

Cole Hart

SIGNATURE NOVELS

PROPERTY  
OF A HOOD  
Millionaire  
2

AN URBAN NOVEL

TIECE

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*An Urban Novel*

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*Cole Hart*  
SIGNATURE NOVELS

## **Property Of A Hood Millionaire 2**

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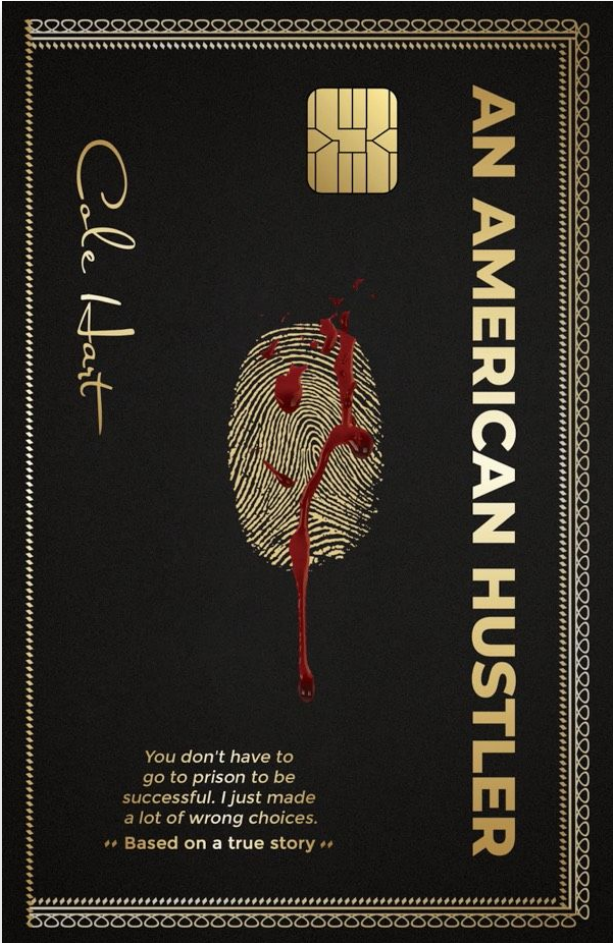
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KIYOMI SIMMONS

**T**his nigga had some fucking nerves leaving me for a bougie, baldheaded bitch and then popping up at my door months later like nothing ever happened. Just when I had gotten to a point where I felt like I'd gotten past this shit, here he comes opening up old wounds. I stood back to make sure we had space between us but not enough for what was about to happen. I glanced him over with my arms crossed, already on guard while hating the fact that his punk ass was still handsome and fine as hell. I was clearly very irritated on the inside, and I was sure it showed just as much on the outside. As I uncrossed my arms, he decided to address me.

“Ki—”

The minute the short syllable of my name crept out of his mouth, I slapped that nigga so hard across his face my fucking hand started stinging.

“What the hell, Ki! You done lost your damn mind or something!” he groaned, holding the side of his face.

“You couldn't tell in that video, nigga?” I mocked.

“Damn, did that make you feel better? Hittin' me like that.”

I smacked my lips, rolling my eyes damn near out the sockets. “A little.”

“I didn't come here to be your punching bag—”

“I didn't punch you, but I should've. Matter of fact, you need to leave before I do something worse to your ass,” I sassed as I turned to walk back in the house. He grabbed me by the arm, turning me to face him.

“OK, I deserved that, but nothing changes the fact that I still love you.”



With a scrunched nose, I frowned at his ass. “Love me! Boy, bye! You got me fucked up.”

“I’m serious, Ki. I still love you, and I’ve missed you like crazy.”

“How dare you embarrass me for the world to see and then show back up like you’ve missed me like crazy? You weren’t missing me when I saw you and your bitch in Paris all on Facebook sharing videos and shit. Where was the love then?”

“I was doing that to please my parents. You gotta understand where I’m coming from. I’m able to travel the world and live my best life because of them. So I figured I’d just play along with the rules. She has always wanted me to be with her best friend’s daughter. I believe she and I were bound to marriage ever since we were toddlers, like some *Coming to America* type shit. So to get them off my back, mainly my mom, I started talking to Haley,” he confessed.

“Haley? Sus got a white girl name that fits her stuck-up, bougie-looking ass.” I chuckled.

“Come on, Ki. I’m being serious here. You just don’t know the hell I’ve dealt with from dating you. Yes, I’ve gone against the grain for two years, but my mom wasn’t having it no more. She threatened to cut me off financially—”

“And so you had no choice is what you’re telling me?”

“I really didn’t. But damn, Ki, you ain’t make it no better. Why the hell did you go to my house and do all that crazy shit?”

“Because you tried me like I was a lame bitch that you could just play with like that.”

“Yeah, but now my mom really hates you with a passion.”

“And I hate her controlling ass too,” I expressed. “All the more reason for you and me to cut our losses and keep it pushing. You can’t afford for them to cut you off financially, and I can’t afford the fucking stress or the headaches. I’m already seeing a therapist behind the dumb shit I did.”

“Damn, you’re seeing a psychologist?”

“Yeah, something like that,” I answered.

“That’s my fault Ki. I’m sorry.”

“Damn right it’s your fault. All on fucking video introducing that girl. Where her hair at, anyway? You know you like a bitch with long hair, whether it’s real or fake. Lil’ mama ain’t got none.”

Loyal grinned. “She got hair. She just likes it cut short.”

“Yeah, whatever—”

“I’ve missed running my fingers through yours.”

“Well, too bad. Run ’em through her scalp now.”

“You ain’t gotta be so mean. Give me a chance to make this right.”

“It’s too late for that. I have a man now.” Even though I knew I was still single as a dollar bill, he didn’t need to know that.

Loyal scowled. “You talking about the man that was here when I pulled up because that ain’t the same guy you were dancing with at the club? I do know him. That was Hendrix Wright.”

“You’re right.” I nodded, kind of feeling good to be connected with a dude that was so well known because of his basketball skills. “Hendrix is just my friend, though. But the guy you walked past when you got out your car is my man.”

“Stop lying. That ain’t your man. Is it?” he asked like he needed to make sure.

“Yeah, that’s my nigga. I assume you didn’t see us kiss before he left?” I egged on with a cute smirk.

“I wasn’t paying attention to none of that. If he was your nigga, then why’d he leave you here to talk with me? He must not know who I am.”

“Actually, he do because I told him. Trust me, he’s not threatened no kind of way whatsoever. So honestly, this lil’ meeting between you and me is over. I’ve moved on.”

“No you haven’t,” he responded, and out of nowhere, he grabbed me by my face, kissing me on the lips. Immediately, I pushed him back.

“What the fuck Loyal!” I let out, wiping my mouth. “This story was ended months ago!”

“You may have ended the story, but I didn’t. We’re on part two.”

“Nah, bruh. This was a written standalone that’s been finalized. It’s over.”

“No, it’s not, Ki. I miss you.”

“As you’ve already said, but I don’t miss you,” I expressed with a shake of the head. At least I thought I didn’t until his ass showed up here. Now, I was having these back-and-forth feelings of the unknown. “I should’ve listened to my mama a long time ago. You were never worthy of my time, and I never should’ve given you my heart. That was my fault, but I’ve moved past that. So you being here has no relevance whatsoever in my life now.”

“You don’t love that nigga. You love me. I know this.”

“Stop doing that. I don’t love you.”

“Yes you do,” he said, pulling me close to him. Damn, his ass was smelling so good. I attempted to push him back, but he pulled me even closer. “I want you.”

“Noooo,” I softly groaned, trying my best to fight temptation. I was already lit from all those drinks I was tossing back at the club and definitely horny. Oh, how I wished that Dodge would’ve tamed this kitty. Then I wouldn’t be caught up in a situation like this.

“Come on,” Loyal whispered in my ear while kissing me gently on the neck.

“Loyal—”

“Baby, please. I’ve missed you. I know you missed me too.”

At that moment, I was so hot and bothered, also kind of mad with myself for entertaining his ass for this long. He was really starting to work me. I didn’t forget about the broken heart he had left me with or the nights I cried myself to sleep thinking about him. I was full of emotions that wanted to pour out, but I was very unclear of what to do with ’em.

Wrapping my hand in Loyal’s shirt, I wanted to punch his ass so bad in the face for hurting me. But instead, I pulled him inside the house and came out of my jogging pants so fast I forgot I had them on. He slipped his tongue in my mouth, kissing me passionately. Panting like a dog in heat, I began helping him slip off his jeans.

I closed my eyes and lay back on the sofa. All I wanted to do was shut my cares of the world out and enjoy the moment. Loyal opened my legs, grazing his tongue across my thong, then pushing it to the side. I gasped, instantly grabbing the top of his head.

“Mmmm,” I lightly moaned as Loyal dove in tongue first. I wasn’t gon’ lie; I missed this shit. Feeling the vibration from his mouth devouring my goods had me on edge. I hadn’t had sex in months, hadn’t even touched myself. Now, this nigga was back and going all in like he had never done before. Unfortunately, I was enjoying every bit of it. He started tongue fucking me, literally. My insides gushed like an overflow of the Savannah River.

“That nigga ain’t me. Don’t ever forget that,” Loyal firmly stated. Talk about this kitty getting wetter. He was right; that nigga wasn’t him.

However, just hearing him say that made me picture Dodge. Damn. Why the fuck did I suddenly feel bad?

“Hold up,” I said, trying to push him back, but Loyal wasn’t having it. It was like he had a point to prove as he came up about to handle his business.

“Aye, where’s your condom?”

He frowned. “Condom?”

“Damn right. You ain’t hittin’ this ass without a condom, bruh,” I expressed, sliding from under him.

“Come on,” he begged. “You know I don’t have a condom.”

“Nigga, you been fucking another bitch raw, I’m sure, and you think you about to fuck me raw too? That ain’t happening. Sorry, not sorry. I shouldn’t be fucking with you at all anyway. What the hell am I thinking?” I asked, while seriously wondering what the hell I was thinking.

“Wow,” he said, grabbing my hand to touch his hard-on. “He miss you too.”

I grinned. “He can also miss me with the bullshit. No condom, no coochie.”

“You gonna do me like that, bae?”

I frowned. “Bae? You reaching now. I think it’s time for you to go,” I said, getting up as I spotted my jogging pants on the arm of the couch.

“You know you want this, babe. Quit playing so fucking hard to get.”

I began to put my joggers back on as I slick rolled my eyes at this nigga. “First off, I’m not your bae or babe. Your baldheaded new bitch is playing that role now.”

Loyal irritably shook his head.

“Again, I think it’s time for you to go,” I insisted just as my cell phone began to ring. I looked over at it sitting on the end table.

“That’s that nigga?”

“Why, Loyal? You don’t pay my phone bill no more. Just leave already.”

“Nah, answer it. I know it’s him. I wanna see if he’s really your man.”

I looked over at my phone again. A part of me wanted to answer it, but then again, I didn’t while he was standing here watching me.

“Answer it,” he repeated.

“I don’t have nothing to prove to you,” I sassed, but in the back of my mind, I figured Dodge would be calling to check on me, and I definitely didn’t want him to be thinking nothing. Instead of trying to avoid this

situation, being that it was already happening and in full effect, I went ahead and picked up my cell phone. “Hey.”

“Hey. You good?” Hendrix asked. “I know it’s late, but I had to call and make sure you were OK.”

I felt a sigh of relief come over me that it wasn’t Dodge. “Yeah, I’m good. Just getting ready to go to bed.”

“Oh, OK. I didn’t call at a bad time, did I?”

“No, you’re fine,” I answered, now eyeing Loyal with a fan of my hand to get the hell on. “What you doing? You home, yet?”

“Yeah, after they closed down the club, I came on home.”

“Oh, OK.”

“I never knew of you to have beef in these streets.” He teased. “What was that about?”

“Long story.” I sighed. “Homegirl just doesn’t like me.”

“Well, I think she met her match. You look so innocent. I didn’t know you had skills like that.”

I grinned. “Skills like what?”

“Skills like you beating her ass. You could’ve easily done that without your cousin.”

“That wasn’t my cousin. Kinsley was working the bar.”

“Oh, OK. Well, you and your friend wasn’t playing with her ass.”

“She deserved it. She tried me more than once.”

“I didn’t know you hung in that circle.”

“What circle?”

“The circle you were at in the VIP section. I’m guessing that’s the reason why shawty don’t like you.”

“You know her?”

“I know of her. That’s Keisha. She has a reputation of being this feisty ass chick that don’t play.”

“Oh, yeah? How you know her?” I asked, looking over at Loyal and rolling my eyes. Quickly, I muted my phone. “You can leave now,” I told him.

He stood there watching me like he could give two fucks about going anywhere.

“She does my sister’s hair. They go way back. That lil’ circle you were mingling with used to be their circle. I see Keisha’s no longer a part of it.”

“Well, your sister has poor taste in friends,” I said with a smack of the lips.

Hendrix laughed. “Trust me, I know.”

“So you know that crew?”

“Nah, not really, but they be at the club chilling and shit.”

“Oh, OK—” I responded just as Loyal decided to show his ass.

“So you’re not gonna get off the phone?” he loudly asked to make sure he was heard.

I frowned like nobody’s business. Was this nigga serious right now? Surprisingly, he snatched my phone out of my hand, definitely wanting to test my gangster.

“Aye, nigga, rule number one—never leave your girl in the company of her ex. I’m here now. You may as well hang up.”

“Oh my God!” I let out, immediately jumping on Loyal’s back, trying to snatch my phone out his hand. With strength out of nowhere, somehow, I was able to get my phone back. I instantly looked at the phone screen to see that Hendrix was still on the line.

“Damn, you acting like this over that nigga!”

“You need to leave! Now!” I yelled.

“Not until you get off the phone.”

“I’ll call you back,” I told Hendrix, ending the call.

“I can’t believe you.”

“No, I can’t believe you! How the hell you come over here acting a fool when you’re the one that left me, nigga!”

“I told you why I had to do that!”

“You didn’t have to do shit! You could’ve warned me or told me what was going on, but did you!”

“No, but you know now!”

“Fuck all that. It happened the way it was meant to. It’s over between us. Ain’t no coming back from that!” I yelled, but instead of him taking that for what it was, he grabbed my face and kissed me in the mouth.

“It’ll never be over.”

I pushed him back. “Don’t make me call my mama and tell her that you’re here. You already know she’ll get off work early—”

“I’ll leave, but you ain’t seen the last of me.”

“Loyal, you ain’t no thug. So gon’ about your business. I never should’ve taken it as far as I did.”

“Yeah, but you did,” he said and walked out. I went over to the door to see if he was really going to leave, and he did. Just as I closed the front door shut, my cell phone chimed.

***You OK? HENDRIX***

***Yeah, I’m fine. Thanks for checking back. YOMI***

***No problem. I’ll hit you up tomorrow. I’m going to bed. HENDRIX  
OK. YOMI***

It was definitely something about Hendrix that I was feeling. Not only was he a gentleman, but he was cool with it too. I was glad it was him calling instead of Dodge because I would’ve been fucked. He was the one that I was digging more, and I would’ve hated for him to have to question me or what I was doing. I really had a thing for him. He treated me good and protected me when need be. A girl couldn’t ask for much more. Plus, from the looks of things, he and Keisha seemed to be finally over. At least that was what I was hoping.

I went in the bathroom to wash Loyal off me. I hated to even think I’d been so vulnerable and allowed that nigga to put his mouth on me. It had to be the liquor. Maybe a part of me really did miss him, but that was all out the window now. I could never stoop that low ever again. His ass left me conflicted because, deep down, I knew I had fucked up. I just prayed that Dodge never questioned this night, or I might just have to come clean. Jesus, please fix it.

After cleaning myself up, I went in my bedroom and lay across the bed. Dodge still hadn’t called to check on me. Maybe he trusted me to handle my business and was expecting me to call him. I didn’t know, but the minute I decided I would do that, my phone rang.

“Hello,” I quickly answered.

“Wassup, baby girl? You good? You don’t need me to come back, do you?”

“Nah, I’m good.” I smiled. Just hearing his sexy voice sent a soothing chill down my spine. “When am I gon’ see you again?”

“Um, well, I have some business to handle tomorrow. So I might not come through—”

“But you’re gonna see me Sunday, right?”

“I’m definitely gon’ try.”

“Try? What you mean by that?”

“I just have a lot going on, but I promise if I don’t, I’ll make it up to you.”

“You do realize that Sunday is my birthday?”

“How can I forget? I promise I’ll do my best,” he expressed as I pouted in the phone.

“OK, well, I’m going to bed. Text or call me tomorrow if you have time,” I threw in because for some reason, my feelings were a lil’ hurt.

“OK, good night, beautiful.”

“Good night,” I responded and ended the call. Once off the phone, I rolled over on my back and stared at the ceiling. Maybe I was starting to like him a lil’ too much a lil’ too fast. Could he tell in my tone that I’d done some shady shit with Loyal? Was he feeling some type of way about him showing up here unannounced like that? Like what was it? He seemed all into me before he left, but now, he was having second thoughts about spending time with me especially on my birthday. See, that was why I hated this shit. Falling in love was for the birds, and I was certainly starting to think it wasn’t for me.





## DODGE GAMBLE

**I** ended the call just as an overflow of tears began to fall. Checking on Kiyomi was absolutely a priority, but hearing from my brother was everything. I lay in bed, wiping the tears from my face, staring at the ceiling with random thoughts clouding my brain. Dameon's voice rang out in my ear like I was still on the phone with him. The call didn't last no longer than a minute, but I had this weight-lifting relief to know that he was somewhere alive.

Where was this nigga at? Better yet, what the fuck was he doing, and why hadn't he come home? It had been two fucking years. Two whole years that he'd led us to believe he was dead. I mean, what else were we supposed to think? A part of me was angry that he'd put us, let alone Granny, through that. She'd already dealt with losing her daughter and then him. Whatever the hell was going on, it was big, and I mean big like major. I didn't know what he'd gotten himself caught up in, but now, the shit was starting to trickle my way and that was the last thing I needed.

My cell phone chirped of an incoming text message as I glanced over at the bold, blue numbers on my alarm clock displaying the time of 3:43 a.m. I picked up the phone. Instantly, my heart dropped the second I saw who it was from.

***Meet me at this address, early daybreak at eight. You can bring two of your guys if you don't feel safe, but no more than that. Don't be late. 145 Amway Road... DONTAE***

I took in a deep breath, heart steadily pounding like it was about to beat out my chest. My hands had gotten sweaty as a dull headache began to

trigger all kinds of emotions. For the first time in my life, I was scared as hell. I was never one to back down from anything, but this shit had me wanting to skip town and take my loved ones with me. The nerve of it all. Not only did Dontae reach out late as fuck like he knew I was still up, but this seemed to be a message within a message. Like how much did he really know? On top of that, how much was I supposed to reveal?

I took in a deep breath and held it for as long as I could. My lungs seemed to be filling up with water as if I was drowning, but just as I began to feel lightheaded, I released the much-needed air and started breathing again. With a regrettable shake of my head, I already knew that I wasn't going to get any sleep. That text message had me bothered as fuck, and I knew for a fact that I would need support on this one, and I wasn't waiting to call them.



“Say what now?” Meech asked with an intense concerned frown. “Hold up —” He paused, “Ain't that the same—”

“Address that Dameon asked me to come to the night he disappeared,” I replied before he could even finish his sentence.

“Wait, what?” Rosco asked, looking at Meech and then back at me. I was sure he needed answers, and I had no choice but give 'em to him. “I'm lost. What about the address? D told you to do what now?”

“The night he went missing, he texted me to come to the same address that Dontae wants to meet me at.”

“So was he there when you made it? Did you talk to him? Do you know something that I don't know?” he asked all in one accord it seemed.

“Um, well, he wasn't there. Matter of fact, nobody was there. The scene looked like a bloodbath to say the least. Apparently, from what I could tell, at least two people were injured, and I'm assuming that they were Polo and D. But I was told to get in and get out.”

“Wait, this shit ain't adding up for me. Like what the fuck!” Rosco let out. I could tell he was seriously puzzled, and hell, so was I, but I could only tell him what I knew at this point.

“Listen, cuz, I'm just as baffled as you and probably even more so on a whole different level now. D sent me text messages,” I explained, now

locating the messages in my cell phone and handing it to him. “He sent these the night he and Polo went missing. Read them for yourself.”

As he sat, consumed in the text messages in which I knew he’d likely read more than a few times, I glanced over at Meech. The look on his face expressed a lot. He was also confused and knew that this shit was big—whatever it was. I honestly didn’t know what Dameon had done, but the crew and I were definitely caught up in at this point. I just couldn’t understand why the fuck it took so long for Dontae to come back and confront me about it.

“I don’t understand why Dontae wants to talk with you now. This shit is fishy as fuck. Is there something that we’re missing?”

“Where did you end up going at to get the duffel bag?” Rosco asked, not even thinking about what Meech was talking about. I figured he’d be caught up on those text messages anyway for a while.

“To some cabin out in the woods. It was an actual location of course but definitely ducked off on some private land that I’m sure only Polo and anybody closely associated to them knew about. Of course, Polo and D were close, so it wasn’t a surprise that he also knew about it.”

“Or maybe that was his first time going there,” Meech added. “You never know.”

“You’re right. I don’t know, and that’s why I’m so confused about this shit.”

“So what was out there? Was D gone, or did you get to see him before he left? Or is he really dead?” Before I could respond, he carried on. “Why the fuck didn’t I know about any this shit? I should’ve been the one he called. I was his right hand, his boy, his confidant—”

“Rightfully so, and I really wished he would’ve text you instead of me. Walking up on that scene is something I don’t believe I’ll ever erase out of my memory.”

“Yeah, but Rosco, no offense to the relationship you and D had, but Dodge is his brother. I’m sure he hit him up because he wanted to make sure that he would hold down the fort. Meaning Granny and Sha and helping to get them out the hood. You can’t possibly be trippin’ about that, especially at a time like this.”

“I’m not trippin’ about that. I’m only tryna process this shit. It’s *a lot*, especially being that you just sprung this shit on me.”

“I know,” I acknowledged. “Trust me, I get it. But D asked specifics of me, so that’s what I did. I know you read where he said to tell only Meech, but that didn’t have nothing against or toward you personally. I know you know that, right?”

“I know,” he mumbled, but I was sure a part of him felt left out, and I couldn’t blame him for feeling that way.

“So what was in the duffel bag or is that something you still need to keep from me?”

“Come on, cuz. I brought you here to tell you everything. I could’ve just asked you to come with me to meet up with Dontae since he said I could bring two people. But I knew that D would want you to be one of those people. I gave you my phone so you could read those messages because I’m tired of keeping secrets from you. This really feels like weight lifted, even though I got another feeling that more is about to be piled on,” I expressed. “The duffel bag had almost two hundred thousand dollars in it and sixteen bricks. Ironically, you helped over this past year in slowly getting off those bricks.”

“Wow, that’s where you got that work from?”

I nodded my head. “Yeah.”

“I ain’t gon’ lie; when Dontae showed back up, I thought you probably had started working with him on the low or something and that was where the work came from.”

“Nah, I got it from D. Well, not from D technically, but he did tell me where to get it.”

“I see. It’s making sense now.” He nodded. “You talked about the scene when you made it there. What was up with that?”

“The scene was horrible. Blood everywhere, which led me to believe that Polo and D were either caught off guard or something sinister had taken place. Either way, D was able to text me, but—”

“So you saw blood but no bodies?” Rosco asked.

“Yeah,” I answered.

“This shit is crazy.”

“I know, cuz. Believe me, I know.”

“Now, you have to meet up with Dontae. Do you think he knows about the duffel bag? But then again, that wouldn’t make sense. It’s been missing for over two years, anyway. Plus, it only contained anywhere from five to

six hundred thousand tops, and that's including the money and the product. They have millions, so that was chump change."

"Same thing I was thinking." Meech nodded.

"So what do we do now?" Rosco asked.

"We go to this sit-down with Dontae so I can see what the hell he wants because clearly, he wants something."

"Definitely do," Meech commented.

"After that, I guess we'll see," I added.

I really wanted to tell them that I had spoken to D, but now wasn't the time. He did tell me the call was confidential, but I was tired of keeping shit private. Plus, they were my boys. We had a bond like no other, and they deserved to know. After all, I was put in this shit. I didn't ask to be involved. There was no way I was going to keep that to myself. I reared back in the recliner chair, trying to calm my thoughts. In a couple of hours, I would be sitting down with Dontae, and I had no clue how that would play out. I knew we weren't going to walk in the line of fire without having fire; that was for certain. I just hoped that whatever this was about, it would be over and done with by the time we left. However, that was only a wishful dream. This was just the start to something that I was sure none of us would be ready for.



"I can't believe it's an address attached to anything surrounding this wooded ass location," Rosco said as we drove the gravel, narrow path lined with trees on both sides.

"My thoughts exactly when I pulled up out here two years ago. What's so crazy is that we still have about eight more miles to go."

"What?" Meech let out. "Couldn't nobody have known about this spot. I know better."

"I'm with you on that," Rosco chimed in.

"That's why I have so many unanswered questions. D never mentioned anything about this place until he texted me that night. I'm thinking it was a hideout for the mafia's drugs or something. Who knows? D wasn't the only person that Polo was serving on this coast. He had way bigger clients than D. Most of the time, he'd fly here and then meet D with the work."

“So this had to be the stash house because that’s the only thing that makes sense.”

“I agree.” I nodded at Rosco through the rearview mirror. “I’m starting to have flashbacks.”

“You a’ight?”

“Yeah,” I responded, but I really wasn’t. I hated thinking about that night. Even though I’d heard from Dameon, I was still unclear as to what was really going on. Was he safe? Was he even hurt? So that shit didn’t make me feel any better. Hell, he could be somewhere living his best life all while Dontae was here wanting my head.

“What if he wants to put you to work? I know you’ve come out the streets, but would you go back for the right amount of money?” Rosco asked.

“No. I’m out the game. I have no reasons to get back in it. I think y’all should get out too.”

“Well, I’m out the dope game. For the most part,” Meech added.

“You need to get out the fraud game too. You’ve done enough of that. You got money. You don’t need that shit, that stress, or that time.”

“Now, you know I don’t do shit that’ll trace back to me.”

“Until it does,” I commented. “I’m just saying, both of y’all niggas sitting on large sums of money. Nobody should be doing illegal shit now. We need to remodel Gamble Studios and start doing what we’ve always wanted to do. The building is just sitting there being used as a front for business, so y’all can legally deposit money into y’all’s bank accounts.”

“You use it too,” Rosco said.

“It’s my fuckin’ business though. I just haven’t did the work needed to open it up to the public. Plus, I’ve made lots of legal money investing. I’m good either way,” I said just as my stomach began to churn. I suddenly felt queasy the closer I got to the cabin where this sit-down was taking place.

“You OK? You look like you saw a ghost,” Meech chimed in.

“I don’t know. I’m just starting to feel uneasy. That’s all.”

“Yeah, me too, but I’m strapped and ready for whatever. Dontae better not be with no bullshit. We might be outnumbered, but it’s gon’ be more than a couple of dem muthafuckas going down. I know that,” Rosco expressed.

“Definitely more than a couple,” Meech agreed with his hand on his artillery.

We pulled up right in front of the cabin. It looked well-kept from the outside, so I figured it was still being used for whatever the hell they had going on. Of course, about four of Dontae's henchmen were standing outside on the porch, suited up. These niggas always wore tailor-made suits and looked more like top-tier billionaire businessmen than drug dealers and sex traffickers. They were certainly heavy in the game.

"Y'all ready?" I asked, looking from Meech to Rosco.

"'Bout as ready as I'll get," Meech answered.

"Yeah, let's do this." Rosco nodded.

We stepped out of the car as one of the men walked straight toward us.

"Wassup, Dodge?" he spoke, holding his hand out. I shook it with a firm stare. "Dontae only wants you to come in. Your partners can stand out here with us."

"Who all in there?" Meech quickly asked. I could tell he was with all the shits at this point.

"He's alone," the guy answered.

"Oh, OK." Meech nodded at me. "Go 'head. We'll hold it down out here."

"A'ight," I responded. I headed up to the cabin. The familiar setting reminded me of the night I peeked in the windows two years back. I could almost see myself back at those windows looking in. My nerves were on a hundred as I entered the door.

"Ahh, Dodge," Dontae let out. "Come in," he greeted me, standing up and shaking my hand, but nothing about this meeting felt friendly. "Sit down." He pointed at a burgundy leather chair, which matched the same chair he stood up from. The chairs were directly across from each other. I was sure that meant he and I were about to be face-to-face, and suddenly, it hit me—this shit was real.

"So what brings you back to the city? Furthermore, what's this meeting about?"

"Straight to the point as always. I like that about you."

I nodded my head, staring him right in the eyes.

"See, we have a little problem."

"A problem that involves me?" I curiously pondered.

"Sort of, because if I don't get answers, you'll have to compensate for it."

"I will? What the hell that mean?"



“Calm down. No need to get rowdy.”

“It’s plenty reasons to get rowdy, but go on,” I insisted.

“You got the heart of a lion.” He grinned. “But sometimes, you need to learn when to pipe down.”

“Just get to the point. I have other business to tend to when I leave here.”

“The night Polo went missing—”

“My brother too,” I added.

“Well, the night Dameon and Polo went missing, something else went missing too.”

I raised a concerned eyebrow. “What?”

“Forty million dollars in diamonds.”

My eyes stretched a little as I swallowed lightly while trying to maintain my composure. “OK, and what that got to do with me?”

“I’ve sat back for two years waiting to see if these diamonds would show up. For two years, it was nothing...” He paused while eyeing me. “Until a month ago.”

I swallowed hard but attentively listened.

“You see, something is off to me about this whole situation.”

“What happened a month ago?” I impatiently asked.

“Half the diamonds turned up in Africa.”

“Africa? So you mean to tell me that you were told that the said diamonds have showed up in Africa. On top of that, you know they’re yours?”

“Oh yeah. They’re definitely mine. These diamonds were of the finest of the finest quality, one of kind and worth forty million dollars total. What was sold in Africa wasn’t even half that price. As a matter of fact, whoever sold them were just trying to get off ’em.”

I frowned. “Dontae, you’re not making any sense to me.”

“I know your brother has those diamonds.”

“My brother? Why my brother? For all I know, Polo could have those diamonds. Or whoever was on the scene the night they went missing.”

“I thought that at first, but the only other person on the scene was also missing until not long ago when his body mysteriously emerged.”

“So you’re saying that it was three people on the scene? Not just Polo and Dameon.”

“Right, and again, that person was found dead. That only leaves Polo and Dameon. I don’t believe Polo would just disappear like that, so that leaves your brother.”

I sat in silence. What the fuck had Dameon really gotten himself into? This shit was even wilder than I thought.

“If your brother hasn’t reach out yet, he will. When he does, you tell him that I want what he owes me, or he’ll pay for it another way—”

“What that’s supposed to mean?” I asked, standing to my feet. “He’s missing just like Polo. You can’t possibly know what happened, and if you do—”

Dontae stood to his feet. “You might know what happened, and if you do, I’ll find out soon enough.”

“I don’t know shit,” I huffed. “I think it’s time for me to leave.”

“As long as you remember what I said,” Dontae expressed as I turned to walk out. “By any means necessary, Dameon will pay for what he’s done to my brother and for stealing my diamonds.”

I looked back, wanting to go off on this clean-cut, suit-wearing muthafucka, but I knew the best thing to do was leave. I didn’t know what was going on, but somehow, I knew in my gut that I needed to protect the people I loved. For some reason, I had a real bad feeling that his threats were more so directed toward us than Dameon, especially with him not being here.



## DODGE GAMBLE

**B**ack at the house, I headed straight for my bedroom. I just needed some space to get my mind right. As I lay across my bed, my cell phone chirped with an incoming text message. With my phone already in my hand, I glanced at the display screen. For some reason, seeing her name gave me butterflies.

*What are you doing, handsome? YOMI*

*Just got back from handling a lil' business. DODGE*

*Been thinking about you all morning. Am I going to see you today?*

**YOMI**

*That's sweet, and honestly, I wish I could make that happen, but I doubt it. Got a lot going on today. DODGE*

*Tomorrow? YOMI*

I thought about it being her birthday, but I had so much on my plate, and my mental was all over the place. I didn't even know if I'd be much company, let alone able to help her celebrate.

*I'll try, beautiful. I'll try. DODGE*

**K. YOMI**

Anytime a woman sent back *K*, that meant they were in their feelings, and I couldn't really blame Kiyomi. She didn't ask for this. I was sure she could have plenty niggas wanting to do something with her for her birthday, yet she wanted me. However, this shit with Dameon had me baffled. I couldn't quite think straight. Yes, he was alive. I knew this to be true, but what the fuck really happened that night?

*Knock, knock!*

“Yooo!” I called out as Meech entered my bedroom.

“You good in here?”

“I guess.” Even though I told them some of what Dontae had revealed, I still had yet to mention my lil’ talk with Dameon. I sat up on the side of the bed. Being that most of the ride here was quiet, I figured Meech had questions.

Meech sat down in the lounge chair over by the window. He sat silently, staring out of it for a minute or two, then looked over at me.

“Talk to Keisha yet?”

“Nah,” I responded, already knowing that he was just making small talk. “I don’t have nothing to say to her stupid ass.”

“This is the longest you’ve gone without fooling with her.”

“I know, and it’s going to be even longer than this,” I assured him. “I want no parts of her. What we had is definitely over.”

Meech chuckled. “I never thought I’d hear you say that.”

“Well, you’re hearing it now.”

“Proud of you, my guy,” he said, standing briefly to bump fists.

I nodded my head with a smile.

“Is it because of Kiyomi?”

“I can’t lie; I’m definitely feeling shawty. She came in at the right time. I needed that shit. I should’ve been left Keisha’s ass, but I stuck around. I don’t know if a part of me felt sorry for her—”

“It be that way because that’s how I was about Thomasina.”

“Yeah, but me and Keisha together was way more toxic than you and Thomasina were. She was actually a pretty-decent female for you. You just couldn’t keep it in your pants.”

“I’ll take that.” Meech grinned. “Thomasina didn’t have that *it* factor. She wasn’t really a freak, and you know I like my bitches freaky as fuck.”

I laughed. “You are known to have four to five women at once.”

“That’s how it should be.”

“I hear ya.”

“Don’t act like you ain’t never had that shit before. You know you love that kind of attention.”

“Oh, I do, but it’s not necessary. The thrill is all good, but when it’s over, deep down, I still long for just one shawty I can be with.”

“I feel you. That’s how I’m starting to feel about Kinsley. I think I’m falling—”

“Whaaat! Not you falling in love. You ain’t never said that shit before. You might’ve had bitches tat your name on them, but you never said you loved any of ’em. You just took care of ’em. Big difference,” I added.

“Yeah, but Kinsley is different. She’s also feisty as fuck and indecisive. I don’t know what’s going on with her as of late, but it’s something because she’s been giving me weird vibes and crazy mood swings. It’s like she wanna argue, but I don’t. She’ll pick a fight out of any little thing I say. The shit is starting to make me question whether she’s the one or not. Maybe it’s a sign. Who knows?”

“I don’t know. Women are just like that. It could be that Thomasina is back and letting it be known. It could be her period is on, or hell, she might be bipolar. It’s always the pretty ones that’s bipolar.”

Meech grinned. “You ain’t never lied about that.”

“Just be patient with her. Talk to her. See if it’s anything she wanna get off her chest.”

“You right. We definitely need to sit down and talk.”

“Good for you,” I said.

“So what’s the deal with you and Kiyomi?”

“Her birthday is tomorrow, but I don’t have any plans, and she’s made it clear that she wants to be with me.”

“Damn. You need to be making some plans then.”

“How with this shit that Dontae got hanging over my head? That’s literally all I can really think about.”

“Yeah, I’m still puzzled. I know it’s a lot to process, but what the hell does Dontae’s missing diamonds have to do with you? The only thing you got was the duffel bag, right? You didn’t see no diamonds?”

“Did you see any diamonds?”

Meech frowned. “No.”

“A’ight den.”

He grinned a little but still looked confused. “I don’t get it.”

“Me either,” Rosco chimed in as he joined us.

“I know how y’all feel because I still have a lot of questions myself.”

“Him questioning you about diamonds that showed up in Africa is wild. You ain’t never been to Africa.”

“I know.”

“So if you didn’t get those diamonds, somebody did. There were no bodies there, but somebody had to have lived to move the bodies, right?”

Didn't you say that he said it was three people on the scene and he was really confused as to what happened until the third person showed up dead?"

"Yeah, he did say that—"

Meech raised a concerned eyebrow. "Which left Polo and Dameon on the scene—"

"One of them had to have offed D and the other one and took the diamonds. I don't see Polo doing that, because they belong to his family, so —" Rosco explained as I intervened.

"So it had to be Dameon—"

"Yeah, but he's missing," Meech cut in.

"He is, but..." I said with a slight pause as I looked from Meech, then back to Rosco. "He's still alive."



I couldn't get out of the house fast enough. I explained everything I could, but it really wasn't much that I could elaborate on. Not many details, just a brief phone call. I believed Meech and Rosco were even more confused than I was at this point. We all had our own separate theories, but we couldn't pinpoint just one. Wasn't no telling what the fuck happened that night. All I knew was that I had to make some moves quicker than planned.

First and foremost, I had to make sure that Granny and Sha would be safe, which also meant getting them out the hood. Reading between the lines, Dontae definitely threatened me and mine. If I could've stomped a mudhole in his ass right there, I would've done it and thought nothing of it. However, I, too, had to play my cards right. It was imperative to stay ten steps ahead, and I was headed to Granny's to make sure that happened.

I pulled up in an empty parking spot, firing up my blunt and looking around the dingy neighborhood. To know that my people had been living here since I was little disgusted me. Granny made the best of the situation and did what she could to make sure we were good and well taken care of, but it still bothered me. Many nights were sleepless, and many days were hell for having to prove myself. Nobody was going to talk shit, come at me sideways, or fuck with my family. I always stood ten toes down, and that shit wasn't going to change.

After inhaling the good shit and gently releasing the ball of smoke, I thought about my brother. It saddened me to think that he'd put us in danger over money. My heart ached to know his gangster was far deeper than I could've ever imagined. He and Polo were friends, good friends. It was hard to think that he shot and killed him to gain access to those diamonds and then left his family to fend for ourselves. Leaving behind the duffel bag was probably the only way to ease his guilt. I mean, the contents of that duffel bag was nothing compared to what he'd run off with. I disappointedly shook my head because deep in my heart, I just didn't feel like he moved in that manner. It just wasn't in his character.

Shit had me fucked up, but I knew I had to shake it. I ashed the blunt, hit it repeatedly, and stepped out of my car, smushing it on the ground with my Forces. I glanced around at my surroundings, softly clenching the gat that was firmly tucked in the side of my shorts. I was certainly being more aware of my atmosphere.

"Fuck," I mumbled under my breath, seeing Keisha parked a car down from me. Our eyes connected, but I quickly looked away. I didn't want no smoke today, especially from her ass. To my surprise, she didn't even get out the car.

"Wassup, Dodge?" one of the homies spoke.

"Wassup?" I said back but continued walking. The quicker I made it to Granny's apartment, the better.

"Heyyy, Dodge!" a known neighborhood kiddie crew yelled out. "Got a dollar we can get?"

"Damn," I whispered. But as always, I looked out for the kids. I just hated to stop being that the demon likely was eyeing me so hard from her car that if she could, her stare would burn my soul. "What y'all doing out here? Y'all better not be harassing everybody that walks by."

"We ain't," Bella responded with her lil' cute self.

I reached in my pocket and gave her, four of her siblings, and two other known neighborhood kiddies twenty dollars apiece. "Don't spend it all on candy." I teased.

"I'm putting this in my piggy bank." Bella gleefully smiled. "Thanks, Dodge," she said as everybody else began thanking me too.

"Always." I smiled. It felt good to give 'em money or even just to sit and talk to them sometimes. As I walked off, Kay was coming down the stairs heading my way. "Damn, man," I mumbled.



“Wassup, Dodge?”

“Hey, Kay,” I spoke, still walking, but of course, she stopped me in my tracks.

“Did you see Keisha?”

“Yeah,” I answered.

“Did you talk to her? She’s having a tough morning.”

“Why is that?”

She looked at me strangely. “Really, Dodge?”

I frowned. “What? Talking about last night?” I asked.

“What about last night?” she pondered, shooting me the stank face.

“Never mind,” I responded. I just knew she was about to talk some shit about the beatdown Sha and Kiyomi put on Keisha’s ass, but she didn’t. I was assuming Keisha hadn’t told her that part yet, because she was way too chill. At that time, Mr. Henry came out of his apartment and headed down the stairs.

“What’s going on, Dodge?” he asked, giving me a slight hug.

“Nothing much, Mr. Henry. How you doing?”

“I’m OK. We’re heading over to the graveyard to pay our respects.”

*Damn.* Just that fast, it dawned on me.

“Daddy, Dodge totally forgot that it’s the anniversary death of losing our mama,” she said, rolling her eyes at me. “I guess we’re not that important to him no more.”

“Kay, don’t start. It’s a lot going on. I’m sure Dodge wasn’t thinking about this.”

“My sister is going through it, and he couldn’t even ask if she was OK today.”

“I’ll hit her up,” I said. “Good seeing you, Mr. Henry.”

“Same,” Mr. Henry responded as we did our usual fist bump. After that, I just walked off. I didn’t want things to escalate between me and Kay. She was throwed the fuck off too. I didn’t know who could be worse—her or Keisha’s crazy ass.

The minute I made it to Granny’s door, I paused to send Keisha a text.

***You OK? DODGE***

***I will be. KEISHA***

***Cool. DODGE***

To my surprise, she didn’t even talk no shit. I knew she had to be pissed about that fight, but I guess she had bigger shit going on. To have witnessed

her mother getting killed was a lot, and this time of the year usually hit her hard. Not being with her, the shit totally slipped my mind. I felt bad for her, but I wasn't about to get myself caught up in nothing else Keisha. That was for sure.

I used my key and walked into Granny's crib. "Y'all up!" I yelled out as Granny walked out of the kitchen.

"Up and done ate breakfast," she answered, causing me to grin. Instantly, I wrapped my arms around her. I didn't know what I'd do if she wasn't here.

"I should've known. You be up with the roosters," I teased.

"Or earlier." She teased back. Kissing me on the jaw, she backed up and looked at me. "You OK, baby?"

"Yeah, never better. Where's Sha?"

"Shaaaa!" Granny called out. "Yo' brother here!"

Sha came walking from down the hall. "Wassup, big head?" She teased.

"Nothing much. Did you tell Granny you were fighting last night?"

"Doooodge!" Sha let out.

I laughed. I had to slide that one in just for the hell of it.

"Sha, I know damn well you weren't fighting last night."

"Yes she was," I egged it on. Sha punched me in the side.

"A'ight, don't hurt yo' hand," I clowned.

"Sha, what I tell you about that shit? You know better than fighting. That's not you."

"Dodge lyin', Granny."

"Oh, is he? You lyin', Dodge?" she asked, staring at me to make sure I was being honest.

"I'm just playing, Granny," I told her with laughter. I didn't want this to go any further, because Granny wasn't going to let it go no time soon. I only wanted to fuck with Sha a lil' bit.

Sha rolled her eyes at me. "Ol' ugly self."

I laughed. "Anyway, glad y'all got on some clothes. I'm 'bout to take y'all somewhere."

Granny looked over at the wall clock. "It's eleven thirty, Dodge. Where the hell you taking us this early?"

"Sheesh, woman, don't worry about that. Just grab yo' purse and let's ride," I insisted.

“OK, but this better be good,” she sassed with a playful smirk to let me know that she was excited just to be getting out the crib with me.



The ride was about twenty minutes of us clowning and joking around. A part of me had forgotten all about the crazy shit that had transpired earlier with Dontae. I couldn't let him or Dameon dictate my happiness, and they certainly weren't about to keep throwing me off my game.

I pulled up on eight acres of land sitting directly in the back was a brand-new brick house with a three-car garage attached.

Granny nor Sha were paying much attention to what was really going on, but the car had certainly gotten quiet as they watched. I parked right in front of the house as Sha looked at me through the rearview mirror.

“Where we at? Who's house is this?” she questioned.

“Dodge—” Granny got out, but I cut them both off.

“Get out,” I insisted as they wasted no time getting out the car.

“Dodge, whose house is this?” Granny asked almost with an elated expression on her face like she knew.

“It's yours and Sha's,” I answered, pulling the keys out of my pocket.

“Oh my God!” Granny screamed out, almost fainting. I had to catch her before she hit the ground.

“You OK, woman?”

“Granny!” Sha called out.

“I'm OK, I'm OK,” she responded after catching her breath. “Dodge—” At that moment, she started to cry. I looked over at Sha as she started to cry. I did everything I could to hold back my tears.

“Don't cry, Granny. It's yours, all yours.”

“Wow... I can't believe this,” Sha said, staring at the home. After a few minutes of them taking it all in, Granny finally said.

“The people better not pop up on my doorstep, Dodge!”

“What people?” I asked like I didn't know.

“The damn police. I don't need that shit. I can just as well stay where the hell I'm at.”

“Granny, chill. Don't kill the vibe. Ain't no police coming here. The house is in your and Sha's names. It's paid for with clean, legit money,” I

told her. “You and Sha will finish signing the paperwork on Monday.”

“Paid for? Where the hell you get money like this from?” Granny asked.

“Same thing I wanted to know, but then again—”

“You don’t know nothing, Sha. So hush,” I told her.

“Come on. Let’s do a walk-through,” Sha excitedly said but gave me a big hug first instead. “Thank you, big head. You’re good for something,” she teased.

“Yeah, yeah.”

Once inside the house, they began checking out the immaculate twenty-seven hundred square feet of the open-layout floor plan with nothing but “awws” and “wows” being heard all about.

“It’s four bedrooms, three bathrooms, a big kitchen—”

“’Cause you know yo’ granny loves to cook.” Sha teased.

“That’s right,” Granny let out.

“Granny, can we go in the kitchen and talk a lil’ bit?”

“Why I can’t come?”

“Because I don’t need to talk to yo’ ugly butt right now.”

“Whatever,” she said, hitting me on my back.

“She’s so violent, Granny. Get yo’ daughter.”

“Sha, go upstairs and be nosy. That’s your calling anyway,” Granny said as I laughed out loud.

“Her calling is being nosy?”

“Hell yeah,” Granny responded.

“Y’all some haters.” Sha playfully rolled her eyes and headed up the stairs. Granny and I headed in the kitchen.

“Wow... It’s beautiful, son.”

“I’m glad you like it. Besides your bedroom, this is the only other room fully furnished.”

“My bedroom is furnished? Oh my God. I can’t wait to see it.”

“Meantime, sit down.”

“This is a beautiful table and the chairs—oh my God.”

“I think God has clearly heard your ‘thank yous’ for the day, Granny. I imagine He knows you’re very pleased,” I teased.

The minute we were seated, I pulled out my cell phone, opening up one of my bank accounts and passing the phone over to her.

“What’s this?” she asked, looking at the display screen. Her eyes widened. “This account says two million—”

“Yeah, it does,” I cut in.

“Lord, have you turned into one of them kingpin people?”

I laughed. “No, Granny. I’m not a kingpin.”

“Thank God.”

I chuckled.

“Well, what you do to be making money like this?”

“Well, um... I ain’t gon’ lie; I did get started running the streets, but I’ve switched up the game. I got into crypto currency and started flipping my money. I now own property and have invested in real estate that I plan on flipping as well. I’ve been quite busy over the past two years. I was just laying low and spending wisely.”

“Wow, I’m so proud of you, son,” she said as tears began to fall from her eyes. “I’m so proud of you. I wish yo’ brother and yo’ mama could be here to see how much you’ve grown as a nice, respectable young man. You’ve really outdone yourself.”

“I’m sure they’re here in spirit,” I said, wanting to tell her about Dameon being alive so bad, but that was one thing he asked me not to do. He didn’t want Granny to know he was alive or she’d worry more about his well-being. I didn’t know, but maybe he was right. She’d question me until she couldn’t no more, and then she’d question me again. So I’d uphold his wishes when it came to that.

“I couldn’t be prouder of you myself, and I am very grateful for this house.”

“I know, Granny. I know.”

“What you know?” Sha asked as she joined us. “Upstairs is the bomb.com.”

“I assume that’s good,” Granny joked.

“You gotta see it for yourself.”

“Oh, I’m coming.” Granny stood up and softly kissed me on the cheek. “I hope my bedroom is downstairs because I’m not going up and down no damn stairs.”

Sha and I laughed. “Your room is right down that hall. You’re off by yourself, so you can enjoy your alone time,” I told her. Sha grabbed her by the hand as they scurried off.

I sat at the kitchen table feeling quite proud of myself. It had been a mean two years, but I put in the work to be where I was at now and was thankful just to be in position now to make shit happen. I thought about my

life and what I wanted. I was a twenty-six-year-old millionaire and had big dreams of doing big things. Getting Granny out the hood was just the beginning. I had plans to even more.

Thoughts of Kiyomi crossed my mind. She'd been interestingly invading my thoughts since the day I met her. It was almost like she had moved in rent free. I mean, damn, I was really feeling her. But in my heart, she was young, at least younger than me, and I could tell she still had shit going on. I knew me, and the last thing I wanted was to get in my feelings and knock a nigga out for playing with me or my girl. For the most part, I wanted her to explore those things and or relationships. The only thing that really mattered was that she'd choose me when it was all over and done. Now, about her birthday...



KIYOMI SIMMONS

“Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday to my one and onlyyyyyy, happy birthday to you.”  
“Maaaaaa,” I let out, smothering my face with a pillow.

“Wake up, birthday girl!” she shouted. It was nothing unusual. She did this every single birthday, never skipping a beat. “I got something for you.”

I quickly moved the pillow, sitting straight up in bed. “What?” I asked with bright eyes. She handed over a medium-sized velvet box. I shrieked, “Oh my God! Yes! Yes, I’ll marry you!”

Mama laughed. “Girl, stop it with your crazy ass. Open it.”

I took the box out of her hand and slowly opened it. With a joyful stare, I shrieked, “Awwww, Mommy! I love ’em!” I excitedly smiled. Inside the box were a pair of 14k white-gold bangle earrings with *YOMI* in the center. The matching bracelet was also personalized with my name in it. The jewelry was beautiful. Mama always came through for me; she never failed.

“You like ’em?”

“I love ’em!”

“You better!” She playfully teased. “You’ve only been begging for ’em since Christmas of last year.”

I grinned. “And guess what? You’re always right on time!”

“No, ma’am. *He’s* always right on time,” she said, pointing toward the ceiling. God was definitely on time. Without a doubt, he was the one that never failed us.

“So what’s on your agenda for the day? I’m sorry I have to work tonight.”



“It’s OK. I understand.” I leaned over to hug her. “But I’ll be glad when you get a man so he can take care of you. That way, you don’t have to work so much.”

“I don’t mind working for mine. Never forget that,” she said, gently pushing me side the head. “Never settle for a man just taking care of you. Always have a plan to take care of yourself.”

“Trust me, I am,” I told her.

“Good.” She smiled. “I’m gonna shower now, but I definitely enjoyed our movie date last night.”

“I know... It was the best. I’m just glad they’ve opened the movies back up. It felt good getting out.”

“Girl, your butt be getting out anyway. You’ve not missed a party since outside opened back up.”

I laughed. “I’ve missed parties.”

“No you haven’t. You and Kinsley’s ass stay on the go.” She teased. “Anyway, kisses.” She leaned over and gently pecked me softly on the lips. “I sure as hell hope those lips ain’t—”

“Maaaaaaa, stop it!”

“OK! You ain’t no baby no more.”

“Maaaaaaa!”

“I’m just saying though,” she clowned.

“You’re saying too much. Get outta here.” I laughed. She headed for the door but stopped to look back at me.

“I know it’s parts of your life that you learned way too soon. For instance, having to comfort Kinsley at such a young age while I was out looking for Glenda. Having witnessed Glenda overdosing and calling for help had to be a lot for someone your age.”

“I believe I was around eight.”

“You were, and for you to be nineteen years old today, you’ve held your own in many ways. You’re like an old soul that’s been here before. You’ve been a rock for Kinsley, even though she’s older. You’ve also been a rock for me. Holding down the fort, cooking me breakfast in bed on my off days to make sure I didn’t have to lift a finger, washing clothes at the young age of ten just because you wanted to help out any way you could. You may be spoiled to some, but you deserve the world to me, and I’m happy that you chose me to be your mama.”

“Mommyyy, you’re gonna make me cry,” I said with teary eyes.

“I know. Hell, I’m ’bout to make myself cry.” She smirked. “Love you, kiddo.”

“Love you too.” I smiled as she headed to her bedroom, I guess to take a shower and chill before work.

I glanced over at my cell phone to check my social media accounts and immediately noticed that Dodge had texted me around six in the morning.

***Happy birthday, beautiful. Make today amazing. DODGE***

I smiled, even though I was a lil’ mad at him. He had yet to let me know if I was going to be spending the day with him or not. I really wanted to, but I couldn’t let him see me sweat. Just as I crawled out of bed to wash up and get mentally prepared for the day, not having any plans whatsoever, the doorbell rang.

“Oh my God, I bet that’s him.” I smiled. I didn’t care about having morning breath, because I was going to put these lips right on his and then introduce him to Mama. I didn’t even care what she thought about his age; I just wanted her to know that I liked someone new, and it was him. As I pranced to the front door, I was met by Kinsley handing me a huge five-foot teddy bear.

“Happy birthday, bitch!” She grinned. “Your flowers are on the table.”

“All of this was delivered?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“What flowers?” I asked, looking past the big ass bear to see a colorful vase filled with I know about a hundred colorful roses.

“Oh my God! These are beautiful.”

“I know, right!” Kinsley happily agreed. “OK, open the card.”

I grabbed the card that was laying by the roses and opened the envelope.

*Happy birthday to a special woman. Even though you’re turning nineteen, it feels like you’ve been here before. I don’t know where our relationship is heading, but I hope that we’ll end up together. I know this doesn’t make up for us spending the day or night together, but I hope at least it makes you smile and think of me. I’ll call you later. Enjoy your day.*

**DODGE**

“Why am I crying?” I asked, wiping my tears.

“Because that was so sweet,” Kinsley responded. “Dodge is really the man.”

“I know.” I nodded. “I feel so bad though.”

“Why? What’d you do?”

“Remember I told you about Loyal coming over here and I turned his ass around?”

“As you should’ve. I wish you would’ve kicked him in the crack of his ass on his way out. Like who the fuck does he think he is to just pop up over here as if you’re gonna forgive him—”

“I let him eat my coochie.”

Kinsley’s eyes widened as her mouth dropped open. “I know you fuckin’ lyin’!”

“Shhhhh before Mama hears you.”

“Yomiiii! Tell me you’re playing,” she loudly whispered.

“I wish I was. I don’t know what got into me. I shouldn’t have done that. I feel so bad about it, and the only way I can get over this is to be honest and tell Dodge what happened. I mean, after all, he trusted me by leaving here, knowing that nigga was here.”

“Did you fuck him too?”

“No.”

“Well, don’t tell him.”

“But Kiiiiinn.”

“Don’t damn ‘Kin’ me. You knew better than that. You should’ve kneed that nigga in the balls before you let him put his lips on you.”

“I know. I should’ve, but I was weak, real weak. I really wanted to be with Dodge, but he didn’t think it was time for us to take it there. Then when he’s leaving, here comes Disloyal—mind you, looking fine as hell.”

“Well, first off, give Dodge props because most niggas would’ve taken it there.”

“I know.”

“Disloyal ass for example,” Kinsley fussed. “I can’t believe you, Yomi.”

“You’ve said that already.”

“And I’m saying it again.”

“I already feel bad enough.”

“As you should, and I hope you’ve gotten him completely outta your system. Don’t let that nigga come back and ruin your life. Don’t forget he has a girlfriend.”

“I’m not, and I told him that it was over.”

“What did he say?”

“Nothing. He just left.”

“Good,” Kinsley irritably responded. “He’s a lame muthafucka that thinks he can just walk out your life and come back like nothing ever happened. How dare you let him have his way?”

“I know, Kinsley. I feel bad about it, and it won’t happen again.”

“It better not,” she sassed. At that moment, I shot her ass the stank face.

“I didn’t have to tell you. So pipe down.”

She shot me a stank face back but instantly calmed her tone. “OK, it’s your birthday. I’m not trying to ruin it, but Yomi, don’t do that shit again.”

“I’m nooooot!” I assured her.

“Yes, you’re young, and you have options, but don’t ever sell yourself short for a nigga that means you no good.”

“I agree.”

“I can’t believe he cut you off because he was afraid of his mammy cutting him off.”

“That’s what he said, and honestly, I kinda felt bad for him, which is probably why I gave in to temptation.”

“Chile, I don’t even wanna think about it.”

“I know, right? I don’t either,” I said with a shake of the head. “But back to his mammy. She has been hell-bent on running his life. It’s just unfortunate that he’s caught up in her bullshit.”

“Well, I can agree with that. I never liked her ass anyway. She seems like the type that can’t keep her nose out her grown children’s business.”

“She need to be worried about them fat ass daughters of hers. Hook them bitches up with somebody while she out here planning his future,” I bitched, rolling my eyes.

“You crazy.”

“I’m for real,” I commented just as my cell phone chirped of an incoming text message.

***Happy birthday, Ki. I love you. LOYAL***

I frowned.

“Who is that?”

“His ass.”

“Block his fucking number.”

“I am,” I said. A part of me wanted to block his number, but another part of me liked that he was now chasing me. It felt good because usually, I was the one on his ass. With the tables being turned, he could now get a dose of what I’d been feeling.

“So what’s up with you and dark chocolate with his sexy ass?”

“Who? Hendrix?”

“Who else would I be talking about?”

“Oh, nothing. He’s just cool people. I do like him, but I ain’t tryna fuck around with no niggas my age. They play too much.”

Kinsley laughed, “You love saying that. Do you want my opinion?”

“You always give it to me anyway, so shoot.”

“You just turned nineteen, Yomi. Live your life. See who you wanna see. Do you, sis. You don’t have to answer to nobody but God. But hey, when you know somebody is good for you and good to you at the same time, always choose him.”

I smiled. I understood where she was coming from, and that was about the trillest advice I’d gotten in a while. That’s why I fucked with Kinsley the long way. She made sure to always tell me what I needed to hear, not what I wanted to hear.

“Hendrix is fine though.”

“Tell me about it.” I laughed with a wink. “Temptation is a muthafucka, but I be standing my ground.”

“Yeah, like you should’ve done with Disloyal.”

“I know, bitch.”

“But hey, I think Hendrix has a lot of women ridin’ his jock, anyway. Shit, everybody knows him. He’s a very popular guy.”

“I know. That’s what makes this even more interesting. Even though he has girls flocking at his feet, the nigga keeps his eyes on me.”

“Flattering, right?”

“Very.” I blushed a little. “Anyway, I need to go text my boo thang. He might not be here to celebrate my birthday, but he has showed out for the day. Disloyal ain’t never sent me flowers like these.”

“What you gon’ tell Auntie when she sees this stuff?”

“I’m gon’ tell her who they’re from. She may as well get used to knowing that I’m talking to someone new and he’s older than me. I wouldn’t see a reason for her to dislike Dodge. He’s a ladies’ man. He’ll win her over.”

“I can believe that with his smooth ass.”

I laughed, picking up my vase of roses. “This thing is heavy as hell. Gotta be the vase.”

“It’s beautiful. I know that.”

“Grab my bear for me. He’s my new bed partner.”

“Don’t be fucking the damn bear in your sleep,” Kinsley joked.

“Hush, girl,” I laughed.

I lay across my bed and sent Dodge a text message.

***Thank you so much for the gifts and the early morning text message. Your card was the sweetest. Just want you to know that I appreciate having you in my life. You came at a time when I really needed something different and better. You make me smile more than you know. I can’t stop blushing. The bear is so big and is already my new bed mate. The roses are like nothing I’ve ever seen before. You outdid yourself. Thank you.***

❤️🥰❤️ YOMI

***You’re welcome, babe. I’ll hit you up later today. I’m out with Granny and Sha. By the way, they told me to tell you happy birthday. DODGE***

☺️ ***Tell ’em I said thank you and OK. YOMI***

I didn’t understand why he chose today of all days to spend with Granny and Sha, not that it was a huge deal, but it bothered me a little. Any other day, I wouldn’t care. I actually loved their bond with each other, but today was my day. It’s my birthday, and I figured if he liked me the way he acted like he did, he’d make time for sure to be with me today.

I huffed a little, kissing my bear on the lips while wishing it was him. I rolled out of bed and headed for the bathroom to wash up. I was going to do something for my birthday, whether that included being with Dodge or not.

As I stood under the warm, steamy shower, my phone began to ring. I reached out of the shower and grabbed it off the decorative shelf that was nearby.

“Hello,” I said, not even noticing the caller ID.

“Happy birthday, girl!” Rosalyn said.

“Thank you!”

“What you doing for it today?”

“I don’t know, but I’m doing something,” I told her.

“Well, say less. What you doing now?”

“Girl, I’m in the shower.”

“Oh, well, call me when you get out.”

“I’m good. What you wanted to do?”

“Hold up, why Dodge ain’t doing nothing with you?”

“He’s with Granny and Sha right now. I have no clue what he has going on after that, but he hasn’t said anything about chilling with me.”

“I’ll hit him up and find out what his plans are.”

“Noooo, don’t do that. He did send me some beautiful roses and a big ass bear that I absolutely love. I’m sure whatever his reasons are for not coming through are good. At least they better be,” I added.

Rosalyn laughed. “His intentions mean well. Dodge really is a good guy.”

“I know. Anyway, I’m down for whatever. If he decides that he wants to do something, then I’ll have to ditch our plans. If not, then we’re going to find something to get into.”

“Sure as hell will. So get finish doing what you’re doing. See if Kinsley wants to come out too.”

“Oh trust, I was inviting her anyway. She’s the life of the party.”

“I can tell.”

“I’ll call you when we’re on the way with your non-driving ass.”

She laughed out loud. “Whatever. I’m gonna learn one day.”

“I hear ya,” I joked. “But let me finish washing up.”

“OK, cool,” she said, and we ended the call. The minute we ended the call, my phone chirped of an incoming text.

***Happy birthday, pretty woman. HENDRIX***

I smiled.

***Thanks, Hendrix. YOMI***

***What are you doing today? HENDRIX***

***Hanging out a lil’ bit. What are you getting into on this beautiful Sunday, which happens to be my birthday? ☺ YOMI***

***Wishing I could be with you. HENDRIX***

***Oh yeah? YOMI***

***Yeah. HENDRIX***

***I’m not really sure what the day consists of, but I’ll be sure to hit you up if I get free. YOMI***

***That’s wassup. Enjoy your day, pretty woman. HENDRIX***

***Will do. YOMI***

Hendrix made it easy to like him. He was charming, sexy as hell, and very easy on the eyes. On top of that, he was also like a mini basketball celebrity. Seemed like everybody knew him. However, the only thing I knew was that we’d only recently just met, and just because he was acting like he wasn’t fucking nobody didn’t really mean that he wasn’t fucking nobody. A nigga that fine... I just knew better.

Once out the shower, I dried off and put on my favorite whipped body lotion, Unicorn Kisses by The Spiritual Tea Company. This had to be the best-smelling shit ever. I put on a black lace sexy bra and panty set and headed for my closet to find something super cute to put on. It felt good turning nineteen. I still wasn't legal, but hell, that didn't matter. I could have a drink anytime I wanted one, and if I wanted to smoke a blunt, all I had to do was smoke with Kinsley. I was really living in a grown woman's world without the bills and kids, of course. Definitely living my best life.

After browsing through my clothes at the numerous new outfits that I'd stashed just for my birthday, I settled on a stretchy satin light-blue bell-bottom jumpsuit with a plunging open neckline that tied at the waist. As I laid it out on the bed to see what shoes matched it, I called Kinsley from my cell phone.

"I'm right down the hall from you. What do you want?" she asked.

"Get dressed. We're heading out for my birthday."

"Now you're talking. Where we going?"

"I don't know. Somewhere," I told her. "I thought I would've had plans, but Dodge ain't tryna do nothing—"

"Dodge ain't the only nigga you're talking to. What about Hendrix? When one don't come through, the other will."

"I knew you would say that, but I'm not tryna travel that road. I'm already feeling bad for fucking around with Disloyal."

Kinsley smacked her lips in the phone. "You should be."

"Anyways, bitch, either you ridin' or not."

"Oh, bitch, I'm ridin.' Don't do me." She grinned. "I already got my shit laid out. I didn't care if you did have a date. I was going anyway."

I laughed, "You stupid."

"I'm for real." She grinned.

"I'm getting dressed now, so we'll be leaving in the next hour."

"I'll be ready," she said as I ended the call.



"Oooooooh, y'all bitches got it smelling like that good, good." Rosalyn said as she got in the car.

Kinsley grinned. "Meech keep some good weed."



“Trust me, the whole crew do.” Rosalyn grinned as Kinsley passed her the blunt.

“So since it’s your birthday, me and Kinsley did a thing.”

I frowned. “What thing?”

“You’ll see.” Rosalyn smirked as she hit the blunt.

“Tell me.”

“You’ll see,” Kinsley said as she glanced over at me but continued driving.

The ride was filled with light gossip, laughs, and excitement. I didn’t know what was planned, but I was ready for it. As Dodge crossed my mind, I sent him a text message.

***Haven’t heard from you anymore. Just seeing what you’re up to.***  
**YOMI**

***Tryna finish what I’m doing so I can slide through and pick you up.***  
**DODGE**

***Oh wow. I’m not home. Kinsley and Rosalyn got me out here in these streets. Had I known you were tryna come through, I would’ve waited at home for you.***  
**YOMI**

***It’s cool. Just let me know where they take you, and I’ll come thru.***  
**DODGE**

☺ ***OK, will do.***  
**YOMI**

“What you smiling so hard for?”

“Dodge just told me to tell him where y’all are taking me and he’ll slide through.”

“He got some nerves. Wanna wait ’til we make plans to show up.”

“Hush, Kinsley. As long as he shows up, that’s all that matters to me,” I said with a slight frown on my face. “Why are we heading to Fulton County Airport?” I asked.

“Because Hartsfield Airport is too busy right now.”

“Hold up. Are y’all tryna flew a bitch out?” I asked with excited eyes.

“Girl, chill out,” Rosalyn clowned as she puffed on the blunt.

“I’m serious, y’all. I can’t go nowhere. Dodge is supposed to be meeting me.”

“You mean to tell me that you’ll miss a flight just to be with Dodge?”

“Uh, yeah!” I answered. “I didn’t bring an overnight bag, and y’all didn’t either. So I know we’re not flying out. Plus, I’ve never flown before. I know damn well you wouldn’t be springing nothing like this on me.”

Kinsley laughed. “No, calm down. I just came here to meet Meech. He’s flying out, but I have to get something from him before he leaves town,” she explained.

“Oh, I was about to say,” I slid in. I didn’t know what Kinsley and Meech had going on as she continued to drive. Suddenly, she stopped just outside of an airport strip. “Is that a private jet?” I pondered. “Damn, he flying out on that?”

“Look.” Kinsley pointed.

“Look at what?” I asked just as my eyes lit up like Christmas lights. “Oh my God! Is that Dodge, y’all?” My heart began to pound with excitement as he headed down the stairs of the private jet.

“Don’t just sit here. Get out!” Kinsley exclaimed.

“Yes, bitch! Get out.” Rosalyn grinned.

I literally hopped my anxious ass out the car and ran toward Dodge like Whitney Houston did, making her way to Kevin Costner in *The Bodyguard*. This shit felt like a dream. I couldn’t believe it. I practically jumped in his arms, legs wrapped around his waist, as he bear hugged me.

“You didn’t think I’d miss your birthday, did you?”



KIYOMI SIMMONS

**T**he minute my feet touched the ground from hugging this sexy ass man, Dodge handed me a box that he was holding.

“Oh my gosh! What’s this?” I shrieked.

He handsomely smiled. “Open it.”

“Oh wow.” I blushed while anxiously opening my gift. My hands were literally shaking from the excitement. Once I’d torn the cute white and gold paper off the box, I noticed the Rolex logo printed on the outside. “Oh my God!” I let out while pulling the top off that box to find another box within. I wasted no time opening that box, and wow! I was really wowed! “A Rolex watch, Dodge? Really?”

“I love watches. Thought I’d buy us matching Rolexes,” he said, showing off the sparkling, white-gold bling on his wrist. It definitely matched mine. I was so overjoyed and floored at the same time, almost lost for words. “Let me help you put it on.”

The whole time he was putting the watch on my wrist, my stomach danced with butterflies. I was really smitten by him and how this whole thing was a surprise that I was totally in the dark on.

“Let’s go.”

My eyes stretched. “Go where? I’ve never flown before.”

“It’s always a first time for everything. No worries. You’re in good hands.”

I smiled. “For some reason, I can believe that.”

“You better. I’ll never let anything happen to you,” he said, leaning in to kiss me. I swear he had the softest lips on the planet, and his ass smelled so

good. I just wanted to eat him up.

I looked back to see Rosalyn and Kinsley standing by the car with cheesy smiles on their faces. Dodge grabbed me by the hand, distracting me as he led me up the steps of the private jet and the minute we boarded...

“SURPRISE!” the crew yelled out. My heart dropped from the overwhelming excitement of knowing that Dodge had planned all of this for me. It was Sha, Meech, Rosco, Apple, Donk, Cobra, and Boss Hog cheering me on for my birthday. Next thing I knew, Kinsley and Rosalyn joined us.

“Y’all heffas were in on this?”

Kinsley laughed. “Yeah, we were.”

“Dodge set all of this up in a matter of hours, TODAY,” Rosalyn emphasized. “You should be thanking him.”

“More like kissing him,” I retorted, gently grabbing Dodge’s face and kissing him. I mean, tongue all down a nigga’s throat.

“Damn, get a room already!” Kinsley joked.

“Hush. That’s the birthday girl. Let her have some fun,” Apple chimed in as Dodge and I grinned.

“I didn’t even bring any clothes.”

“You don’t need any. We’ll shop when we land,” Dodge told me.

“But my mama—”

“Oh, you’re fine sus. I already told her that I was surprising you for your birthday the minute Dodge told me what was up. So she knows we’re headed out of town and won’t be back for another two days. She did say for us to call her once we made it,” Kinsley shared.

“Wow, this is unbelievable.” I beamed as everyone began getting in their seats before takeoff. I looked over at Dodge, who grabbed the seat right in front of me so we’d be facing each other. “Where are we going?”

“Miami, Florida.”

“Oh shit, Miami!”

He nodded his head. “Yep, so sit back and relax. You want a drink?”

“Hell yeah I want a drink.”

Dodge grinned as he reached for the Hennessy bottle. He poured me a mixed drink, and as I sipped damn near the entire flight, all my focus was on this man. He had really outdone himself yet again, and all I wanted to do was show him how appreciative I was for making me this happy.

“Come here. Let me kiss dem lips again.” I teased but couldn’t wait to kiss on his ass every chance I got.

I had never gone to Florida. I know that's crazy, but the only state I had a chance to visit was South Carolina, thanks to a Myrtle Beach getaway that Loyal had taken me to for his birthday. To our surprise, his mammy and daddy just so happened to show up, and the whole trip went to shit. Of course, I'd always believed that them showing up wasn't by chance. To this day, I'd always felt that way. Needless to say, after that trip, I never wanted him to take me nowhere else that wasn't close enough for me to call my mama to come get me. Other than that, I hadn't traveled much. It wasn't like we had family vacations or getaways. Everything we did was in Atlanta. I'd tagged along to Savannah twice with Kinsley for St. Patrick's Day, but even still, that was in Georgia. So this trip was special to me, very special.

The flight was amazing. I'd never felt safer being in Dodge's presence. He certainly made sure of that. We laughed, clowning, drank good, talked shit, and even had a dance-off between Rosalyn and Sha. I hadn't had this much fun in a long time. Before I knew it, we were landing, and as my feet hit the soil of Miami, Florida, I knew the next two days were about to be memorable and lit.

Once off the jet, I could smell the Miami beach vibes in the air. The first thing we did was get the rental vehicles that were reserved for us. They weren't playing with these new rentals. We had a black BMW and two black, three-seater Tahoes. We rolled out of the airport like big-time celebrities. Dodge and I rode solo in the BMW, which had a bitch feeling like I was on top of the world. The rest of the crew were in the Tahoes following us. Of course, Dodge would lead the pack. He was just that guy, the one that led his crew. If that shit wasn't a turn-on, I didn't know what was.

“So where are we heading now?”

“You'll see.”

I smiled. I mean, that was all his ass was making me do. I couldn't help it. He had me feeling good inside and out. I knew I'd only been in one relationship, and even though Dodge and I hadn't made it official, his actions spoke volumes.

“You good?”

“Good? I've never been better. I can't lie; I didn't think you had anything planned for me. I didn't even think at first that you'd even see me

today, let alone make all of this happen without me knowing. I'm quite nosy. I'm never really shocked by much, but this has taken me by surprise."

"I figured I would sneak this one in on you. Plus, I ain't gon' lie; I hadn't planned anything 'til earlier this morning. I've had so much going on and so much on my mind 'til I had to get it together and make this happen. I didn't want you to miss out because of shit going on in my life. That wouldn't have been fair to you."

I looked over at him, feeling bad that I'd been so hard on him for possibly not being able to see me today. "You OK?"

He shrugged. "Hopefully."

"Is that bad? I mean, it's nothing bad, is it?"

"I hope not, but only time will tell."

For a minute, I was silent. I really didn't know what to say. "You're not going away or anything?"

He looked over at me with an uncertain expression. "Meaning?"

"Like going to prison or something?"

He grinned. "For what?"

"I don't know. Maybe drugs, something illegal... Shit, I don't know."

Dodge laughed. "I told you I don't sell drugs, and I'm not doing anything illegal."

"Whew, thank God," I mumbled.

"Why you say that?"

"Because I need you around. You can't just leave a sista like that."

He looked over at me with that handsome ass smile. "I ain't going nowhere, but you sho you here to stay?"

I smiled. "'Bout as sho as I'll ever be."

"A'ight, I hear ya." He grinned.

I could recall him saying that he didn't sell drugs, but he hadn't exactly explained to me what he had going on or did for a living. I was glad he reassured me that it wasn't anything illegal. I would hate for him to get caught up in some unnecessary bullshit that would take him away. This was already something very new for me. Almost felt too good to be true, but I wanted to embrace the moments, every moment, and accept what the universe was sending my way. I looked over at him and smiled to myself, even though I was sure it was showing. I couldn't help myself.

"What you smiling so hard for?"

“All of this, and *you*,” I added with emphasis. “You got me smiling like this. My damn jaws hurt from smiling so much.”

We laughed, shared small talk, and the next thing I knew, we were pulling up to the Fontainebleau Hotel.

“Oh my God! You have gotta be kidding me,” I let out.

“What?”

“The Fontainebleau is only a hotel that I’ve imagined being at many times over. I always take these luxurious vacations in my mind while surfing the web.” I grinned. “OK, universe! I see you.”

Dodge laughed with a shake of the head as he pulled up to the valet area. Once parked, we got out of the car. Meech pulled up behind us with Rosco pulling up behind him. I got out the car, enjoying the smell of the city in the air. Everybody got out of the other vehicles wildin’ out, lots of laughing and joking around. Rosalyn was dropping it like it was hot, and even I joined in with a shimmy type of two-step that tickled the hell out of Dodge.

We entered the hotel as us ladies chilled off to the side while being nosy, admiring the amazing view and allowed the men to check us in our rooms.

“Is this like a dream come true or nah?” Kinsley asked with a smirk.

I frowned. “Did you tell him?” I asked, giving her a playful side-eye.

“I may have.” She grinned.

“What else did you tell him?”

“That’s for me to know and you to find out,” she joked.

“Girl, I can’t wait to unwind and have my way with Hoggie later,” Donk teased. Hoggie was just another nickname she’d given him. I guess that was her way of shortening Boss Hog.

“I’m jelly. I don’t have anybody on this trip with me,” Sha cut in.

“Shit, me either. But hey, I was always told to not bring sand to a beach anyway. We can do what we want.” Apple grinned, giving Sha a high five.

“You got a point,” Sha agreed.

“Well, I feel like Donk. I’m ready to get my fuck on,” Kinsley joked.

“First off, we’re gonna have a good damn time before any hanky-panky takes place later tonight. So sit y’all horny asses down somewhere,” I said with a playful roll of the eyes. “Y’all trippin’. Ain’t they trippin’, Roz?”

“Uh... I don’t know friend. I feel like them.” She laughed.

“Oh hush,” I commented just as the guys joined us.

“What y’all over here talking about?”



“Nothing,” Sha quickly responded as we chuckled out loud.

“Y’all ready to get this two-day party started?”

“Hell yeah,” we nearly said in harmony.

We headed for the elevator, all loud and cuttin’ up. I definitely blamed it on the alcohol for the most part because we’d gotten litty on the private flight here.

“We have two suites,” Dodge told us. “But we’re going to the bigger suite first.”

“Who’s in that suite?” Donk asked.

“Everybody but me, Kiyomi, Meech and Kinsley.”

“Ohhhh, y’all got a suite by y’all selves, huh?” Sha teased.

“Well, she is the birthday girl, and Kinsley is her cousin,” Donk joked with laughter just as the elevator took off.

“Whew shit, this is a long way up.” Kinsley gasped.

“Or down,” I uttered, having a great fear of heights.

We stepped off the private elevator and right onto the oceanfront, four-bedroom suite.

“Oh wow,” I mumbled, admiring the view. I believed everybody felt like I did as they took off in different directions, calling out their rooms that they’d be sleeping in. Being that this wasn’t where I’d be laying my head, I went straight out on the balcony to take it all in. As I stood staring at the ocean, almost with happy tears in my eyes, I could feel Dodge’s arms caress me from behind.

“You good, love?”

“Listen, I’m only nineteen, and to be experiencing a moment like this is something most people never get in a lifetime. This is everything. I don’t know how you pulled this off in so little time, but I truly appreciate all of this,” I told him.

“It’s my pleasure. You just don’t know. I’ve not been in a good space like this in a long time. I can’t lie; it feels good,” he said, kissing me softly on the neck. “There’s more.”

“Can’t be much more than this. This is already enough.”

“You hungry?”

“Am I? Yes, starving,” I responded just as the smell of food hit me. I was so busy trying to get to the balcony that I hadn’t even noticed anything else.

“Well, it’s time to eat,” he said.

“What?” I pondered, turning to look at him.

“The cooks inside have prepared your favorites.”

“The cooks?” My eyes stretched, looking past him.

“Yeah, this is gonna be a birthday to remember.” He smiled.

“Every second of it,” I added with a big smile.

Kinsley stepped out on the balcony. “Sus, they got your favorite foods in here. Including the cannabis hot wings that you loved at Dodge’s birthday.”

“Oh shit,” I let out, grabbing Dodge by the hand and scurrying inside the house.

When I tell you the food was delicious, it was everything. I had cannabis hot wings, Italian meatballs, chicken alfredo, fried liver in gravy with rice, pepperoni pizza, cheeseburger sliders, sweet yeast rolls, collard greens, and macaroni and cheese. It was certainly a variety of things I loved to pig out on, and I had to have a taste of each thing. By the time I was done eating and feeling stuffed as hell, all I wanted to do was head to our suite so I could wash up, kick back, and relax for the rest of the evening.

I looked over at Dodge, who looked like he was feeling about as stuffed as I was. “You ready to skip out on this party?” I asked.

“Hell yeah,” he responded.

“Aye yo! We ’bout to go,” I said.

“Gone girl. Go get some alone time with your king,” Apple said.

“I know that’s right,” Kinsley agreed. “We going out, right, babe?”

“Yeah, we gon’ hit the city.” Meech nodded. “Sure y’all don’t wanna go?”

“I don’t have any clothes to put on, and I want to shower before I do anything. So y’all good. Go have fun. We can hit the city tomorrow. Right, Dodge?”

“Whatever you want,” he responded.

“Well, let me know if you change your mind. We’re not leaving just yet,” Kinsley said.

“Will do.” I smirked as Dodge and I headed out of their suite to spend some QT with each other in ours.

The minute we walked into the two-bedroom suite, my mouth dropped. It was beautiful. Rose petals were thrown on the floor.

“Follow the red-petal road,” Dodge teased.

I smiled as I followed the rose petals into the master bedroom suite. “Oh my God!” I happily shrieked once walking in. On the table over by the oceanfront balcony was a three-layer red velvet cake with nuts on the top, covered in a clear cake lid. I knew what it was the minute I saw it. “My favorite.”

“I know. You didn’t think you were gonna have a birthday without a cake, did you?”

“I wasn’t even thinking about a cake after all that good food I just ate. But thank you, thank you, thank you.”

He grinned, kissing me on the lips. “Look,” he said, pointing at the bed.

“That’s for me?”

“Yes. It’s just something to relax in for the night. We’ll go shopping tomorrow.”

On the bed was a pink and white fitted cotton onesie that had *kiss me* written in cursive letters all over it. I could tell it would stop right below my butt, and my tatas would look great from the plunging neckline.

“I hope you like it. Sha picked it out for you.”

“I love it. It’s something I’d definitely wear.”

“Well, I kinda figured that by what you had on Friday night when I was over your house.”

I grinned. “Yeah, I almost forgot about that.”

“I didn’t,” he assured me. “Anyway, you have a pair of slippers there too.”

“I see ’em.” I smiled, noticing the pink UGG slippers next to the onesie. “How did this stuff get in here?”

“While you were busy eating, dancing, and getting your drink on, I had Sha bring the stuff in here and get the room ready. You never even missed that she was gone.”

“Wow, you really thought this out in so little time.”

“Sometimes you just make shit happen, especially for the ones you care about.”

I blushed. “That’s so sweet. So right now, I’m going to shower, then come back and relax on that balcony with a glass of something strong and be under you for the rest of the night. Do you wanna join me in the shower?” I asked just as his cell phone began to ring. He pulled it out his pocket and looked at the display screen. I couldn’t see who it was, and he

didn't answer. I mentally shrugged, already figuring it wasn't anybody that was already with us on this trip. "So—"

"Oh nah. You go ahead. Enjoy yo' alone time, and when you come out, I'll have yo' mixed glass of Hennessy ready for you. Then I'll shower."

"You can join me, though." I tempted him again to make sure that he knew it was cool.

"OK," he said with a bashful smile. "I'll bring yo' drink to you. How 'bout that?"

"Sounds good." I headed in the master bathroom and simply stood in awe of the floor-to-ceiling marble stand-in shower. The shower could hold at least four people easy. The décor was absolutely beautiful, super serene, and immaculate. I had only imagined a life like this, and now, it was coming true. As I came out of my clothes, my phone alerted me of a text message. The minute I saw who it was from, I cringed inside.

***I would love to get a room and spoil you a lil' bit tonight. Let's finish what we started Friday night. LOYAL***

I rolled my eyes. "Wow, this nigga got some nerves," I whispered to myself.

***Listen, DISLOYAL, I don't know what the hell I was thinking to even let you get that close to me. I must've lost my damn mind for a minute there. But I don't want no parts of you, no parts of this, and there's nothing else to be said or had when it comes to us. It's over. YOMI***

***BTW, I'm already at a hotel in Miami, Florida with my man and enjoying myself. I suggest you take your baldheaded bitch to one in the A, since that's where you're at and leave me the hell alone. Good night, asshole. 😏 YOMI***

***Wow, so it's really like that? LOYAL***

***What hotel in Miami? You lying. LOYAL***

***The Fontainebleau. Do I need to snap some pics and send 'em to you? YOMI***

***👁️ So you're really saying it's over now? LOYAL***

***It was over when you announced your new bitch on Facebook Live. YOMI***

***OK, we'll see about that. LOYAL***

***We sure will. YOMI***

I guess he got the picture because he didn't respond back. I didn't know what his problem was, but I wasn't going back down that road. He'd lost

me for good, and it was of nobody's fault but his own. I could only imagine that he'd have a few tricks up his sleeve, but either way, I wasn't going for it. Fuck all that. Dodge was the man I had my eyes on, and I was like Usher with this one. I had plans for him, big plans.



## DODGE GAMBLE

**D**odge, I know you see me calling you. Keisha is in the hospital. She started having back-to-back panic attacks and couldn't control them. Her heart rate was through the roof, and the doctors had to sedate her to calm her down. She's OK now, but she's really going through it. I was hoping that maybe you could talk to her. You're really the only person she listens to, at least she used to. But what the hell? Can you give it try? Daddy feels helpless, and so do I. I guess between the breakup and having to relive the events that took place when mom died has been all too much for her. I'm not saying to go to the hospital and sit with her. Just call her cell phone and check on her. If you still care just a little please reach out. Thanks. KAY

I read the text message but honestly didn't want to put too much thought in it. This definitely could've been one of Keisha's stunts. I mean, after all, I hadn't talked to her since I sent the text to see if she was okay. The time before was when I choked her ass out. So this could've been one of her many games to get my attention. Sad part was that if it was true, it would be easy to believe because Keisha had some deep-rooted issues, and what she really needed was therapy, not a nigga. Dick was only a temporary solution to an ongoing problem.

The only thing that needed to be on my mind was fixing Kiyomi's drink and enjoying the rest of the night with her. As I mixed her Hennessy and Hypnotic together, my cell began to ring.

"Oh boy," I mumbled as I looked at the display screen, now noticing that it was Mr. Henry calling. "Wassup, Mr. Henry?"

“Wassup, Dodge. I don’t mean to bother you, but Keisha’s in the hospital.”

“I heard.”

“So you know already?” he expressed. “See, that’s why I’m calling. I figured Kay would call you, but this ain’t yo’ problem, Dodge. Keisha has been dealing with a lot for many years, especially after the death of their mom. She blames everybody for her shortcomings. It doesn’t matter if that’s in her relationships or just her personal life. What she doesn’t know is that I’ve already spoken to a well-known psychologist in the area that’s gonna stop by tomorrow. She has no idea, so I know she’ll be pissed at me, but at this point, I don’t care. Keisha has caused me enough trouble to last a lifetime. It doesn’t matter what I say to her; it goes in one ear and out the other, especially since she’s gotten grown.”

“I feel you.”

“Kay is no better. She continues to follow her sister, and that does nothing good for her either. She’s headed down a one-way street leading to nowhere. They are like the fuckin’ blind leading the blind. So please, don’t reach out. Let Keisha deal with this shit on her own. I got her, but first and foremost, she gotta want this help for herself.”

“I understand.” I nodded. “I appreciate you calling me.”

“Listen, nothing you’ve done when it comes to Keisha is solely yo’ fault.”

“I learned that some time ago.”

“I’m glad you did. Anyway, I’m ’bout to go back in her hospital room to make sure she’s OK because she’s been having a fit to leave, but they won’t let her. I’m actually glad they won’t.”

“Yeah, she needs to stay in there at least until she talks to the doctor.”

“Yes, I’m her father.” I heard him say as he then responded back to me. “Oh, hold up one minute, Dodge,” he said as I could hear someone in the background talking to him. A few seconds later, he returned to the call. “Did you hear that?”

“Nah, I heard somebody talking, but I couldn’t hear what was said.”

“That was her doctor. He said her test came back, and oh damn, it ain’t the time for this news.”

“What?” I pondered.

“Keisha’s pregnant.”

My eyes stretched wider than the Pacific Ocean. “Say what now?”



“The doctor says that Keisha is pregnant.”

“Wow,” I uttered. Now was not the time for any of this. I didn’t even care to be on this call, let alone hear some shit like that. “Look, Mr. Henry, I’m not trying to be rude, but I gotta go. I’ll call you when I get back in town.”

“Oh, I didn’t know you were outta town. OK, son. Handle your business,” he said. “We’ll talk later.”

“True,” and after saying that, I ended the call. What the fuck did he mean by saying that Keisha was pregnant? I didn’t know what to make of that information, but as I sat pondering over the shit, Kiyomi called out from the bathroom.

“You coming? At least bring me my drink.”

“Coming!” I yelled back. Mentally, I had to repress the shit I’d heard and continue enjoying myself. If Keisha was pregnant, it probably wasn’t mine. I mean, I’d starting wearing condoms some time ago. I didn’t want nothing like that to slip up, so I wasn’t claiming this one. However, I was unsure of how’d she take this news and run with it. Keisha “the unpredictable” was what I called her. So no fucking telling, but I had to be prepared for whatever because she was certainly coming with the bullshit and, more than likely, sooner than later.

I stepped into the bathroom, two cups in my hand, but stopped in my tracks as I watched the water run over Kiyomi’s silky smooth skin. Her body was badass, curves in all the right places with an ass that was nice and fat. I could see me hittin’ it from the back like all of her belonged to me. Shawty was perfect. No lie, she was beautiful as fuck, and I liked her more than I even realized. She was young and ready. On top of that, she definitely had the potential to be the one that I could see myself settling down with. Only thing was that I wanted to wait. I wanted her to be sure of being with me. She was drawn to me like a moth to a flame—this I knew—but I could tell she’d been broken. One thing I’d learned from fucking with Keisha was that you couldn’t fix someone’s broken pieces. The only thing I could do was be there and hope she recognized a real one. In doing so, she’d let go of the past, even the hurt, and learn to move forward with an appreciative heart that was ready to love.

“I got your drink,” I finally said.

“Good, bring it here.” She smiled, turning to face me. I walked over to the shower, opening the big glass door. She reached for the drink, but

instead of grabbing it, she pulled me by my shirt.

“Nooo.” I grinned.

“Yesss, come in here.”

“I still got my clothes on. Take ’em off. Join me.”

“You are fucking persistent lady.” I teased with a shake of the head.

“I always get what I want.”

“And what do you want?”

“You,” she answered, stepping up to me with kisses so smooth and sweet, my dick instantly rose to the occasion.

“Fuck it,” I said, setting the drinks down on the bathroom counter and coming out of my shorts. But before I could come out my shirt, Kiyomi pulled me in. “Whoaaaa, girl.” I laughed.

“I said get in.” She grinned, helping me come out of my wet shirt.

“You lucky this is just a plain white T-shirt.”

“Plain white my ass. It’s a white Saint Laurent T-shirt.”

“Still plain and white.” I teased, kissing her soft lips at the same time as sliding my boxer briefs off. I really wasn’t trying to move this fast, even though we’d been talking a couple of months. However, I guess I didn’t plan this extravagant trip for nothing. Something was surely going to happen, at some point, some time.

The showerheads were directly above us. The running water felt like raindrops, and in the middle of euphoria, it was just me and her. I palmed her ass cheeks, pushing her gently against the glass shower door. I didn’t wanna put it on her, but damn, she wasn’t leaving me much of a choice. As I started kissing her around the neck, I found myself getting turned the fuck up. Listen, this was a side only a select few had gotten a taste of.

Before I knew it, I had her legs wrapped around my neck as I sucked the soul out her body. Pussy was dripping more drops than the showers above us.

“Oh my God!” she let out with extreme pleasure.

I heard her, but God couldn’t help her now. I’d gone from zero to a hundred so quick, and this zone was magnified by her aggressive, sexy ass demands, which I eagerly gave in to. This was the tastiest treat I’d had in a long time. Pineapple juices quenched my thirst to a point I could literally live off this shit without food and still survive.

“What you doing to me?” she moaned. The sultry sounds that escaped her lips only made me go harder. Not because I was trying to turn her out,

but because she had a nigga feeling like Superman, and all I wanted to do was save her ass.

My tongue vibrated on her clit and had her legs shaking, whole body quaking. I was in it to win it. I had no clue how I managed to stand so firm on a wet floor with all this ass in my face and thick thighs wrapped around my shoulders, but there was no way I'd ever drop her in no kind of way whatsoever.

Once I was done feasting, belly full and heart content, I bent her over to work it from the back. Her pussy was tight, walls closer than most as I groaned a little but did my best to keep quiet, only because I was focused and determined to please all of her. She was reaching, trying to push me back some, but I wanted guts and all.

“This what you been beggin’ fo’, right?”

“Oh my God!”

“I’m just givin’ ya what ya asked fo’.”

Between her screaming my name, moaning and begging for more, then wanting me to stop so she could catch her breath, my dick was ready to explode. I fought the urge several times; pussy was so good, made me wanna put my seed in her. Instead, after about thirty minutes of sensual strokes from the back to the front, then back to doggy style, I pulled out, painting her ass cheeks with a glossy white coat of this liquid gold. I let out a deep breath of fresh air like I'd been holding it in forever from concentrating so hard.

“You good?” she asked with a smile.

“Hell yeah I’m good. You good?”

“Like Tony the Tiger, I’m greeaaat, baby!” she shrieked as we laughed out loud.



“Wow, that shit in there was amazing.” She blushed as we got in the bed.

“I hope you don’t think that’s it. Shit, this party just starting.”

She bashfully grinned. “I have no problems with that. Maybe we should put a *do not disturb* sign on the door. I’ll be so embarrassed if Kinsley and Meech heard me with all that damn loud ass moaning and shit.”

I laughed. “I don’t know. That shit might just run in y’all family.”

“Stop it!” She laughed out loud, playfully hitting me.

“Just kiddin’.” I chuckled as we slid under the covers next to each other.

“Thank you for this. I couldn’t have asked for a more perfect birthday. Your planning was on point, super secretive, and everything I didn’t expect. Just know I’m the happiest in this moment that I’ve been in a really long time.”

I smiled inside, kissing her on the forehead. “You deserve the best.”

“Aww, you can be so sweet. I mean, you have this sweet yet thug appeal that’s like no other. I sit back and watch how you move. All your homies look up to you. You are the man in your circle. Hell, you’re the man period. People just be showing you mad love and respect.”

“I earned dat shit.”

“I believe you.”

“It didn’t come just by always being so laidback and cool. Trust, there were moments when I had to stand ten toes down and teach a nigga ’bout playin’ with me and mine. I don’t always carry a gun because my crew do for the most part, but I know how to use one and accurately at that. Fighting ain’t always about gunplay though. Niggas don’t get that part. I’ve beat the shit outta the hardest nigga walking Project Ville. He wasn’t no lil’ ass nigga either. Definitely much bigger than me.”

“Damn.”

“He was known as the hood’s bully, knocking niggas out left and right. But I wasn’t to be fucked with. Guess he learned that shit the hard way. What was so crazy is that my brother was there the whole time and sat back watching the shit go down. He wasn’t no joke either, but he knew I didn’t need him to step in.”

“I see why they respect you in the hood.”

“It took a lot more than that, but let’s just say that was the start of it.”

“I can imagine. I knew you wasn’t the one to play with.”

“I ain’t saying I’m the baddest nigga in the streets, but I can hold my own.”

“I know.” She smiled with a cautious pause. “I ain’t tryna change the subject, but it’s obvious you got money. How did you get it? I mean, if it’s none of my business, just say that.”

I grinned. “Nah, I don’t mind indulging just a little. I started out selling weed in high school. I had mad clients, including teachers—”

“Stop it... teachers? Are you serious?”

“Shit, you just don’t know the half of it. Everybody smokes. Everybody wants to get high.”

She laughed. “Wow, a teacher buying weed from their student?”

“Yeah, they actually spent the most money. Anyway, that’s how it started. I had dreams of getting my family out the hood. Of course, D, my brother, was my connect. He made sure I was supplied and did what needed to be done to keep money in my pockets. We both held down Granny, but she ain’t no slow leak. Granny only took so much from us. She ain’t one of those people that don’t care where money comes from. She cares,” I expressed as Kiyomi laughed.

“Well, long story short, when my brother went missing, I came into a stash of dope and money. In other words, I graduated from weed to bricks. Once I started selling that, I knew it wasn’t something I wanted to do forever. Plus, my brother made it clear that the streets should only be a temporary means to come up and get out. As I was coming up, I started investing. My money went into stocks, rather crypto currency, and that was and has been my way out the game. Yes, I have money, but I spend wisely for the most part. I only indulge when necessary or when I’m trying to spoil a special young lady on her birthday.”

She smiled. “Awww.”

“I’m serious. You are special. It was something about you the minute I saw you. We had this instant chemistry. This instant connection. I felt it, and I know you did too. I also liked the way you handled yourself when confronted by Keisha. She’s usually the bully in any situation, but you didn’t back down. I ain’t gon’ lie; my dick hard just thinking about it.”

She laughed. “You silly.”

“I’m serious,” I clowned. “Well, earlier this morning, I took Granny and Sha to their new house.”

“What! A new house?”

“Yes, I bought them a house. So they’ll be moving out the hood soon. I had it set up to where they’d sign papers tomorrow, but since me and Sha are out of town, I had to reschedule that appointment for Wednesday. Nevertheless, Granny won’t be trippin’ about moving out the projects now. She knows that everything is legit. Ya know, timing is everything. This move has been in the making for over a year but in the works for much longer than that. I just needed to make sure it was done accordingly. Now,

since that's out the way, the next thing I'll be doing is introducing Sha to her new hair and nail salon."

"Noooo, you got her a building to work out of?"

"Yeah, that's part of the real estate venture that I've also invested in. See, I have my hands in a lil' bit of this and that now. I can't lie; I have a lot going on."

"I see." She smiled. "Well, thanks for taking out the time to make sure that I was good."

"As long as you're a part of my life, I'll always do that. Speaking of doing that, what is it that you like or see yourself doing?"

She hunched her shoulders. "I don't know. I wanna be an entrepreneur. Maybe sell bundles of hair and other stuff. I've been doing a lil' research here and there. My psychologist got me—" she said with a slight pause like maybe she'd mentioned a lil' too much. "Well, um... I've been looking at things like press-on nails, hair, purses, um... wholesale stuff. I've even started learning how to build a webpage because eventually, I want to put up a website of my own and sell my stuff. I just have to get a job so I can make that happen."

I nodded my head, definitely listening and feeling out her dreams and aspirations. She had a good head on her shoulders. I was sure she could pull it off.

"Anything else you see for your future?"

"I don't know. I wanna be happy and in love. I want a man that provides for me, makes sure I'm good and taken care of, and I take care of his needs and wants as well. I want kids someday. Do you?"

I simply nodded as she frowned.

"You don't have any, do you? I mean, you never mentioned you did, but —"

"Nah, no kids," I told her with thoughts of this bullshit looming over my head that Keisha had going on.

"So what else is planned for the next two days? I think the surprises have been more than enough." She smirked, kissing me with them soft ass lips.

"Well, we're here to enjoy the sunshine, the weed, good liquor, good food with the oceanfront views right here to relish in. We get to sleep in late. I'll order breakfast in bed. What you like? Cheese eggs and pancakes?"

"Yesss!" She giggled.

I grinned. “I got you. We have a spa date tomorrow, massages and wine, and then a nice reservation for two, dining in style, catered of course.”

“Ooooh.” She smiled. “I liiikes the agenda. So much thought and an A-plus for the effort.”

I smiled as she pulled out her cell phone.

“You know you need to upgrade that to the iPhone, right?”

“Hush.” She laughed. “Ain’t nothing wrong with my Samsung.”

“Shiiiiid.”

“This coming from the low-key, laidback nigga.”

I laughed. “Laidback niggas carry iPhones too. But don’t worry. I’ll upgrade ya.”

“Oh yeah?” she said, holding her phone over her face to take a picture. “You don’t mind if I take a picture of you and post it on my page, do you?”

I looked over at her, trying not to frown. I had social media accounts with lots of followers, but I never posted shit. I just liked having one so I could see what was going on in the real world. On top of that, I never let a bitch or a woman post me. That was a part of being low-key.

“What? You don’t want me to? I’ve seen your dry ass pages,” she joked. “Ain’t shit going on, nothing but that handsome ass profile picture that’s the same on all of your accounts.”

I grinned. “I know. I been peeping you since I accepted all of your requests. I don’t post shit, even though people always tagging me in stuff.”

“I mean, I wouldn’t be mad if you didn’t want me to post you. I just wanted to show the world that I was certainly content and who it was that’s making me so happy.”

“Shit, go ahead,” I told her. “Let it be known that zaddy is out here making it harder for a nigga.”

She blushed. “Ooooh shit nii.” She laid her head on my chest with the cutest smile and then snapped a few pics of me and her laying down. I already knew that this was just the first of many to come. I could see my phone blowing up already, females talking shit or being nosy. “I’m not posting them until we’re on our way back. I gotta take my time and filter through all the good ones.”

“I’m sure you do. What you think yo’ mama is gonna say when she sees them?”

“My mama don’t have social media. She ain’t into that shit. She’s not computer savvy either, and she barely even takes pictures with her phone.”

“I wouldn’t either if I was carrying a Samsung.”

She laughed, “Stop it! How you know she got a Samsung?”

“Because her daughter got one,” I joked as she straddled me.

“Well, upgrade her too then, Mr. iPhone Pro Max, or is it Max Pro?”

“Either or,” I teased. “And say less. I got y’all.” I laughed.

“I think it’s time for part two of what we started in the bathroom.”

“Shit, I was waiting on you.” I cheesed just as my cell phone started ringing. I glanced over on the nightstand to look at the display, but Kiyomi called it out before I could look.

“It’s Kay. My guess is that it’s probably Keisha,” she bluntly said with a slick roll of the eyes.

I simply shook my head. “I don’t know, but either way, she don’t want shit, and it didn’t matter if she did. I’m here with you.”

“Right, so she can cancel those plans of reconnecting for the next two days.”

“She can cancel those plans of reconnecting forever,” I assured her.

“Dat’s my bae,” she teased with a scrumptious kiss. From there, we shut out the rest of the world and enjoyed each other’s company like we were the only two in it. I couldn’t lie; I had the best time of my life just being with her. She had certainly won me over.





KEISHA HENRY

I sat up in the hospital bed as Kay walked back in my room. She looked annoyed, but I didn't give a fuck. Nobody could have been more aggravated than me. "It's been two days, and Dodge still hasn't called you back?"

"No. I called and been leaving messages since Sunday. I don't know what his problem is, but maybe he's really over you."

"He can't be over me now. I'm pregnant."

Kay looked at me with that stank ass face she gave when shit didn't sit well with her. I hated that fucking look. "I know, but is it really his?"

"Didn't you ask me this shit Sunday? Matter of fact, you asked the same shit yesterday too."

"That's because I wanna know. Shit, you know how you've played with Dodge in the past."

"Yeah, but this time, I'm really pregnant again."

"OK, but you do know he's gon' want a paternity test."

"Like I give a fuck," I told her. "We were still fucking around, whether he wanna admit that shit or not."

"Sis, you did say that he'd started using protection."

"Like that always works. Look, bitch, don't upset me no more than I already am."

Kay shrugged. "I can just text and tell him that you're pregnant. Maybe he'll call back then."

"No, I need to deliver this news in person. I don't want him getting a text or phone call. Me wanting him to call back or respond is because I'm

trying to set up something cute so I can make the announcement. You know, something sweet that he'll remember."

"I hope you ain't talking about with no whole lotta people. That didn't exactly play out well the last time at your baby shower."

"Hush, Kay. You really be working my damn nerves sometimes. If it ain't you, it's Daddy taking my cell phone and then walking in here with a damn psychologist."

"Daddy really is trying to help you. You're just too stubborn to see it. Give that lady a chance."

"Look, I didn't talk to her ass yesterday, and I'm not talking to her ass today either."

"Well, I think you better talk to her because I overheard your doctor say that he's recommending a psych ward to watch you for the next few days if you don't."

"That's a muthafuckin' lie!"

"You were the one in here talking about killing yo'self and the baby because Dodge wasn't responding. You got these people worried about your well-being more than you are."

I sighed, trying to stay calm. "Listen, if y'all give me my phone back, I'm sure Dodge will answer if he sees that it's me calling him personally."

"Take that up with Daddy."

"I'm a grown ass woman. I can get up and walk out this bitch if I wanted to."

"That may be true, but them people gon' be on yo' ass like white on rice. Try it and find out."

"Hush, Kay."

"No, I won't hush, Keisha. Look at you. Your life is all over the place. Mentally, you are truly fucked up. You need help. Just because you have your own beauty salon, making good money, don't cover the fact that you're broken. I always have your back but now, I wanna have my niece's or nephew's back. You've tried to get pregnant for years. You've even lied about it a few times to get our attention. Now that you are pregnant, you should be thankful and not acting a fool."

I rolled my eyes. "I was pregnant once, so it wasn't all a lie."

"You were, but I'm talking about all the dumb shit you did after the first real time."

“Well, why not talk about that one real time, so you call it, since you wanna talk about everything else.”

“I don’t like talking about that. I know it hurts you. I don’t like talking about mom’s death. I know that hurts you. But you gotta talk about those things with somebody.”

“I don’t need a shrink, Kay.”

“Everybody says that, but you’ve been broken, bitter, and acting a fool for a long time. You need help, and me and Daddy can’t give you that. You don’t fucking listen to us, anyway.”

“And don’t,” I sassed. “I just wanna leave this place. I’m tired of being here.”

“You gotta cooperate if you wanna leave here. You’re a strong person, one of the strongest women I know. Believe it or not, I look up to you. Strangely, that’s why I’m always caught up in your bullshit. I know it be bullshit, but all I want is to always have your back. Do you even get that?”

“Yeah.” I regrettably nodded, wanting to roll my eyes, but my sister was right. She was the more levelheaded one. I really looked up to her. She had a way of handling things a lot better than me. She had the strength and the heart I wished I had. I didn’t know how things had gotten so fucked up in my life, but it did, and I’d done everything I could to try and fix it. I just never knew how.

“Will you talk to the damn psychologist so you can get out of here? That’s the first step. Then you can reach out to Dodge yourself. Hell, go to his house or the mansion. Find his ass and tell him. He’s always wanted kids. I’m just hoping that it’s his.”

“Bye, Kay!” I said with an attitude. I was ’bout sick of her ass.

“A’ight. I’m leaving, but I’ll be back in a couple of hours. Hopefully by then, you will come to your senses with yo’ crazy ass.”

“You the crazy one, bitch.”

She grinned with a shake of the head. “Love you.”

“Yeah, love you too.” As I sat in bed, feeling hurt that Dodge had yet to respond to Kay, a part of me wanted to cry. I had messed up so many good things in my life, including him. I was truly lost, but I didn’t know how to relay that message to those that loved me. Acting this way meant not having to feel shit, but in reality, I felt everything.

“Knock, knock—”

“Hey, Daddy. What you doing back so soon? You saw Kay?”

“Yeah. We met down the hall just now. So are you planning on speaking with the therapist? She’s scheduled to come back in about an hour.”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“Please do. I just want you to get better. You know me and Kay got everything moved into my new place. It feels so good to be in a decent environment, and I wanna thank you just like I thanked her.”

“No need for all that.”

“Yeah, but you and Kay did put the down payment on it for me, and you not only paid for the movers, but I was really surprised this morning when I walked in and saw that you’d gotten me a new bedroom and living room set.”

“Well, I know I’ve been a real bitch lately, so I wanted to do something nice for you. I guess I’m thankful as well that you stay on my ass, even though I’m so rebellious about everything.”

“You are definitely that.” He grinned with a shake of the head.

“Daddy, can I have my phone back?”

“No, not until you agree to speak with the therapist.”

“I said I’ll talk to her. Now, give it here.”

“No. I’ll give it to you after you talk to her.”

“Wow.” I sighed with a slick roll of the eyes. “A’ight, whatever.”

“You got an attitude?”

“Nawl,” I responded, but I definitely had an attitude.

“Aren’t you glad you’re pregnant? You’ve been wanting this baby since —”

“Yeah, I’m glad,” I said, cutting him off. “And I didn’t mean the shit I was saying yesterday about harming it. I just wanted to get somebody’s attention.”

Daddy frowned. “Well, attention like that will land yo’ ass in some hot water. You could be sitting in the damn crazy house right now if it wasn’t for the therapist wanting to try her hand at talking to you again.”

“Yeah, I heard,” I uttered. “Anyway, if it makes y’all happy, I’ll talk to the lady.”

“Good,” he said, walking over and kissing me on the forehead. “I have a few more errands to run today, but I’ll be back later tonight.”

“No, handle your business. Hopefully, they’ll discharge me in the morning, and you can just come back then.”

“You sure?”

“Yep.” I nodded.

“OK, see you in the morning.”

“OK, Daddy.”

“You know, I also spoke with that therapist too. I’d like a few sessions myself. I know I need ’em to come to terms with a few things myself.”

I looked up at him with sincere eyes. In all honesty, that made me feel good hearing him say that. The only thing I could do was smile at him with an approving nod. He knew that was my way of saying that I was proud of him.

“Love you, Keisha.”

“I know,” I responded, feeling hopeful inside as he headed out of the room. Without my dad, I didn’t know where I’d be. It was true; we’d had our ups and downs. Yeah, we’d fended for ourselves during some difficult times, but he had his reasons as to why he couldn’t fully be there for us. I couldn’t fault him for the rest of my life for any of that. He had been doing everything he could in the past couple of years to make that up to us. So I got it. I guess I had to be a lot more understanding when it came to other people’s problems instead of just focusing on my own.



“Hi, Keisha. How are you today?” Dr. Harris asked.

“Better,” I responded while sitting up in the bed, fixing the neck of this ugly ass nightgown they had me in.

“Are you ready to talk to me now?”

“I guess.”

“OK, great. After speaking with your father and your sister, I got a little information that I believe I can start with. Off top, this is only a session to get you to open up and express your feelings and to hopefully clear the air about things that have been unsettling in your life. I do hope that after we speak today, you’ll decide to make a few appointments.”

“I’m not crazy,” I uttered.

“I don’t think you’re crazy,” she said back. “I think you need some clarity and someone that you can confide in that will help you deal with certain aspects of your life.”

“And that person is you?”

“Hopefully,” she responded with a friendly smile.

“So let’s begin. I’m just ready to get out of here.”

“I’m sure.” She nodded as she glanced down at a notepad that was in her hand. It looked like she’d had some things already written on it, like an agenda or a set of questions for me. Either way, I was just ready to get this shit over with too.

“How old are you, Keisha?”

“Twenty-five.”

She nodded. “You’re the oldest, right?”

“Yes. It’s just me and my sister.”

“OK. How was it growing up with it being just you and her?”

“It was fine. Me and my sister get along. Things didn’t start to crumble until my mom died.”

“What happened to your mom?”

I grinned. “I know my father has told you all about this. Why you gotta come in here asking me questions like you don’t already know?”

“Because I don’t. Your father only told me that you’re struggling with life and that you’ve been a bully to a lot of people. He told me that he felt it wise for you to see me in hopes of it making you a better person. He also believes that your sister could do so much better in her life if you weren’t such a negative influence on her with your bad attitude. He feels that if you don’t get it together now, it could ruin you, and you’ll forever have regrets that he’s trying to prevent you from having.”

I frowned with the stank face. “Oh, he said all that?”

“In a nutshell,” she responded.

“Mm-hm.”

“So if you’re really willing to talk to me, do you mind telling me about your mother? We can start with what she meant to you. What kind of woman was she to you, your sister, and your father?” she politely asked.

I sat silently for a minute. No one had ever asked me that question. No one ever asked that I remember her in that way. No one wanted to even talk about her like that, so I guess they didn’t expect me to either, and I didn’t. It was like no one cared once she was gone. So for her to be asking me this now was foreign, and I honestly didn’t know what to respond at first.

“Are you OK?” Dr. Harris asked.

“Yes,” I responded, but an unexpected amount of tears crept in the corner of my eyes.

“Take in a deep breath and then slowly release it,” Dr. Harris softly instructed. “Close your eyes and lay back. I want you to be comfortable and in calm spirits. Just think about your mom, her face, her smile, her kind words, her hugs, her love and tell me what you remember most about her.”

As I lay back, I could vividly see my mom appear in my thoughts. She was such a beautiful woman to me. The prettiest woman walking this earth. “I... uh...”

“Take your time.”

“I, um, can remember her laugh. She had the silliest laugh to me. I’ve been told that I laugh just like her, even though I rarely allow that side of me to show,” I said with a bit of sadness in my tone. “I can remember how she’d let us stay up on a school night if Kay and I wanted to watch a movie with her. Daddy was always the sterner one, but she always got her way in the end. She was sweet, the sweetest person I ever met and knew. She loved us all unconditionally and even loved me through my rebellion at such an early age. The only thing I wanted was for us to leave the projects and move in a fancier place. I was tired of the girls at my school thinking I wasn’t good enough to be their friend because of where we stayed, so I became mischievous, being fast and doing ungodly things.”

“Go on.”

“All she wanted was for me to be a good person and grow up to be the respectable and loving woman that she always imagined I’d be.”

“I’m sure she still sees the best in you.”

“I doubt it.” I shrugged. “My mom was my everything, and once she left here, there became a void in my heart that can and will never be repaired. What happened to her was unfortunate and untimely. We wasn’t ready, especially me.”

“Can you remember the day it happened? What was going through your mind?”

“Yes, I remember like it was two minutes ago. Hell, two seconds ago.” I paused to wipe my tears.

“Take your time.”

“We were so excited; the whole family was. She and I had just left to go pick up some ice cream and cake to celebrate us moving into a fancier neighborhood. Man was I happy. Things had definitely started looking up for us. Mom had gotten a new job, paying really good money. Daddy’s social security benefits had just kicked in, and we were on our way to the



top. On the way back from the grocery store, she talked with me about being this good person and always looking out for my sister and Daddy. She said that even though she's still here, they still needed the love and attention required to maintain. Since I was her mini me, then that's where I'd step up. She said to clean the house without being asked and to wash clothes and cook sometimes because Daddy's back is bad, and she was going to be working crazy hours on her new job. So she needed me to step up and be the second in charge of home when it came to a womanly duty. I never knew that conversation would be the last. As we drove into our neighborhood, gunshots rang out. From what I'd heard later, it was a rival gang fight that never got resolved. Nevertheless, when bullets stopped and the noise and chaos ceased, I looked over to see that my mom had been shot, and I believe she instantly died. Her eyes were still staring at me, strangely with a smile on her face. I honestly never saw a bullet wound; I never saw any blood. I just knew she was gone. My dad rushed out the apartment, snatched me out of the car. I feel like he already knew that we'd lost mom. Once he'd carried me in the apartment, he went back outside. I just sat in the crib, hugging my sister as we cried. I could remember just saying, 'she's gone, Kay, she's gone.'"

"I'm so sorry to hear this. I know that must've been tough for you."

"Very."

"But you're strong and resilient. Look at you. You're here. You're a beautiful young woman with a whole lot of life ahead of you. You've overcome all the horrific obstacles that were thrown your way. You may have lost your mom, but you didn't lose yourself. It may have felt like it, and sometimes I'm sure it probably still does. But you have to focus on the good in your life. Your mom asked that you take care of your dad and your sister. I'm sure she's looking down to make sure that you're still watching out for them. I don't believe she meant that as in finances but as in always making sure that they are in good spirits and feel loved."

I listened, and for the first time in my life, I actually felt heard. More importantly, I was taking in everything that was also being said. I cried for the first time in my life with someone that I felt was genuine in her feelings and concerned about me. This was just the start of a breakthrough that I really, really needed.

"It's always tough to lose someone that we love and hold so dear to our hearts. It's an unexplainable pain that never fully goes away but over time,

it gets easier. You have to start putting your best foot forward and doing things that make you happy. What do you do for a living?”

I wiped my tears, long enough to respond. “I have a beauty salon. I do hair. I’m the main stylist, and my sister does braids. She also braids down my clients’ hair before I do any sew-in or wig installs. We work as a team.”

Dr. Harris smiled. “That’s good, and whether you know this or not, you’re actually making sure that your sister is good.”

“I know,” I softly said. “I believe she knows it too. I want the best for her. I just don’t always show it when I get her caught up in the crazy mess I have going on in my life.”

“But that can change. It’s never too late for that to change. It’s OK to work on yourself, and when she notices the change, change will also come for her too.”

“Makes sense.”

“Has anything new been happening in your life that you can be proud of? Do you have a special someone around?”

“Well, I just found out I’m pregnant.”

“Wow, like as of since you’ve been here?”

“Yes,” I said with a sense of wanting to smile.

“Have you shared the news with your family and or the baby’s father?”

“I have shared the news with my daddy and Kay, but I have not had a chance to tell the father. I want to, but we’re not exactly in a good place.”

“But you and him not being in a good place doesn’t mean that you can’t be in a good space for your baby.”

“You’re right.”

“Is this your first, or do you have other kids?”

“This will be my first, although I’ve given birth before.”

“What happened?”

“I had a stillborn back when I was a junior in high school. I carried the baby full term, and when she was born, she wasn’t breathing. It was a trying time in my life. I don’t believe I’ve ever bounced back from that, either. Me and Dodge, the father, were broken. Since then, he has always wanted kids, but I could never have any more. Plus, Daddy said that I needed to focus on school first, not babies. Not that I even listen to him—I mean, I know I should, but I really never have to be honest. Anyway, it just never happened again.”

“So is this Dodge person the father of this baby?”

I paused. Maybe I could be completely honest with her. I mean, it wasn't like she could tell anybody. At least if she did, I could sue her ass. "Well... uh... Truth is, I don't know. I think it is, but we used protection anytime we had sex, and that's been going on for at least eight months or so."

"I see. So why was that?"

"He didn't trust me."

Dr. Harris's eyes widened. "Why is that?"

"Because I wasn't exactly honest with him about a lot of things."

"Well, were you sleeping with other men?"

I cautiously paused for a minute. "Maybe."

"Was he dealing with other women?"

"Absolutely."

"OK, so when speaking of the baby, do you feel it could be somebody else's?"

"It's a possibility, but I don't wanna speak that into existence. It's Dodge's baby, and I'm sticking with that."

"OK, so I don't want to rain on your parade. But I want you to keep things fully in perspective. I don't want you to get your hopes up and then have to come to terms if he's not the father. I need you to be real with yourself. That way, you can give your baby the best when it comes to you staying healthy in mind and body."

"It's his."

"Keisha—"

"It's his."

"Okaaay... Well, I would love to talk with you more outside of this environment. Would you be open to that?"

I shrugged my shoulders. Could this lady really help me? I looked over at her. She was beautiful with a genuine smile that lit up a room when she graced it. For some reason, I looked up to her, and I didn't even know this lady. It was just the way she carried herself I guess. "Uh... well, I guess we can do that."

"Great." She smiled. "I have all of your information, so I'll call you and set up our next appointment. You'll be coming to my office the next time."

"Sounds good. So does this mean I can leave?"

"I'll speak with your doctor, and I'm sure they'll get your discharge papers ready."

“Good. I’m so freaking ready to get outta here.”

“It’s a must that we stay in touch and that you come in for your appointments.”

“Gotcha, Doc. Now all I wanna do is get my cell phone back, check my social media accounts because a sister been MIA, and get some much-needed rest at my own house.”

“Definitely take care of yourself and your baby. Don’t let distractions take you out of character and always be real with the person that’s looking back at you in the mirror. I’ll have some assignments that are positive and helpful in keeping you on the right track when we revisit. Sounds good?”

“Perfect.” I said, with a sincere smile. For some reason, I couldn’t wait for our next visit. Hopefully, I’d have some good news about Dodge and me. But like I said, hopefully...



## DODGE GAMBLE

I walked in my house, feeling pretty good from such an amazing getaway with Kiyomi and the crew. We'd had a blast and brought back countless memories. I wasn't gon' lie; I needed that break, and from the looks of things, Kiyomi did too.

While pouring my things out of the duffel bag onto the bed, my only thoughts were that this was the worst part of traveling—unpacking. I glanced over on my dresser at a picture of D just sitting there. He was the coolest nigga I knew. Always had his shit together and always made sure I did too. I loved him but was definitely conflicted as to not knowing what the hell was going. As I flopped back on the back trying to gather my thoughts, my phone rang.

“Wassup?”

“You gettin' settled?” Meech asked.

“Yeah, just really gettin' here though. Had dropped Sha off at Granny's and sat over there talking to her for a lil' while.”

“You know she ain't lettin' you leave without talking about something.”

“About anything,” I joked. “But she mainly was talking 'bout the move. She's so excited.”

“I know she is. I'm happy you finally were able to make that happen. I also want you to know that I'm proud of you. You are definitely someone we all look up to. I know I do my own thang, and running the streets, doing all that other sideways shit, ain't something I have to do. I guess it's just the thug in me, bruh.”

I laughed. “You think?”

“Hush, man. I’m trying to have a vulnerable moment here.”

“Oh, well, carry on.” I teased with a shake of the head.

“For real, bruh, you are doing what a lot of niggas we grew up with wish they could be doing. You handled your business just enough to get out the streets. You have no reason of going back. You invested your money and are making moves out here in the city. That’s something you should pat yourself on the back for.”

“I appreciate that, bruh.”

“Yeah, D and your mom would be proud.”

“Speaking of D...”

“Yeah, wassup with him? I haven’t been able to shake the fact that not only is he alive, but that he called you. That had to be the strangest call of them all, though. Definitely right before that damn sit-down with Dontae.”

“I know, right? I mean, the timing wasn’t coincidental. That’s for sure. Makes me wonder if D knew what was actually going on here.”

“I’d say he did and do. The thing that gets me is that he wants to link with you on New Year’s Day and not a moment before.”

“Right, and it’s only September. Like what the fuck!”

“So basically, until then, we have to ride this shit out with Dontae’s old Peeping Tom ass?”

“Basically,” I responded. “I just wish this talk could’ve been sooner. Or that he would’ve called after my sit-down with Dontae. Then I could’ve asked him what was going on. From what I can gather though is that D took Dontae’s diamonds and then finally sold some of ’em.”

“Dontae said that the diamonds showed up in Africa, right?”

“Yeah, so either D is there, or he slid through to handle business and dipped.”

“The latter part sounds like something D would do.”

“I agree, but then, what happened that night? So D is alive, but Polo is dead? Or is Polo just missing too? If that’s the case, then who shot who and why?” I pondered.

“Look, none of this shit is making sense to me. All I know is that D has the answers, but we won’t know shit until you talk to him.”

“I agree. I also don’t care to discuss this shit on the phone no more. Not that it’s bugged or nothing, but you know how I move. I never know what Dontae is up to.”

“I agree.”

“That’s why I have my house on full surveillance and can watch my cameras even when I’m not around. I don’t want no funny shit going on and I not know about it.”

“I know that’s right,” Meech agreed and then changed the subject, just like I was hoping he would. “You had fun in Miami?”

“Did I? That’s the most fun I’ve had in a long time.”

“Same here,” Meech concurred. “Even Kinsley was on her best behavior. She didn’t catch not one attitude the whole time we were there. I’m feeling like I need to take her off the grid more often.”

I laughed. “I think we all just needed that time away. No telling what she has on her mind. I mean, just because you’ve been talking to her for a few months don’t mean you know her.”

“True.”

“Me and Kiyomi had a great time together.”

“Did you hit that?” He grinned.

“What you think?”

“Say less.” Meech chuckled. “I heard her ass in that room. I just thought you was gon’ lie about it.”

I laughed. “Man, stop it.”

“I’m just sayin’. Her and Kinsley gotta be cousins because I be having to cover her mouth sometimes. Dem women don’t mind lettin’ a nigga know when something feels good.”

I grinned. “You stupid.”

“Yeah, but back to Kinsley. I’m gon’ sit down and talk with her. I just wanna know what she got going on. We were so caught up in the physical attraction of it all, not to mention the bomb ass sex, that I don’t believe I’ve truly gotten to know her. Before I get settled down, I think that’s of importance.”

“Damn, I feel you. I’ve been thinking the same thing with Kiyomi. I just wanna know what she has going on or had going on. I think it’s things that maybe we’ll never know, but for the shit I easily can find out by just asking her, I’d rather know.”

“I feel you, and I’m willing to open up myself if that’s what Kinsley wants.”

“I think I’ve done more opening up to Kiyomi than she has with me, but I believe that’ll change soon. We have a lil’ date at Pappadeaux later. That’s



her favorite restaurant. I told her to come through early. It's a few things I wanna ask her, but I don't wanna ruin the date."

"Damn, it's that bad?"

"Nah, it shouldn't be. I just want her to indulge a little. Like tell me more of what she's got going on."

"Oh, OK, well, she should be fine with that."

"Yeah, should be," I said just as my doorbell started ringing.

"Who is that ringing the damn doorbell off the hook?"

I instantly looked at my surveillance camera. "Ah damn. It's Keisha's ass."

"You right, 'ah damn.'" Meech grinned. "Did she call to let you know she was coming?"

"Hell nawl. I haven't even seen this woman in weeks, but I believe I know why she's here. Let me handle this shit, and I'll call you back."

"A'ight, just text *help* if you need me to call the police to come over there."

"You got jokes, nigga." I grinned.

"I'm just sayin'." Meech laughed and ended the call.

I headed for the door, already shaking my head. "Who is it?"

"I know you see it's me," Keisha blurted out.

I didn't even wanna go back and forth with this crazy girl, so I opened the door. "Wassup?"

"Let me in," she demanded as I moved to the side to let her in. We might as well get this shit over with and be done with it.

"Wassup, Keisha? Why you come over here unannounced?"

"Because I figured you'd be with the bullshit when I said I needed to see you."

"OK."

"Especially since I went on IG and seen yo' lil' bitch tagging you in all those lovey-dovey pictures that y'all were taking in Miami."

"OK."

"So that's why you couldn't call my sister back?"

"Nah. I just didn't."

"So you didn't care that I was laying up in the hospital?"

"You're not my concern anymore, Keisha. I don't know when you're gonna get that."

"Oh, but I am your concern."

I grinned, already knowing where this was going. “How you figure?”

“I’m pregnant.”

I continued to laugh. “Oh, yeah.”

“The shit ain’t funny. Ask Kay and Daddy.”

“I believe you.”

“So why you laughing?”

“Because we both know that baby ain’t mine.”

“Dodge, just because we used condoms don’t mean this is not your baby.”

“You’re delusional, Keisha. I know you were fucking other niggas.”

“I used rubbers with them too.”

I scowled. “Them? How many was it?” I asked with a side-eye.

“Don’t play with me, Dodge. You know what I mean.”

“Nah, I really don’t. So you say you’re pregnant? Congratulations. I really hope this one works out for you, but that baby ain’t mine.”

“What do I have to do to prove it?”

“You don’t have to do nothing. I’m gonna have a paternity test the minute I can. That way, I won’t have any issues out of you.”

“You stand here like we never had history together. Like I never meant nothing to you. You basically have dissed me for another bitch—”

“No, it was over between us before I even met her.”

“So after all this time and all these years, it’s just over like that?”

“Yeah.”

“You got some muthafuckin’ nerve. You like acting like I’m the bad guy, but you’re no saint yourself. How you think I lost my first baby? I was stressing out over you fucking around on me so bad ’til I was a nervous wreck the whole pregnancy. I caught you—”

“You never caught me. I was never that careless. You just heard shit. Plus, we were young. You and me. We were still in high school. No, that was no excuse for me to be fucking around on you, but after you lost the baby, I straightened up. I wanted to be a good guy for you. But something changed in you. It seemed the tables turned.”

“Ya think, nigga! I’d just lost my baby. My heart was broken. Did you ever even sit down so we could talk about my feelings? No! It’s like you picked up the pieces and moved on. Yes, you cried and I know it hurt you, but you didn’t let it stop you.”

“I stopped fucking around though. I knew how that made you feel because I felt the same way. So I chilled out. I wanted and tried to make things right. But you got started. What was I supposed to do? Wait ’til you wanted to act right?”

“No, but you could’ve been more sympathetic to the girl that had just lost your baby.”

“I don’t wanna do this with you. I don’t even wanna talk about the baby no more. I struggled with that loss just as you did. I just wanna move on.”

“That’s your problem. You always just wanna move on. Just like you did back in the day when you fucked around on me, and just like you’ve done with this lil’ young girl that just popped up out of nowhere.”

“Keisha, it’s time for you to go. You’ve definitely worn out your welcome. Plus, if you’re pregnant—”

“If? Oh, it’s like that?”

“Damn right it’s like that. You lied for a whole six months like you were pregnant, and it wasn’t nothing in that damn stomach of yours but fucking ice cream, Applebee’s, and Ruth’s Chris.”

“Shut the hell up!”

“No, you shut the hell up and take yo’ ass home.”

She grabbed her stomach like she was hurting a little, but then straightened up like nothing had happened.

“You a’ight?”

“Don’t worry ’bout me,” she sassed. “Give me my Prada bag while I’m here, and I’ll be out yo’ hair.”

“A’ight.” I shrugged and headed in the bedroom to get her shit. I just wanted Keisha gone. She was like a bad fucking cavity that kept giving me toothaches and headaches every chance she showed up. As I was in the back looking for her Prada bag, I could’ve sworn I heard her talking to somebody. Damn, I wasn’t back here a good five minutes. I spotted the Prada bag and quickly exited my bedroom. By the time I hit the corner of my living room, there she was standing there face-to-face with Kiyomi.

*Oh my G—*

“If this is a bad time, I can leave,” Kiyomi said.

“I told her ass she could stay. I was just leaving.”

“Yeah, it’s best if Keisha leave. You’re fine,” I said, giving Keisha her Prada bag.

“I see you’ve been to Miami with this nigga.”

“How you seen that?” Kiyomi asked. I simply shook my head.

“I saw the lil’ cute tags on social media,” she responded. “Looks like the same place he’s taken me a few times.”

“Keisha, stop lyin’,” I intervened.

“So we haven’t been to Miami before?”

“Yeah, but—”

“But that was before my time, so I could give two fucks,” Kiyomi shot her way. “Weren’t you leaving?”

“Yep,” Keisha told her, then looked back at me. “Don’t forget to tell her that I’m carrying yo’ child. That’s the only reason why I haven’t mopped the floor with her ass. I should press charges for having to fight her ass at the club.”

“Bitch, do it.” Kiyomi glared. “I’ll beat yo’ ass all over this house! Have this nigga feeling sorry for your stupid ass.” I shook my head, knowing it was only a matter of time if Keisha didn’t leave.

“Keisha—” I called out with a bit of an attitude in my tone.

“I’m leaving,” she said, rolling her eyes at me. “I don’t know how this lil’ thang y’all got gon’ work because I don’t ever want this bitch around our baby.”

“Bitch, I don’t wanna be around that lil’ baldhead, ugly ass baby.”

Keisha laughed. “And you think I got a bad attitude. This bitch go in on babies. You know she got problems.”

“Keisha, if you don’t leave my house—”

“I’m leaving, nigga.”

Kiyomi frowned as she looked from Keisha and then back at me. Keisha seemed satisfied, so she took that as a good note to leave on. Once she was out the door, the shit hit the fan.

“What she mean by she’s carrying your child?”

“She’s lyin’.”

“So she’s not pregnant?”

“Yeah, she is pregnant.”

“Oh, so you’re for sure this time?”

“Well, the doctor confirmed it.”

“What doctor, and how long have you known?”

I paused for a minute. Maybe I’d said too much too soon. “Well, her dad called me Sunday while we were in Miami. He was telling me that she’d gotten admitted in the hospital due to having panic attacks or something.

Then a doctor came up talking to him while I was on the phone and told him that she was pregnant.”

“Soooo you’ve known this since Sunday?”

“Yeah, but it was no reason to say anything about it. Keisha ain’t pregnant by me. We’d been using condoms for a while.”

“Yeah, but condoms aren’t one hundred percent safe.”

“Trust me, she was fucking other niggas too.”

Kiyomi stood there by the door, still hadn’t fully made her way in the house. “What if that is your baby?”

“It’s not.”

“Well, if it is, I’m not sticking around. Matter of fact, I may as well leave now because I be damned if I get all the way in to find out that you have a baby on the way by that dumbass broad. Ain’t no way in hell I’d help you raise that baby.”

I frowned. “So that’s how you feel?”

“Damn right that’s how I feel. Your dumb ass gon’ be stuck like chuck if she is pregnant by you. Just imagine eighteen more years of her bullshit times one thousand. I pity the fool.”

I grinned a little, trying not to show my anger, but Kiyomi was really starting to push my buttons.

“You realize you just called me dumb, right?”

She stood watching me with a mad stare. “Dodge, I’m just saying this shit is for the birds. I’m not with any of it. I think we should just let it go now because Keisha gon’ make me kick her ass, baby and all.”

I frowned again. “You’re starting to sound like you’re a lil’ cray too. Why are you seeing a psychologist again?”

“I never said.” She popped.

“Well, I think I wanna know.”

“Oh, so now you wanna go there, huh?”

“Yeah, take me there because you’re trippin’ right now, and I don’t like it.”

“Oh, I’m trippin’? I’ll knock all this shit over,” she said, looking at the décor on the shelf that Granny and Sha had bought me as a housewarming gift. “Then you can say I’m trippin’.”

“Nah, you don’t wanna do that,” I told her with a serious stare. “But why are you seeing a psychologist? Did it start about a nigga? Matter fact, was it over that nigga that showed up at your house Friday night?” I could

tell by her body language that I'd hit the nail on the head. "So am I right? What did you do?"

She rolled her eyes. "I think that's irrelevant."

"I don't. It's a part of your past, yes, but it's really not that irrelevant, especially now."

"If you must know, he cheated on me with a bitch he broadcast on Facebook Live, so I rode out to his house while he and his family were out of town and broke up some shit."

I nodded. "Oh, you broke up some shit, huh? Some shit like what?"

Kiyomi grinned. "Is that important?"

"Not really, but I wanna see what kind of headspace you were in."

"Nah, I think you're trying to turn this around on me because you got that bitch pregnant."

"Really, I'm not, and once again, she's not pregnant by me."

"Yeah, whatever, Dodge."

"So you're gonna tell me or not?"

"Or fucking not!" she sassed.

"Well, since you don't wanna tell me that, did you fuck him Friday night?"

"Oh wow! Are you being serious right now?"

"Very serious. Did you?"

"No, I didn't fuck him."

"Did you kiss him or anything like that?" The way she looked off said a lot, but I'd let her have that. "Care to come clean about anything?"

"Nigga, have you been fucking around with another bitch or bitches!"

"This ain't about me. It's about you."

"This ain't about me either, so don't fucking do that. You know what? Fuck this, and fuck whatever the hell we got going on. I'm over this shit before it even gets started. Fuck whoever you want. I don't give a damn. You and Keisha deserve each other!" she snapped, and after saying that, she barged out the front door, got in her car, and peeled out of my driveway.

I stood there thinking that this shit had gone way too far. It was never supposed to be like this. As always, Keisha had a way of stirring the fucking pot, and Kiyomi couldn't control her anger long enough to reason with a nigga. Between dealing with their crazy ass attitudes, I would have gray hairs by morning. I didn't know what to do, but I wasn't about to run behind Kiyomi's ass. Maybe it was best for us to call whatever the fuck this

was quits. We hadn't gotten in too deep, and from the looks of things, I was glad we hadn't. This shit had me feeling some kind of way, and I hated it. I just wanted to knock some shit over. "FUUUUCK!"





KINSLEY SIMMONS

“So the bitch was there when you got there?”

“Yes, already standing her ass at the door by the time I walked up to it. She was the one that opened it for me. I really thought I was gonna have to walk dem dogs on that bitch, but she stayed in her lane for the most part.”

“I’m surprised. That bitch got a smart-ass mouth.”

“Definitely slick as fuck, and she did say some things that I made her pipe down on, but it’s all good. She lucky she’s pregnant—”

I spit my fucking yak out the minute I heard that shit. “She’s what!”

Kiyomi busted out laughing. “Bitch, you wet my damn lashes!” she exclaimed while wiping her face.

“I’m sorry, but she’s what!”

“Yeah, you heard me. The bitch said she’s pregnant.”

I frowned. “Is it his?”

“He said it’s not, but I don’t fucking know.”

“Did he say it wasn’t his in front of her?”

“I can’t remember, but he did tell her she was lyin’ about going on a similar Miami trip as we did numerous times.

“I know she didn’t go there.”

“She definitely went there. That crazy bitch also said that she would’ve mopped the floor with my ass if she wasn’t pregnant. I really wanted to spit in that hoe’s face, but I ain’t never stooped that low in my life and don’t plan on it. However, she gon’ make me kick that damn baby out that stomach of hers.”

I laughed with a shake of the head. My cousin was just as crazy as she wanted to be. “You can’t be talking like that, Yomi. Leave the damn baby out of this.”

“You right.” She grinned. “But that hoe lucky.”

“No, you lucky she didn’t take a warrant out on you for fighting her at the club. You and Sha’s ass would’ve gone to jail.”

“That’s what the wack ass bitch said, too. But I don’t believe she knew then. Apparently, she’d gone to the hospital for panic attacks or whatever Dodge had said. Well, that’s when they found out she was pregnant I believe.”

“Ooooooh.” I nodded. “Sus, that bitch messy as hell though.”

“Hell, I know that. She started some shit and then hauled ass. Now, me and Dodge are at odds, and I’m hating this shit.”

“So why you mad at him if he’s saying the baby ain’t his?”

“Sus, I don’t know. I was so in my muthafuckin’ feelings just hearing that shit. What got me is this nigga done fucked the life outta me and expected me not to act out ’bout it. If this bitch wasn’t so pressed and wanting to stir the pot, I would’ve been good. But to tell me that she was pregnant by the man that I’d planned on making my own had me feeling a way. On top of that, he knew about it and didn’t even tell me. Like what kind of shit was that? I was pissed and hurt at the same fucking time. Then to say it’s not his... Nigga, how the fuck you know? He was definitely hittin’ it. I didn’t give a fuck about him wearing a condom. Hell, that dumb bitch could’ve compromised all that shit on purpose. He still don’t get that part.”

I shrugged, thinking that she had a point. “True.”

“Then this nigga gon’ ask me why I’m seeing a psych?”

“Wheet! How he know that?”

“Because I slipped when we were outta town and mentioned it, but I didn’t elaborate on it. Apparently, that stuck with him, so since this shit popped off with Keisha, he wants to know why, thinking I’m crazy or something because I started snapping. I believe the nigga called me cray, cray.”

“I know you fuckin’ lyin’.”

“Shit, I wish I was. So I tell him why I’m seeing Dr. Harris, and he wanted to dig deeper, but why the fuck do you wanna know more? I wasn’t going there with him. Hell, had we just sat down and had a civilized

conversation about it, I would've told him. But don't come at me like I'm crazy and then I have to explain that incident—”

“Because then he gon' really think you're crazy.”

“Exactly!” I nodded with a roll of the eyes. “Yes, I probably said some shit to that bitch to make him look at me sideways, but he's lucky all I did was talk and not punch her ass smack in the face. That's what I really wanted to do.”

“I know you did.” I laughed.

“Then he asked if I fucked Loyal Friday night.”

My eyes widened. “No he didn't.”

“Yes he did,” she assured me.

“Wow, that shit really had gone left. What did you say?”

“I said, no, but that wasn't good enough. He asked if anything other than him fucking me happened.”

“Damn.”

“Right, but I didn't even get into any of that. There was no way I was going to tell him that Loyal had eaten my pussy like it was his favorite peanut butter and jelly sandwich.”

I laughed. “You stupid, but you're smart. Never tell a nigga everything. They'll hold it over your head forever.”

“I've listened over the years, even though it may not have seemed like it. At first, I wanted to say something, but shit, not no more.”

“And don't,” I told her. “So what's up with you and Dodge now?”

“We're at odds. When I left, we'd basically called this whole thing off. Like I believe it's over.”

“Nooooo, not after that nice ass birthday he planned for you.”

“I know, right? I feel so hurt over this shit, but you know me. I can't let it get to me like that, or I'll go right back over there and turn his whole muthafuckin' house upside down. I promise ya!”

“No, please don't do that,” I quickly said. “Dodge ain't Disloyal. You ain't gotta do that to him. He's a genuine guy, and I love him for you. I see the way you light up around him. So regardless of whatever this lil' split is, I don't believe it'll last.”

“I don't know. I don't even wanna think about it,” she said, but quickly changed the subject to something I didn't wanna hear. “You talk to Auntie since we been back?”

“We just got back today, and no. I haven’t talked to or seen her since she came over here.”

“Do you plan on talking to her? I think she really needs you right now.”

I hissed with a shake of the head. “She don’t need me. Her loyalty ain’t with me.”

“OK, I can see how this makes you feel. So I’ll move on, but I think y’all both need counseling. Maybe together,” she added.

“I don’t need shit, Yomi,” I said, standing up.

“Where you going?”

“Well, Meech wanted to sit down and talk to me. I don’t know about what, because we’ve been in a good space. So I guess I’ll ride over here and see what he got going on. I know one thing; after this lil’ sweet vacation, he better not hit me with no shit about a bitch being pregnant. I don’t think I could handle it as well as you did.”

“Sus better be glad I did,” Kiyomi joked.

I laughed. “Anyway, I’ll be back because I’m not staying over there tonight. I just wanna sleep in my own bed.”

“Shit, I feel you. Guess I’ll sit here and browse the internet because when I get a job, I’m buying all this wholesale shit and starting my own business. Fuck these niggas and a bitch nine to five,” she teased.

I simply smiled, but I knew she was hurt about Dodge. She just didn’t want to show it. I would never stop rooting for them. That was for sure. I just hope they’d realize they’re good for each other before it was too late and really over.



I walked in the mansion, seemingly all bright eyed and bushy ponytail with a smile on my face. I didn’t know what this lil’ quick link with Meech was about, but I was definitely ready to speak on it and get it over with. Hopefully, it didn’t have nothing to do with his ex, or I was going to be the one knocking all this shit over.

“Wassup, babe?”

“Hey, handsome. What’s going on?”

“Nothing much. Just chillin’ while everybody’s gone.”

“So you called me over for sex, huh?” I teased. “If that’s what you wanted, that’s all you had to say.”

He grinned. “Oh, I’m getting some of that anyway. It wouldn’t matter if everybody was here or not.”

“Haven’t you had enough? I mean, we fucked every three hours while we were in Miami.”

Meech nodded with a light chuckle. “That was yo’ horny ass though.”

“I don’t recall you turning it down either.”

“Why would I? Have you seen yourself in the mirror lately? That ass is getting fatter and fatter,” he said, taking my hand and turning me just enough to slap me on my behind.

“You trippin’.” I laughed, placing a warm kiss on his lips. “So should I have a drink before we get started?”

“I just fixed you one,” he said, walking over to the island bar and handing me the mixed drink that he’d prepared for me.

“What is it?”

“Casamigos with a splash of Sprite topped with a lemon.”

“You learn my likes quickly, I see.”

“I’m supposed to.” He smirked, pulling me by the hand into the large family room. “Let’s sit and talk.”

“Let’s.” I smiled but had to get a lil’ clarity first. “This ain’t about that crazy ass ex of yours, is it? You ain’t got no damn baby on the way, do you?”

He chuckled. “Nah, I don’t.”

“I was ’bout to say.”

“Nah. This talk ain’t about me, but we can touch on some things if it’s something you wanna know. I mean, I’m pretty much an open book. However, I’m sure it’s still some things that you don’t know that maybe you’re curious ’bout. Even though we’ve been kicking it for a while, we don’t really get into a lot of personal stuff. We just joke around, eat good, drink good, and talk shit. We do know certain things but not a lot.”

“You mean like personal, personal things?”

“Yeah, like those things.” He nodded.

“Um... well, let’s see. I was practically raised by my aunt, Yomi’s mama. She’s like my mama, too. Of course, you know I still live with them, even though I would love to move out and get my own place. I have been working at Club Truth since I was twenty-one. I’ve never been in a serious

relationship, because I don't take men seriously. I love the color blue with a splash of pink. My ass is all real, no surgeries here."

He grinned. "Gotta be jelly cuz jam don't shake like that."

I laughed but continued, "I love American Deli shrimp-fried rice, but then again, you know that."

"I do."

"I sleep late when I'm not working."

"I know."

"My favorite position is doggy style."

He nodded with an approving smile.

"You like that, don't you?"

"Love it." He grinned.

"I think that's about it. I really don't have nothing else to share."

"But I think you do," he said as I frowned while gazing at him.

"No, I don't."

"Come on, babe. You can talk to me. It's more there. You've been getting snappy as fuck lately. You'll go from zero to a hundred so fast I can't keep up. I've been tryna be as transparent as possible when it comes to Thomasina and my life, yet you still find ways to blame me and get upset about the craziest shit."

"No, don't do that. I don't like being spoken to in this way. Just say what you gotta say."

"I am."

"No, you're not. I've told you things about me, things that I don't mind revealing—"

"And what about the things you do mind—"

"What about 'em?" I responded with a bit of frustration in my tone. I knew damn well he didn't call me over here to get all deep and personal about my business. I'd never opened up to nobody outside of Yomi and Auntie. Wasn't no way he would ever get that side.

"Babe, I'm not tryna get you to talk about things that you don't wanna talk about—"

"Well, don't, because I'm not."

"But that's the thing. Either we talk about some of that stuff so I can know why you get bothered the way you do, or I can't keep kickin' it."

"So you're saying it's over?" I asked, giving his ass a side-eye. He had to be kidding me right now.

“I didn’t say that, but we can’t keep going like this. It’s like you have mood swings or something. Not even necessarily mood swings, but you just get annoyed fast as hell. Any lil’ thing can set you off. On top of that, I’ve noticed that the closer I try to get to you, the further you push me away. Like now for instance.”

“I’m not pushing you away. I said what I had to say.”

“Okay then, tell me about your mom. Where is she?”

I stood up, setting my drink down on the end table. “I think it’s time for me to go.”

“So you’re gon’ walk away from this conversation? From me?”

“Yeah, cuz if I’d known this was what you called me here for, I wouldn’t have come.”

“But why? I don’t wanna know this to hold it against you or to judge you. I love you. I really do love you, but the only way this will work is if you let me in.”

“You’re not a fucking therapist. I don’t have to let you in. This is my life, not yours.”

Meech stood up, looking me dead in the eyes. “It’s this attitude that I can’t deal with. I don’t know what your fuckin’ problem is, and at this point, I’m ’bout ready to say fuck it all. I tell you I love you and that we can get through whatever it is that makes you this way, yet you still don’t trust me enough to let me in. The shit bothers me, Kinsley. You’ll never be in a decent relationship as long as you’re this way.”

I really wanted to snap on his ass but took this as a sign that it was past time for me to go. I snatched away from him and started to walk out.

“So that’s it? You’re gonna leave me, huh?”

I looked back at him. He was hurt; I could see it in his eyes. He was one of the good guys and didn’t deserve this. “I’m sorry, but this isn’t something I can do with you, not right now,” I said as unexpected tears began to fill the corners of my eyes.

“Please, I just need to understand. I don’t wanna keep running into this problem without knowing how to respond to it. It leaves me stuck because I’ve never encountered how warm someone could be one minute and then cold the next. Help me help you.”

“This is not a conversation that should be had with you. Yes, I have demons that I struggle with. I also have demons that I’ve tried my best to leave in the past. I know this isn’t fair to you and I can’t apologize enough

for that. You've been the only man in my life that was genuine with me and could feel the love. But that's not something I'm used to. I push people away because I'm protecting me, my feelings. You don't deserve this or me. I do need help, but I have to deal with this first for myself, not with you. That's not gonna fix me."

"But you're broken, babe."

"You can't fix me, Meech," I expressed. "I'm sorry. Please try to understand that I have to do this on my own."

"If you walk out that door, it's over."

Those words crushed me because I, too, genuinely loved this man, but maybe we had come to the end of the road.

I stood there just wanting to tell him about everything that hurt me, that broke me, that made me the woman I was today, but I couldn't. Deep down, I knew I couldn't. "I'm sorry," I said with a regrettable shake of my head. "I'm sorry." After getting that out, I turned to walk away. I didn't know if it was for good, but it certainly was for now, and the shit pained me more than anybody on this earth would ever know.



I pulled up in the driveway but decided to drive around the house and park in the backyard. I needed to smoke, *bad*. My nerves were shot, and my head was spinning. It was something deep within that triggered anger anytime Glenda was mentioned. I sometimes hated that lady, and it bothered me to hold those emotions so close to my heart. As I pulled the blunt out of my ashtray and lit it, my phone rang. I glanced down to see that it was Yomi.

"What you doing?" she asked the second I answered.

"In the backyard, blowing one. I'm just over so much of this shit."

"What happened!"

"Me and Meech just called it quits. Rather, he kinda broke up with me."

"Wheet! I'm coming outside."

She must've been standing at the back door because the second she said that, she was getting in on the passenger's side of my car.

"Why would he do that?"

"He wanted to talk to me about my life."

"OK, and—"



“And I didn’t.”

“Hold up, what you mean ’bout your life?”

“He says that I’m in other worlds, maybe all over the place with my feelings. One minute, I’m good, and the next, I’m not. I snap easily, etcetera,” I explained, passing Yomi the blunt.

She inhaled the good shit a couple of times, and as she exhaled, she looked over at me. “Well, I can’t really disagree with him saying that.”

“Yomi, I don’t need you coming out just to take up for him.”

“Oh, I’m not taking up for him. I’m just saying that what he’s saying has some truth to it.”

“OK, whatever.” I snatched my blunt back and began smoking it.

“Sus, don’t get mad at me. So he wanted to talk about your life. I assumed that would’ve been him asking more about your mom and dad, maybe?”

“He didn’t mention my dad, but he definitely asked about my mom. Maybe that came from him knowing or me telling him that I’ve lived with you and Auntie since I was younger. I look at her like my mama.”

“Sounds about right.” Yomi shrugged.

“Anyway, that’s not a conversation I wanna have with him. Even though he says he just wants to understand me more, be there for me, all that—”

“Aww, that’s sweet of him. I believe it. You don’t?”

“It’s not a matter of me believing him. I just don’t wanna talk about that.”

“You gotta talk to somebody, Kin. You’re always talking about me and my temper. But hey, I only go from zero to one hundred when I feel played or tried. Other than that, I’m pretty chill. My dad has never really been around, but Mama made up for his lack thereof—”

“At least she did that and have always made sure you were good.”

“That’s true, but I sometimes wish I had my dad around. You know I believe we would’ve had a bond like no other. I guess you never miss what you never had, but it’s a small void there. Like who’ll walk me down the aisle when I get married? Who can I call when I just wanna vent about men?”

“Auntie—”

“Yeah, but sometimes, you just want a man’s point of view, a man like your dad or even an uncle. Hell, we only have Granddad. It ain’t like he and

Grandma had any other kids besides Mama nem. Then we don't know our dads' people like that because their asses not around either."

"I know. That's that bullshit," I said, puffing on the blunt.

"You know I only have two more sessions with Dr. Harris. She's been a really good listener. Hell, it reminds of chatting with a man or a woman, whichever is needed at the time of us talking. She's versatile in most conversations. I like being able to tell her stuff and know that it's not leaving that room. It's the comfort of it all. If it wasn't her, I would've beat Keisha's ass again. I promise ya, baby or no fucking baby. Honestly, the only reason why I beat her ass at the club is because I owed her that one. I felt tried by her and her sister—"

"And the sister still gon' get hers."

"Damn right or my name ain't Kee-Yo-Mee."

I laughed. She always tickled me with that shit.

"They need to know they can't just bully me and get away with it."

"That's on period!"

"Exactly! So I really think you should make an appointment with Dr. Harris. Talk to somebody, sus, or you're gonna end up a lonely old woman with a house full of cats."

"Bitch, you got me fucked up." I laughed.

"Anyway, my shower water is running—"

"Auntie gon' beat yo' ass 'bout doing that yet."

"I knooow. So we'll talk more when you come in," she said, opening the car door but turning back to look at me once more. "Wassup with these niggas today? You think they planned this shit?"

I grinned. "Nah, I doubt it. Maybe it's supposed to be a wakeup call for both of us."

"Bitch, I ain't sleepin'. Cuz fuck that." Yomi laughed.

"Yeah, I hear you," I said as she closed the door behind her and headed in the house.

Maybe she was right. I did need to talk to somebody about this shit in order to fix other parts of my life and relationships. I'd had these mood swings, temper tantrums, and anger built up for most years of my life. Something definitely had to change. I glanced down at my phone and started scrolling through my messages. I landed on one of the messages Auntie sent me. I copied and pasted the phone number that was in it and decided to make the phone call. Either this was going to make or break me.

As the phone began to ring, my heart raced. The minute the woman answered, all I wanted to do was hang up. But instead, I stood my ground.

“Glenda—”



KIYOMI SIMMONS

Over two weeks had passed, and I had yet to hear from Dodge. I was sure he was feeling the same awkward distance from me. One minute, we were Livin' La Vida Loca out in Miami like the perfect couple, soaking up all the sun and beach vibes, enjoying each other's company. Next, we were like strangers living on two separate islands as if we'd never known each other. Life had a way of throwing the weirdest curveballs when it came to relationships, and I swear I was striking out with each ball being tossed my way.

Maybe I'd taken things overboard. My mouth tended to go a lil' too far at times, and like my mama used to say, "*keep on, Yomi, and your mouth gon' write a check that your ass can't cash.*" I probably should've apologized for snapping on him about Keisha's untimely news, but fuck that. If that bitch was really pregnant by him, then what was I really apologizing for? This had to be some of the lamest shit ever.

"You good?"

I looked over at Hendrix with a half smile. "Yeah, I'm good."

"You seem like you got something on your mind. Ever since you got here, you've been a lil' distant. You ain't gotta be scared. I won't touch you unless you want me to."

I laughed. "It's not like that, but I guess I am preoccupied just a little. No worries though, I'm shaking that shit."

"Yes, you definitely need to shake that shit, especially since I've been looking forward to spending this alone time with you."

I smiled. "Oh yeah?"

“Can’t you tell? Look at this smile.”

I looked over at him, and he was definitely sexy as hell, smiling all hard and shit. I mean, damn, I really liked his ass, but I liked Dodge more, and that was what had me so conflicted in my feelings.

“So do you have a woman or nah, nigga? While you sittin’ over there with all that cheesing and shit.”

He grinned. “I’m cheesin’ and shit because I’m feeling yo’ fine ass.”

“And who else are you feeling?” I asked, shooting him a side-eye.

“I ain’t fucking around like you think I am.”

“You don’t know what I’m thinking.”

“You gon’ let me get in that pretty lil’ head of yours just so I can see what you’re thinking?”

I smirked. “You got game for days.”

“Nah. The only game I have is shootin’ hoops and scoring.”

I laughed a little. “And scoring, huh?”

“I was really thinking about basketball. Your mind is the one in the gutta.” He laughed.

“Nah, I thought yours was,” I joked as he stood up.

“You want something to drink? I don’t have any liquor, but I do have some wine.”

“Wine? Oh, you’re one of those romancers?”

“Why? Because I drink wine from time to time?” He grinned. “I’d rather a lil’ softer taste than liquor. Guess you can say I’m a smooth type of nigga.” He teased.

“I can agree with that. And sure, I’ll drink a lil’ wine.”

“Cool,” he said, heading for the kitchen. It was certainly something about Hendrix that I liked. He was like a tall, tasty, red plastic cup of chocolate milk—charming as hell—and his looks matched. He was athletic, smooth with his words and had nice swag about himself. Now to hear the nigga preferred wine over liquor definitely had me intrigued. He was mysterious and luring. I honestly had to watch my time with him, or I’d find myself getting caught up, and trust me, that wasn’t something I needed to be doing.

My phone chirped to let me know I had a text message. I glanced down at the display to see that it was Loyal. I rolled my eyes first but proceeded to check the message.

**WYD, Simmons? LOYAL**

I grinned to myself. He'd always call me by my last name when he felt a way about anything I'd done or said that he wasn't feeling. Kind of tickled me to be honest.

***Disloyal, what do you want? YOMI***

***Stop with the Disloyal shit. I want you. LOYAL***

***You can't have me. I'm taken. YOMI***

***By that nigga you posting on IG and Facebook? So what he took you out of town for your birthday? I'm sure you know I could do that and more. So cut the shit. I know you were only doing that to piss me off, but it's all good. You've had your fun and your sweet lil' revenge. Now tell that nigga to back off. LOYAL***

Wow, this nigga really was crazy, and his ugly ass mammy thought it was me. I had to laugh about that.

***DISLOYAL, like I said before, ain't nothing a joke, OK! This shit is real. So why don't you back off? Clearly, I've moved on. Too bad you tried but can't. YOMI***

***Don't worry. I know what to do for you. Tell ya boy to be ready because if you expect or want me to fight for you, then it's on. May the best man win. LOYAL***

I grinned to myself while shaking my head. Disloyal really had me fucked up. I honestly was over his ass. Yes, it had taken a while to get myself in this space, but I was good on him. Did it feel good that he was now the one running behind me? Hell yeah. I'd said it more than once. It felt damn good. Did I want to string him on just a lil' longer? Hell yeah, especially with things being on the rocks for me and Dodge. I had to keep these niggas on my ass. I guess I wasn't as ready to let go of the leash. It felt kinda good.

"You good?" Hendrix asked, making his way back over to me with the glasses of wine in his hand. He handed me one and sat down next to me.

"Yeah, I'm good," I answered, but Loyal always had a way of getting under my skin. Even though the relationship was over, he'd managed to find his way back in. Sure, I was partly to blame because I continued to indulge in his pursuit of me. Oh well. I sipped from the glass and looked over at Hendrix. It just wasn't the right time to be consumed with thoughts of Loyal or his shenanigans. "So back to you. Who is the lucky lady?"

He frowned. "What lady? My mama?"

I laughed while sipping. "You keep a handful of jokes on the deck."

“Nah. I’m serious.” He grinned.

“Me too. Who is she or they?”

“I see you’re not gonna let this go.”

“No, I’m not. If I’m talking to you, I wanna know what I’m getting myself in.”

He nodded. “I can dig that.”

“OK, so tell me.”

“OK, so I used to be a ladies’ man. Meaning, I had a few different women I kicked it with. I wasn’t and had never been the settle down type of nigga. I know that sounds funny, especially if I’m dealing with a female that wants monogamy. But why choose that when I can choose many?”

“Oh wow.”

He shrugged while drinking some of his wine. “I’m young. I have my whole life ahead of me. I play ball and it’s a known fact that I’m going to the NBA. I look good, yeah that sounds arrogant as hell, but I mean well. I’m blessed in all areas.” He teased with that big ass cheesy smile of his that I liked. Sure, the nigga was cocky, but that was what turned me on about him.

“So um—”

“Now, don’t get me wrong. I’m sure when the right one steps up to me, I’ll chill the fuck out. Like you—”

“Oh, like me? You’d chill the fuck out?”

“Yeah, but you ain’t ready. I know. I can tell, and that’s not a bad thing either. You were just on IG hugged up with Dodge. He’s in a-whole-nother league than most of them niggas out there. I don’t even know him like that, but I respect how he moves. So wassup with you and him? I mean, one minute you’re boo’d up, not really fucking with me for the past couple of weeks, and now, you’re here sitting on my couch, drinking up my damn wine—”

I laughed.

“I’m serious.” He grinned. “I’m not complaining though.”

“I’m glad you’re not, and as far as Dodge goes, I’ll talk about him after we discuss your plays.”

“Meaning women?”

“Yup.” I smirked

“I deal with this one chick. She’s a lil’ older than me by about three years, not much—”



“Just one chick?”

“Well, yeah. She’s the only person I’ve fucked in the last past three months. However, even that ain’t often. I feel like she got some issues that she needs to deal with. That within itself has kept me at bay. I’ve known her for a long time. We just never kicked it. So we’re not exclusive or nothing like that. I mean, she’s pretty and a baddie. I like her. But she knows what I have going on, and well, it’s no pressure for her. She might wanna be exclusive.” He shrugged. “I don’t know, but I’m not rushing nothing. That’s for sure.”

“So do you use a condom when you’re fucking?”

“If it’s one thing my dad taught me, it’s to use rubbers at all times unless I’m married to her.”

I grinned. “Your daddy is a smart man.”

“I know. Where you think I get it from?” He smugly smiled back.

“Oh, I can believe it. Your father must be a suave dude.”

“Like father, like son.”

I grinned. Hendrix was cocky as hell, but that was a characteristic of his that I adored. On the other hand, Dodge was super laidback and low-key, and I loved that about him. To me, they were a lot of the same but definitely had lots of differences. The bigger picture was that Dodge and I had called it quits a couple of weeks ago, and neither of us had reached out to the other. I knew I was stubborn in a lot of ways, but damn, he could’ve said something to me to smooth the shit over.

As we sat sipping on wine and clowning around with each other, my glass of wine fell out my hand and wasted on my brand-new baby-blue sleeveless maxi dress.

“Ahh fuck!” I let out.

“Damn, that’s gon’ stain if you don’t move fast.”

“Move fast? I’m not home. I can’t just take it off and wash it.”

“Take it off,” he said, getting up to walk down the hall.

“Whet! Take it off?”

“Yea!” he called out from down the hall as he went into one of the rooms. He came back holding one of his basketball jerseys. “Put this on and I’ll wash your dress. It can be washed, right?”

“Yeah. It’s just a maxi dress from Fashion Nova, but it’s new. I didn’t wanna mess it up already.”

“I feel ya. I’ll turn my back,” he said, turning his back to me but then peeking.

I laughed. “I see you looking.”

“OK.” He laughed. “I’m not looking now.”

I slipped my dress off with nothing but a matching white cotton bra and panty set. Quickly, I slipped his jersey on, patting him on the back and handing over my dress.

“You think the wine will come out?”

“Definitely,” he responded while eyeing me down. “You have some really nice legs.”

“Thanks,” I said, trying not to blush. “Hopefully, it doesn’t take long for my dress to wash and dry. I can’t be sitting ’round you half naked for too long. You might try something.”

He laughed, “You want me to?”

“Noooo,” I responded.

“Well, I won’t. I assure you, even though I wouldn’t mind. Anyway, it’s just one piece, it’s not gonna take too long to wash and dry,” he said, heading to put my dress in the washer. The minute he disappeared into his laundry room, a soft knock was heard at the door.

“Somebody at your door!” I called out. Damn, I didn’t know who that could be, but the last thing I wanted was somebody coming over and thinking that Hendrix and I had something going on just because I was sitting here half naked in his jersey.

He came out of the laundry room just as another knock was heard at the door. He frowned. “You said somebody knocking?”

“You hear ’em,” I said. “Maybe I should go in the bedroom or something. I don’t have no clothes on.”

“You can if you want to. It’s just right down the hall to the left.”

I headed in the bedroom, and once in there, I sat on the edge of his bed while looking around, being nosy. Hendrix’s décor was nice as hell inside his apartment off campus. I highly doubted the décor was all him, but if it was, he had good taste in just about everything he touched. He had a king-sized bed with a navy plush comforter and white sheets. As I scoped out his trophies and his accolades inside frames on a bookshelf, I heard a woman’s voice coming from upfront. I frowned.

“What the fuck! I know this nigga ain’t got me over here and his mama done showed up.” I got nervous. Meeting somebody’s mama while dressed

in her son's jersey was kind of embarrassing. I really hoped he'd just get rid of her ass and have her come back when I was gone. As I sat contemplating if I should just hide in the closet, I began to listen closely to what was being said.

"So you're here by yourself?"

"Why? I'm tryna figure out why you just popped over here," he said as my eyes stretched open. At that moment, I realized that it wasn't his mama. This nigga had a bitch showing up on his doorstep unannounced. This couldn't have been the worst of timing.

"So where is she?"

"Look, you can't just come in here asking shit like that. We aren't together."

I frowned. "I know damn well—"

"Where is she?"

"I don't know what you're talkin' 'bout."

"Oh, you know, nigga."

As I sat there contemplating if I should just walk out and see what the fuck was going on, a part of me said to just sit still. Plus, I already was only wearing Hendrix's jersey. Even though we weren't fucking around, whoever that was wouldn't believe that.

"Hendrix, I'm not playin' with you."

"Nah. I'm not playin' with you. Damn, we just started kicking it like that, and you already on some bullshit. My sister tried to warn me."

"Fuck yo' sister," the female fussed, and next thing I heard was shit being tossed around or thrown and glass breaking. I stood up to peek out the door because I didn't want no smoke with a bitch I didn't know over a nigga I wasn't fucking. Out of nowhere—well, not exactly nowhere—but this bitch popped up right in front of me as I stood face-to-face with one of my fucking rivals.

*What the fuck! Out of all bitches!* It was definitely 'bout to go down.

Kay swung on me so fast I almost didn't see it coming. From there, the fight was on. We went toe to toe and tore up Hendrix's bedroom. I couldn't lie; she had way more muscle than her sister did, but I wasn't playin' with the bitch. All I could think about was them tag teaming me, and I went crazy on her ass.

"Bitch, I owe you this shit!" I yelled between dragging her down and beatin' her ass. Hendrix pulled me off her, and the second she was free, she

came at me full force, punching and swinging. Shit pissed me off so bad because while he was trying to hold me, she was getting in some good licks until I footed that hoe in the stomach. She went down to the floor, groaning and shit. I tried to kick the breath out that bitch. I snatched away from Hendrix and slapped his ass. “Nigga, don’t be holding me!”

Hendrix was so caught off guard and lost that this shit was even happening. “I’m sorry. I’m only tryna stop y’all!” he exclaimed, but I was so mad I wasn’t trying to hear it. At that time, I really could’ve dived on Kay’s ass and choked the living shit out of her, but instead, I stormed out.

This shit had already gone way further than I ever expected. I was sure the reason why was because I’d already had run-ins with this bitch. If only Hendrix had said who he was fucking with, I would’ve known, and knowing that fact, I wouldn’t have stayed. I was bothered like a muthafucka, but I picked up my shoes, grabbed my purse, and walked out. I didn’t give a damn that I was only dressed in a jersey as I headed for my car. It didn’t even dawn on me that I had all these damn scratches and shit on my face until after the fact of feeling the shit burning. “Damn!” I let out.

A day of trying to get away to clear my thoughts turned into a day of reckoning with a bitch I owed a good ol’ ass cuttin’ to. I shook my head, still in disbelief that Hendrix was fucking Kay. How the hell did that come about! Out of all the hoes in the world, he ended up fucking with that one. Shit had me confused as hell. I was lost on that one. I heard him say that his sister warned him, but how would she know that them bitches were crazy? One thing about it, when the smoke cleared, I was gonna get some answers from Hendrix, especially if he wanted to save whatever the fuck we called ourselves doing.

I drove into my neighborhood with all kinds of thoughts going through my mind. I was so mad that this shit had taken place. I mean, I wanted to get her ass but not like that. Now, she was going to be thinking that me and Hendrix was fucking, and on top of that, she was definitely going to tell her mouthy ass sister about it. All I could do was shake my head, and just when I thought that this day couldn’t get any worse—*what the fuck!*



## DODGE GAMBLE

I smiled the second I saw Kiyomi's car bend the corner. That saved me from walking up to her door and knocking. I mean, I didn't know if her mom was home, but if she was, I was certainly going to introduce myself, whether Kiyomi was feeling it or not. I missed the hell out of her ass and needed her to know that face-to-face.

She pulled up in the driveway, almost like she wanted to drive around to the back of the house, but Kinsley's car was blocking her, so she parked behind it. I smiled on the inside, waiting for her to get out, but it took longer than I would've expected. As I walked around my car to see what was going on, she decided to open her car and eased out. At first, I frowned with a confused expression on my face.

"You OK?" I asked, eyeing her down.

"Uh... yeah," she cautiously responded.

"What's going on with you?" I asked, grabbing her by the face so I could get a closer look at her. She tried snatching away, but I wouldn't let her. "You talking, or do I need to leave?"

She looked up at me, eyes all glossy like she wanted to cry.

"You fucking somebody else, Kiyomi?"

"No," she said, snatching away.

"Well, why are you looking like this? You been fighting or something?" I asked, trying by best not to mention the nigga's jersey she had on. "You talking to me or nah?"

"I don't wanna talk about it."

“Fine, but if I leave here, ain’t no coming back, and I mean on my part and yours. I’m not with this shit. I come over here because I missed yo’ ass, and you pull up looking like you just got finished fighting over a nigga.”

“I wasn’t fighting over a nigga,” she responded.

“Well, what were you doing? Where you coming from?”

“I don’t feel like talkin’ ’bout this right now. I just need to cool off.”

“Cool off? So you were fighting somebody—”

“I said I ain’t wanna talk about this right now!”

“Fine, don’t talk! I’m outta here, Kiyomi!” I turned to head to my car. I didn’t know who shawty thought she was, but she definitely had me fucked up. As I opened my car door, she grabbed me by the arm.

“Please don’t leave. Let me explain,” she said in a sincere yet aggravated tone.

“Explain then.”

“I went over to Hendrix’s apartment to chill.”

I swallowed hard, folding my arms but trying to hear her out before I snapped. ’Cause what the fuck was she doing over that nigga’s house?

“Don’t look at me like that.”

“I’m just listening,” I replied. I was sure my facial expressions were that of curiosity and concern mixed with *don’t fucking play with me*.

“Well, it’s not what you think. I wasn’t over there fucking him or nothing like that. I honestly just went over because he’d been inviting me, and since I hadn’t heard from you, I figured why the fuck not.”

“Mm-hm—”

“Don’t judge me, because I’m tryna be honest here.”

“I’m just listening, Kiyomi. Talk.”

“Um, well, he fixed me a glass of wine, and well, we were talking, and I spilled it on my dress. So he offered to wash it for me.”

“OK...”

“And he brought a jersey for me to put on while my dress was washing. I promise that’s all it was. He didn’t even see my body or nothing. He had his back turned to me while I changed.”

“Mm-hm.” I nodded, really trying not get in my feelings, but I was definitely in my fucking feelings.

“Listen, so while I’m sitting there, he gets a knock on his door. So I go in the back because I didn’t know who it was and I didn’t want nobody

seeing me there in his jersey and be thinking we're fucking because we're not..."

"OK."

"And, um... while I'm in his room—"

"His bedroom?"

"Yeah, his room." She nodded. "So this female comes in talking shit. I figured that it was the same female he had just told me he was fucking around with. I didn't want no smoke because I knew me and him weren't fucking. Seriously, the whole me wearing his jersey and being over there was innocent on my part and his," she tried to assure me. "Next thing I know, the female comes rushing down the hall trying to see if he had another woman in there and found me. But the kicker is that the female he's fucking is Kay."

I frowned with a baffled look. "Kay? Keisha's sister?"

"Yeah, that bitch, and well, you know the minute she saw me, it was on. She swung first, and then, we went at it."

I was blown away by all of this. First, she was over to another nigga's house chilling and shit and then to get caught up over there and have to fight was another blow. But to find out she was fighting Kay put the fucking icing on the cake. "Kay?"

"Yeah, Kay," she said again. "Now she's gonna think I'm fucking Hendrix when really I'm not, and I didn't want to fight her. Well, I did, but I didn't wanna fight her over him. Well, not over him but because of him," she irritably explained. "You know what I mean. He's not my man. You are, and—"

"Oh, I'm yo' man now?"

Her eyes widened like she didn't mean to say that part. "I'm just sayin'. You're the man I really wanna be with, but then you just leave me hanging —"

"Oh, I left you, or you talked hella shit and walked out on me?"

"Please don't do that. You know what I mean. I hadn't heard from you in over two weeks."

"And I hadn't heard from you either. Phone calls, text messages, and pull-ups work both ways."

"I know, but the last time I pulled up, you know who was there."

"I get it, but are you the type to chill with another nigga because you're mad at me? I'm telling you now, that shit ain't gon' cut it. I don't even think



you're ready for a nigga like me."

"But I am, and I made a mistake," she said with tears in her eyes.

A part of me felt a lil' sorry she'd gotten caught up like that, but clearly, she brought that shit on herself. She had no business even being over there.

"Hey, what's going on out here?"

"Mama, everything's good."

"Who are you?" she asked, staring at me and then directing her attention back on Kiyomi. "And what the hell happened to you?"

"Nothing, Mama."

"I know you ain't out here fucking with my daughter."

I frowned. "Huh? No, I just pulled up. Ask yo' daughter what happened to her. That ain't have nothing to do with me."

"Mama, you can go back in the house. He's good."

"No, I need you to get yo' ass in the house and tell me what's going on."

"I'm talking," Kiyomi said.

"Sounds like y'all out here fussing to me."

"No, ma'am," I intervened. "Matter of fact, I'm leaving. By the way, I'm Dodge. I never meant for us to meet like this, but it's been a pleasure either way. I can see where your daughter gets her beauty and that feisty energy from," I said, opening my car door. Hell, this shit had turned quite embarrassing for me.

"No, don't leave. We're not done," Kiyomi said, trying to grab my arm.

"I believe we are," I told her. As I got in the car, she and her mama started going back and forth with each other, but I just wanted to get the hell out of there. I hated with a passion for that to be my introduction to her mama. I mean, I'd always been big on first impressions, and that certainly wasn't a good one. Kiyomi had me all in my feelings, and that was something I needed to avoid at all costs. I already had enough shit going on. I didn't need her careless, unpredictable behavior adding to it.

In about fifteen minutes or so, I was pulling up in the front of Sha's new hair salon. I really wanted Kiyomi to be here for this. That's one of the reasons why I went over there. After missing her like crazy, I'd come to the conclusion that I really wanted her to be in my life against all odds. I wanted to share first experiences with her and to let her know how much I adored having her in my life. However, that shit went way left, and I hated even showing up like that. Never again.

A light tap on my window brought me back to reality.

“Dang, what you thinkin’ ’bout?” Sha asked, standing there with a big ass smile on her face.

I opened my car door, getting out. “Mind ya business.”

Rosalyn laughed. “You are her business.”

“Tell ’em, cuz.” Sha laughed. “Anyway, why you wanted us to meet you down here?”

“Just hush and follow me,” I said as I walked up to the building, stuck my key in the door, and walked in.

“Ooooh shit! Dodge, you’re opening a club!” Rosalyn asked, all excited and shit.

“Nah.” I laughed.

“Well, what is this nice ass spot?” Sha asked as she looked around the empty place.

“It’s yours.”

Her eyes lit up. “It’s mine? What you talkin’ ’bout, Dodge?”

“The place is your new hair and nail salon.”

“Stop it!” Rosalyn exclaimed.

“Are you serious!” Sha asked.

“Very.”

Sha jumped in my arms, squeezing me tightly around the neck. “Dooooodgee! This is mine!”

“Yes, big head, it’s yours.” I grinned. It was nothing more in this world that made me happier than seeing a smile on her face like that. Once she hopped out my arms, she damn near hopped in Rosalyn’s arms. They jumped around, happily dancing and cheering like two energetic kids stumbling upon a room full of ice cream, cake, and candy.

“Wow, I can’t believe this. It’s like a dream come true. And to think I graduate November first.”

“That’s only a month away, and girl, you’ll come out of there with your own shop. Do you know how many bitches wish they could be in your shoes?”

“I know, right?” Sha grinned.

“Y’all look around because here’s the deal. This is going to be a family business.”

Sha smiled. “Tell me more.”

“You know how Keisha runs her shop? She does the hair while Kay braids. Keisha makes really good money because of her help, but Kay is like her right hand. Without Kay, she wouldn’t be as tight as she is. They vibe off each other.”

“Ooooooh, say less. Rosalyn, you’re going to be my braider. I don’t know anybody that can slay braids like you can.”

Rosalyn cheesed. “I know, right?”

“You just gotta tighten up because I heard you called yourself taking a break,” I slid in.

“Nah, school just kinda distracted me, but I was just telling myself that I needed to get back on it. I miss my lil’ coins.” She laughed.

“Well, y’all definitely gotta get it together. Sha, you’ll need to have a schedule that works with you doing hair and nails, but I believe nails is your specialty. However, it’s nothing wrong with doing both. Being that it may not be as easy as it sounds, you’ll need to hire a few workers to rent booths to do hair and nails.”

“Don’t worry, bro. I’m already cooking some shit up in my head.”

“Well, good,” I said as they wandered off, being nosy and scoping out the building. As I stood there, staring out the window with Kiyomi on my mind, a car pulled up behind mine. At first, I didn’t notice the car, but I definitely peeped who it was when they got out.

“Man, I ain’t in the mood for this shit,” I uttered as Keisha walked up to the floor-to-ceiling window and tapped on it.

“Come here!” she called out.

I didn’t want her or Sha getting into it, so I stepped outside. “Wassup?”

She smiled. “What a coincidence. I’m heading to my shop and spotted yo’ car parked around the corner from it. What you doing over this way?”

“None of your business.”

“Drop the attitude, Dodge.”

“Wassup, Keisha? What you want?”

“You can’t answer your phone?”

“What you want, Keisha?” I repeated.

“I want you—”

“Well, we both know that’s outta the question.”

“It might not be when you hear what just happened not long ago.”

“Here we go,” I mumbled.

“No, I’m serious. Yo’ lil’ girlfriend just got in a fight with Kay over Kay’s man. Apparently, they’re fucking, and Kay caught her over there.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah, so why you out here acting like I’m the one that’s for the streets, you need to be checkin’ yo’ girl.”

“Whatever Kay may think she saw wasn’t it. I know for a fact she’s not fuckin’ that nigga.”

“Oh, she got you fucked up in the head. I know you can’t believe that shit.”

“Well, I just left her, and I heard all about what happened.”

“You act like she can’t lie about the shit.”

“I never said she couldn’t, but I believe her. On top of that, regardless of if it was true or not, I’m not about to stand here and let you talk about her either.”

“Oh wow. I can’t talk about her, but she can talk about the mother of your child?”

“Who is that?”

Keisha frowned. “Who is who?”

“The mother of my child?”

“Oh, you got jokes, nigga? Don’t fucking play with me.”

“No, don’t you fucking play with me,” I snapped, really wanting to mush her ass in the face, but I knew I couldn’t put my hands on her. At that moment, she peeped inside the building.

“Is that Sha and Rosalyn in there?”

“Yeah, and?”

“What you really doing over here, Dodge? I know damn well you didn’t get them a shop right around the corner from mine. Are you fucking kidding me?”

“Actually, no. It’s hot over here in this area. Why not?”

“Because I’m over here, and out of respect for me, you should’ve gotten an empty building somewhere else. You know I run this side of town when it comes to this shit. Your sister can’t touch me.”

“It’s not a competition, Keisha. Sha does her own thing, and you do yours.”

“Don’t act like you didn’t know what you were doing when you bought this shop.”

“I don’t know what you’re talkin’ ’bout.”

“Yes the fuck you do.”

“Yo, you need to chill the fuck out. Aren’t you pregnant? Keep on and yo’ ass gon’ lose this one too.” Keisha’s eyes stretched open big as hell. I could tell I’d struck a nerve. “Look, I didn’t mean it like that, but I’m just sayin’.”

“Nah, you speaking ill on my baby, and that shit ain’t cool.”

“No, I’m not speaking ill on yo’ baby,” I emphasized. “I’m just sayin’ you out here keep startin’ shit and working yo’self up with all this foolishness, not realizing the more you’re stressed out, so is the baby.”

“Dodge, how could you think I wouldn’t be bothered by you getting Sha a shop close to mine?”

“First off, you do hair. You have a long list of clients that love your skills. Why are you bothered by Sha? Plus, she’s more into nails, even though she’s started doing hair too. It shouldn’t be a competition. It’s enough money out here for all of y’all.”

“I’m not talking about the money. It’s gon’ always be the principle behind it.”

“Yeah, let you tell it,” I said just as Sha and Rosalyn stepped outside.

“Keisha,” Sha said, instantly shooting her a side-eye.

“Sha,” Keisha said back. “So I hear you’re moving in.”

“Yeah.”

“Well, don’t get comfortable. It’s not enough business for me and you on this side of town.”

“It’s not a competition Keisha,” Sha said as I stepped in.

“Look, that’s the same thing I just told Keisha.”

“Keisha, you just like to keep shit up. That’s why you keep gettin’ yo’ ass beat,” Rosalyn jumped in.

“Whoa. Don’t y’all start. Just let it go,” I said.

“Oh, you think you did something by tag teaming me with that bitch? Wait ’til I have this baby. Bitch, I’m coming for that ass; I don’t give a damn if you are the auntie.”

Sha frowned. “Auntie! Dodge?”

“Aye, Keisha, just leave. Damn, you always on some bullshit.”

“You may as well tell ’em that I’m having yo’ baby.”

Sha and Rosalyn busted out laughing. “Sus, you ain’t had enough of being embarrassed by telling lies like that?” Sha asked.

“Thought she would’ve learned her lesson after that last baby shower,” Rosalyn egged on.

“Aye, y’all chill. Keisha, bye!” I told her ass.

“Oh, I’ll leave, but they’ll see in due time,” she said, and after that, she headed for her car to leave. The minute she pulled off, Sha looked right over at me.

“She’s pregnant like for real, for real this time?” Sha asked.

I simply nodded my head.

“She is!” Rosalyn asked. “Oh my God! I know better. You was still nuttin’ in that hoe after she tried playing you the last time?”

“Hell nah! That baby ain’t mine.”

“You sho?” Rosalyn asked.

“I know,” I responded.

Sha disappointedly shook her head. “It better not be, or yo’ ass gon’ have hell on yo’ hands. You better not tell Granny. She ain’t gon’ be happy to hear that.”

“I know that’s right,” Rosalyn agreed.

“Y’all, hush the hell up! Damn!”

“I’m just sayin’,” Sha responded, rolling her eyes.

“Ain’t you taking yo’ driver’s test today? Need to be worried about that with yo’ non-driving ass.”

Rosalyn laughed. “Nigga, hush, I got this. Rosco been taking me on a few lessons.”

“That don’t mean shit. I’ve seen you behind the wheel before. Driving two miles per hour and still ran into the mailbox.”

Sha busted out laughing. “Oh, this nigga got jokes, cuz!”

“I see.” Rosalyn grinned. “You better be glad yo’ ass was on the sidelines, or it would’ve been you.”

I laughed. I ain’t have time to sit here clowning with them. I tossed Sha the spare key to her new place of business. “I’m out,” I told ’em, and after that, I got in my car. I glanced down at my cell phone, noticing that I’d gotten a text message.

***I’m soooo sorry about earlier. I was so happy to see you, but as you can see, I was also very shocked because of how I was looking. I feel so bad that I went over to Hendrix’s apartment. I should’ve kept my ass at home. I tend to do dumb shit sometimes, but maybe that’s the “baby” in me. I’m just trying really hard not to get my heart broken again. FYI, I’m***

*really crazy about you. I just hide my feelings. I can be stubborn like that sometimes. And now, I'm sitting here crying because I don't wanna lose you. You have been the reason I smile, and to lose that would be so hurtful to me. Again, I'm sorry, and I hope that you can forgive me. Even if that baby is yours, I'll stand by you. I'm also very sorry for the things I said about the baby. It was disrespectful; I know. But I hate Keisha's ol' baldheaded with a passion. 😞 Oh, and Mama thinks you're super handsome and very respectful. 😊 🤔 YOMI*

I couldn't help but smile. For the first time since I'd been talking to her, she finally showed a vulnerable side. I believed that she didn't take it there with Hendrix. I just hated she put herself in a position like that to get caught up. But hey, she was right. Maybe it was the "baby" in her. As I pulled off, the only thoughts I had was that she was definitely forgiven, but I wanted her to think about that shit overnight without me even responding back. Hopefully, she'd think twice before she did some dumb shit like that again.





## ROMEO "ROSCO" GUNNER

“Ooooooh shiiiiit!” Apple shrieked. “What the fuck!”  
“No, come here. Back dat ass back up!” I demanded, slapping her fat ass jiggling on my dick. As she came back for more, I slid in. First, taking my time and then beatin’ the pussy like I was Debo. “You like dat?”

“Hell yeah!”

“I can’t hear you.”

“Hell yeah!” I slapped her butt cheek, handprint painting a stain on her juicy red ass as she moaned out louder. “Fuck me, daddy! Fuck meee!”

The noises and screams she was making had my ego bigger than King Kong. I was filling this wet pussy up and banging her back out at the same time. Her slippery slope had me gliding down Mount Everest like I could conquer the world. I hadn’t had pussy this good in a long time. Had I known this, I would’ve been smashed shawty. Hell, I would’ve been beatin’ her block down when we were in Miami, but I guess she’d rather wait ’til we got back so nobody would know about us. I had no problem being her little secret as long as she would choke on this big dick every chance she got. I was cool with it. I promise ya!

“Yesssss, right there, baby. Right there!”

*Baby?* Oh, I knew I had her ass from the go. She just didn’t know. I had dick for days and found more inches of it in places I didn’t even know it was hiding. One thing about it, my shit loved exploring her gushy tunnel of love.

I flipped her on her back and began tearing that pussy up from the front. Her walls gripped my shaft ever so softly, then pulled me in as I went as deep as I could. I wanted to touch the back of her throat; this shit was so good.

“Ahhh fuuuck!” she exclaimed with pleasure.

*Ahhh fuck* was right because she had my head wide open. Her moist, creamy juices were like no other. At this point, I didn’t even care if I was the side nigga; I just needed this shit in my life.

As I fucked her good and stroked her insides until I just couldn’t take it anymore, I whipped my python out. She instantly got on all fours and crawled over to it and slurped big boy like a slushie until I busted one in her mouth. I could literally feel it oozing down the back of her throat as she stared me dead in the eyes and then smiled with a sexy ass wink.

“Damn, girl, you better watch out now.”

She laughed. “Nah, nigga, you better watch out.”

We headed for the shower, got in together, and played around for a little while washing each other’s backs. Once out, I jumped back in the bed butt naked; however, she slipped on my T-shirt and sat on the side of the bed. She looked over at me with a bashful smile on her face.

“Listen, if I had known this shit was that good, I would’ve been fucking you on the balcony in Miami.”

I grinned. “Damn, I was thinking the same thing when we were fucking.”

“Be honest, I know you got women ridin’ yo’ dick, but do you have a woman? Like is there somebody special in your life?”

“Yeah, my mama, and she’s still married to my daddy, so she’s taken,” I joked as she laughed. “But nah, I don’t have a woman like that. Yeah, I fuck off from time to time, but that’s because I’m single and can do whatever the fuck I wanna do.”

“I feel you.”

“So do you have a nigga?”

“Not really—well, kinda. It’s really a situationship, but I’m so over that shit. I want something real.”

“Something real like?”

“A nigga of my own. I don’t wanna be fucking nobody else’s nigga. Like I want a nigga that comes home to me at night. If he wanna fuck off, fine. But bring yo’ ass home to me. Bring those coins home to me. Bitches

that wanna give up the pussy will know without a doubt that's it's all about me or nothing at all. I want that deep shit. That shit bitches be writing about. I want the fairy tale, even if it's a hood love story. I wanna win in the end and have our own version of happily ever after. Can you feel that?"

I smiled with an approving nod of my head. "Yeah. I can dig it."

"You so fuckin' handsome. I've always watched you in the club with your crew. You're like the caretaker, making sure that everybody's good, but you got your own shit. Hell, you got more shit than mostly everybody in the crew. You're just laidback with it. Trust, I've peeped that. Them niggas respect you. They look up to you, and I love that about you."

"Yeah, I feel like it's my duty to make sure they're straight, especially Dodge. That's my first cousin, more like a brother to me, and as long as he's good, then I'm great. I know how he feels about the crew, and I can say them niggas will ride or die for him, so that's why it's an obligation to make sure they also stay on their A game. Listen, I'm nobody's do boy—"

"Oh, I know that."

"The shit I do is out of love and respect. I do have all my ducks lined in a row, and the money flow is definitely there."

"I can tell."

"I've been watching you for a while too, though. I was glad you came on the trip because that gave me a lil' time to get to know you."

"Could you tell I was feeling you?"

"Could I!" I teased. "Shit, the feeling was mutual. I'm sure you could tell too."

"I did. Why you think I'm here now?"

"Shit, I'm glad you came." I smiled.

"Yo' handsome ass." She smiled back.

"Yo' sexy, pretty, good-pussy-havin' ass." We laughed. "So I see you and Kinsley are really tight. If she wasn't with Meech, she was stuck under you."

"Yeah, that's my girl. We go way, way back. We lived in the same neighborhood as kids. Like I literally met her when I was around six years old. Of course, we lived in the projects back then. We had a lot in common. Both our moms were drug addicts."

"I see."

"So our bond came from the trenches of basically being outside all day during the summer with mothers that were basically nonexistent because

they were either busy getting high or out and about looking for the shit to get high. Kinsley had a great support system. Her auntie, which is Yomi's mama, would always rescue her, like pick her up and keep her a lot of times, which left me alone. But then, Kinsley would come back, and we'd be right back at it, just me and her fending for ourselves. Sometimes, I even stayed at Yomi's house too. It's like Ms. Nicole knew what we were going through, and she made sure that we were OK. I swear that's the realest, most-loving lady I know. She looked out for me when my own family didn't. I can never thank her enough for that," Apple explained. "I love her and Yomi like they're my family also."

"As you should."

"When Kinsley was around twelve or so, Ms. Nicole got custody of her, and Kinsley moved in with them. By that time, I had gone to live with my grandma. It was either that or foster care. I guess my grandma woke up and realized that she didn't want that for me, so she took me in. The living situation was better. I had food on daily and nice clothes to wear, but I still had a void from my mother not being there. I worried about her all the time. Then it took her almost losing her life to get herself clean. I was around fifteen then. I never went back to live with her, and once I turned eighteen, I got a job, saved a lil' money, and then moved out of my grandma's house into my own apartment. Guess you can say I've been on my own since then."

"Do you and your mom have a relationship?"

"Yeah, we do, but we're not as tight as we should be. I mean, at least we can be in each other's space, unlike Kinsley and her mama."

"What you mean?"

"Kinsley despises her mama, but with good reason. I can't blame her. It was unimaginable things that Kinsley's mama put her through. Makes my heart weep for her inside because she's really a sweet person, but she has her guards up so high it's hard to knock 'em down. I can't really blame her, but I always tell her that she has to get over the past in order to move forward and be happy. I love Meech for her, but Kinsley will self-sabotage a good thing. I know; I've seen her do it many times before."

"Damn, that's fucked up, and I don't mean that as in it's on her but just fucked up that she has to be that way due to shit she's gone through. I know that's gotta be tough for her."

“It is.” Apple nodded. “I love her though, and I’m gonna always stay in her ear about what’s good for her. I mean, one day she’ll come around to gettin’ it. But right now, I don’t believe she’s even in that headspace.”

“Hopefully she’ll get it sooner than later. She’s a beautiful girl. All of y’all are. I’m just glad to be gettin’ to know you more.”

“Me too.” She smiled. “So I noticed that your last name is Gunner and Dodge’s last name is Gamble, but y’all are first cousins.”

“Yeah. Dodge has his mama’s maiden name, which is also my mama’s maiden name. They’re sisters, but my mama and my daddy are married and still together, so I have my dad’s last name.”

“I see. Does that feel good to have your parents still be together?”

“Yeah. I love knowing my mom has her rock, and vice versa for him too. My dad is my nigga. We’re tight as hell and can talk about anything. He’s like a father figure to Dodge and Sha too. He’s like the man of our family because he’s been around since before any of us were born or thought about. We all respect and look up to him. He’s a true definition of the man I want to be. He’s the provider and takes care of home and the bills, and Mom takes care of us. She cooks, cleans, sews, mentors, kisses wounds—shit, she does it all. She’s definitely the queen of our castle.”

“That’s wassup. Shit like that makes me smile inside because that’s what I want. Me and Yomi are a lot alike in those ways. We talk about being the queen of our castles, doing what your mom does and having a husband that does what your father does. I mean, it’s an iconic dream of ours.”

“Well, some dreams do come true.”

“And I’d wake up every morning like ‘pinch me so I can make sure this shit is real.’”

“I probably would too. We’d be two pinching ass muthafuckas!” We laughed out loud behind that funny shit. As we sat chopping it up, still getting to know each other, my cell phone began to ring. I picked it up to see that it was Rosalyn.

“Oh shit. I forgot about her ass,” I said, answering the phone on speaker so I could get up and get dressed. “Wassup, sis?”

“If you don’t get yo’ ugly ass down here to this license place, I know something. You know I’m driving yo’ car to take my test.”

“Damn, I forgot about that.”

“You must be fucking. That’s the only time you forget shit.”

I looked over at Apple and grinned with a shake of the head. Luckily, she had a sense of humor too as she smirked, playfully giving me a side-eye.

“Man, stay outta grown folks’ business.”

“You better get down here, or I’m calling Mama.”

“Girl, sit yo’ ass down somewhere. I’m coming.”

“You got twenty minutes, Rosco.”

“I said I’m coming.”

“A’ight,” she hissed and ended the call.

“‘You must be fucking’,” Apple joked.

“Man, she always saying that shit when I’m not on time.” I laughed.

“Nah, she knows her brother.”

I grinned. “Anyway, I gotta get down there to this license place. You’re welcome to chill out ’til I get back, or I can stop by your crib when I’m done. Whatever you’d prefer.”

“I can chill out until you get back. I like this big ass bed of yours. Hell, I thought you lived in the mansion at first until you invited me over here.”

“I do live there most of the time because it’s always live as hell, meaning it’s always something going on.”

“I can tell.”

“But I do have my own place. It’s not as big or as fancy, but it’s mine, and it’s quiet and peaceful.”

“Shit, it’s nice as hell to me. I can tell yo’ mama probably is the one that decorated. Am I right?”

“Well, Granny and my mama tag teamed the joint. They always come through for us when we need ’em.”

“Swear I love yo’ family.”

“Shit, and I looov—oh, hold up, it’s too early for that.”

She busted out laughing. “Nah, gon’ say it because you gon’ be saying it real soon anyway.”

“Saying what?” I teasingly frowned. “That I looove yo’ juicy ass pussy?”

“Stop it!” She grinned, mischievously punching me in the side.

“OK, OK.” I chuckled while putting my sneakers on. I had business to tend to, but the second I was done, I would be back. It was something about Apple that I absolutely adored and getting to know her more was top list priority. I wasn’t gon’ lie; I loved it here.



I pulled up to the DMV, and there was Sha and Rosalyn sitting outside on a bench waiting for me. I hopped out of my black BMW M5 sedan with a big smile on my face.

“Nigga, what you smiling so hard about?”

Rosalyn looked over at Sha with a smirk on her face. “He got some new pussy, cuz,” she clowned as they laughed.

“Ha, ha, ugly ass lil’ girls.” I grinned. “I’m smiling because it’s about time you gettin’ yo’ license. Ol’ ass lady round here still catching Uber everywhere you go.”

“Hush, boy. You better be glad you made it here on time, or I would’ve had to reschedule,” Rosalyn said, walking in the building to let the people know that her ride was here so she could take the test.

“So is it true that Unc got Roz a new car?” Sha asked.

“Like I’d tell yo’ talkin’ ass.”

“Rosco, tell meeee. I won’t say nothing.”

I sat down beside her. “Nah, that ain’t true.”

“You lyin’!” she said, jokingly hitting me side the head.

I smirked. “I’m for real, girl. You better hope she pass this test.”

“Haven’t you been letting her drive yo’ car? Unc been teaching her too.”

“I know, but Roz gets nervous under pressure. I just hope that everything stays smooth while she’s out on the road.”

“I hope so too,” Sha said. “Uh-oh, here she goes.”

“I’m ready!” Rosalyn said, walking over to me.

I handed her the keys. “A’ight, sis, take your time. Don’t get distracted. You got this.”

“Thanks, big head.” She smiled as she and the short, dingy-looking instructor got in the car. As sis backed out of the parking lot, Sha looked over at me.

“So far, so good.”

I laughed. “Hell, she’s only backing up. It better be so far, so good.”

Sha grinned. “Huuuush! But aye, did you smell that lady?”

I shrugged. “The wind did kinda blow a lil’ tart scent this way,” I said with a scrunched nose. We fell out laughing.

I loved all my cousins just like they were my sisters and brothers. The love was deep in our family, and when one was hurting, we all were hurting. That was how close we were. Because of Auntie's and D's disappearances, it only made us tighter and want to stick together even more. This moment here was quite monumental. Sha had her car ever since she she'd graduated high school. Rosalyn was older but learned to drive just recently. I'd been waiting for this day for a long time. It was gonna feel good to bug her ass like she'd been bugging me when it came to running errands and taking her ass places.

"So who's the new pussy?"

I looked over at Sha with a baffled expression.

"Don't look at me like that. I know it's somebody new. You got that cheesy ass smile on your face."

"Go 'head on with that." I grinned.

"I already know."

"You don't know shit."

"I bet I do. It's Apple, ain't it?"

"Where you get that from? I mean, she's cool people and fine as fuck. I won't take that away from her, but nah. We ain't fuckin' around."

"I saw how y'all were always talkin' to each other when we were in Miami, especially anytime y'all thought wasn't nobody paying attention to y'all."

"We were talkin' to everybody. That don't mean nothing, with yo' nosy ass."

Sha laughed. "Yeah, whatever. I know, so when y'all pop out like this new lil' couple, I'll be here to say I told you so!"

I fanned in the air. "Hush."

"So do you think Roz will pass?"

"Whether she do or don't, she better not wreck my damn car." Sha and I laughed, but as we sat there shootin' the shit for nearly fifteen minutes talking about this and that, Sha spotted my car heading back our way.

"Ohhh, there she goes!" she shrieked.

"Thank God," I said, but maybe I spoke too soon. As Roz was turning into the DMV, she sideswiped the stop sign, and the car sped right into the parking lot and hit a parked vehicle in the back. "Oh shit!" I yelled as Sha and I jumped up and ran to over to my car. I opened the car door as Rosalyn



sat there with a disheveled expression on her face. “What the hell happened?”

“Something crawled out her hair and flew on me!”

“Something! What!” I questioned, looking at the damage done to my car and the car Rosalyn had hit. “Y’all alright?”

“Nooo,” the instructor groaned. “My neck!”

“Lady, something crawled out yo’ hair and flew on me!” Rosalyn shrieked as she stared at the woman.

“If you were watching the road, you wouldn’t have seen nothing crawling out my hair.”

“Roscooo!” Rosalyn called out, almost in tears.

“Come on, Roz, get it together,” I said, trying to comfort her.

“I’m not moving until y’all call 911. My neck hurt,” the instructor said.

“Bitch, you just want some money,” Sha fussed as she leaned over in the car to help Rosalyn get out. “It’s a roach!”

My eyes stretched as Rosalyn damn near broke her neck jumping out the car. “What! Where?” I asked.

Rosalyn pointed at the floor, down by the brakes. “Right there. I told you!” she shrieked as Sha smashed the bug with her shoe. I couldn’t tell if it was a roach or not, but my sister was very squeamish when it came to any kind of bug. She’d always been that way, so it was no surprise that she panicked if the thing flew on her.

“Damn,” I mumbled with a shake of the head. No telling when her ass was getting license now. On top of that, she had wrecked my damn car and somebody else’s too. Then this crabby ass instructor with roaches flying out her hair had nothing but dollar signs blinging in her head. Bitch just wanted money at this point; she wasn’t hurt. But what she really needed was to be exterminated, her whole fuckin’ body sprayed the fuck down. People started coming out the DMV being nosy.

“Wow, this shit is unreal.” I uttered as I heard cop car sirens close by. I didn’t know what the hell was about to happen, but my sister wasn’t going to jail; I knew that. I didn’t care what I’d have to pay to get her out of this jam. As I stood there, noticing the owner of the other car examining her damages, my phone rang.

“Wassup, Dodge?”

“Did Roz pass the test?”

“Hell nah. She done wrecked my damn car.”

“What! Is she OK?”

“Yeah. A fuckin’ bug flew out the instructor’s hair, and she lost it.”

First came silence, and then Dodge fell out laughing on the phone. “Yooooo! That’s mad wild, B! Mad wild! Roz’s ol’ scary ass!” He laughed out loud.

I stood there pissed the hell off, and this nigga was laughing. All I could do was shake my head. No lie, the shit was quite funny once I thought about it. Damn, Roz! Only my fuckin’ sister, I promise ya!

The second I hung up with Dodge to speak with the police who had pulled up, an unknown number called. I looked at my phone, sending the call to voicemail, but they called right back. I didn’t have time for a damn telemarketer right about now, but I answered anyway.

“Yeah?”

“Rosco P. Coltrane—”

Right away, my eyes lit the fuck up. It was only one person who called me that shit, being that *Dukes of Hazzard* was one of our favorite TV shows growing up. My heart skipped a beat as my palms instantly started sweating.

“D?”



KIYOMI SIMMONS

**I**t had been at least twenty-four hours since I'd heard from or seen Dodge, and my ass was sitting on pins and needles. Shit was crazy as to have fought Kay so unexpectedly, but then to come home to Dodge being parked in my driveway took the fuckin' cake. If that wasn't the most embarrassing moment of my life. I had no choice but come clean. I literally was standing there in a fuckin' jersey that belonged to another nigga, looking like I'd just left Wrestle Mania, fighting for my damn life. The shit was unreal. As I sat there, rereading the text messages that I'd been sending him with no response, my cell phone rang. I smacked my lips but decided to answer this time because I wanted answers.

"Hello?" I said in a harsh tone like I had a chip on my shoulders.

"Damn. 'Bout time you answer."

"What you want, Hendrix?"

"I just wanted to know if you were alright."

"Well, yeah, I'm fine," I responded.

"I also wanted to tell you that I'm so sorry that shit happened yesterday. I never meant for any of that to go down. I mean, me and Kay just started kicking it not long ago, but I wasn't tryna get serious because I knew shawty had issues—"

"Clearly!" I spat.

"But I didn't know that y'all knew each other like that."

"What that bitch said?"

"She said that y'all had fought not long ago, and then you jumped her sister at the club, and she wasn't letting that slide."

“That bitch full of shit. Her and her sister jumped me when they saw me and Dodge together. I didn’t even know that bitch. Furthermore, I really don’t know her sister either, but a few months ago, she and I had a run-in at Dodge’s birthday party, so this is where all the beef comes from.”

“I figured that when I saw you and him at the club together. Then to see y’all all on IG, and Facebook confirmed it.”

“Well, I wasn’t doing that to piss nobody off, but if the shoe fits, wear it, bitches.”

“I’m sure that definitely stirred the pot.”

“Like I give a damn.”

“I know you don’t,” Hendrix said.

“So how do you know that bitch? I mean, damn, out of all fuckin’ people to be fuckin’ with, it’s her.”

“Long story short, I’ve known her for a long time, her and Keisha. My sister Vee and Keisha are like best friends. They fall out more than they get along, but somehow, the dumb shit works for them. Vee actually grew up in the same hood as them.”

“How is that? You grew up in that hood too?”

“No, I didn’t. Vee’s mom and my dad had a thing, and well, Vee came from that hookup. My mom married my dad a couple of years after that. So even though he did everything to take care of Vee, her mom was a piece of work, and I guess that’s why they lived in the hood. Hell, most of Vee’s family is still in the same hood. Anyway, me and Vee are really close siblings though. My daddy never neglected her, and therefore, she stayed many nights with us growing up. My mom accepted her just like she was her own. Vee just had crazy ways like her mom’s side of the family. She could be wishy-washy at times, so the older she got, the less my dad picked her up. Nevertheless, we always keep in touch. I love her like a fat kid loves cake; we’re just totally different people and don’t want the same things out of life.”

“I see. It all makes sense now.”

“So being that Keisha and Vee are close friends—well, sometimes,” he added. “Vee been told me to watch out for Kay, being that Kay has been tryna fuck me since I was fifteen.”

“How old is her ass?”

“She would’ve been nineteen back when I was sixteen.”

“Bitch can’t get a man her age?”

Hendrix grinned.

“What you see in her?”

“Kay is not all bad. She has this really sweet side to her, but she is a lil’ fucked up in the head. Their mom died years ago from a drive-by shooting that apparently Keisha witnessed.”

“Meaning?”

“She was in the car with their mom when it happened. At least that’s what Kay told me.”

“Wow.” I sighed. “That’s why she’s so crazy. I couldn’t imagine no shit like that.”

“I know, right? But hey, some people handle things differently. And well, Keisha is the ringleader of Kay. That’s why Kay can’t keep it together. She’s always fighting her sister’s battles. I mean, for her to be small, the lil’ thang will snap in a heartbeat.”

“And gon’ fuck around and get that lil’ back snapped in half fuckin’ with me.”

“Noooo, don’t do that.”

It was only then that I laughed a little. “I’m just sayin’. She need to get her shit together. I never meant to be fighting at your crib like that.”

“Listen, it wasn’t your fault, and I’ve told Kay that because of that, I can’t and won’t be fuckin’ with her no more. I got a whole basketball career ahead of me. If she’s acting like this now, then I can only picture how it’ll be later.”

“She’s too jealous for one.”

“That’s the part I’m talking about. Like showing up at my crib unannounced like we have really put claims on each other. She knows we’re not in a relationship like that. I don’t even know what made her come over here acting like that.”

“Because she thinks it’s more than what it is.”

“Well, she quickly learned that it’s not,” Hendrix said. “But you ain’t no joke. That’s the second time I’ve seen you in action. You be givin’ these women hell.”

“I have to because ain’t nan bitch gon’ try me and think I ain’t with the shits. Oh, I’m definitely with the shits—”

“And is,” Hendrix clowned. “But I’m really sorry. I truly am, and I hope this doesn’t affect our friendship.”

“It’s not,” I softly said. I still liked Hendrix. I didn’t want us to be falling out over something he had no control over. “We’re still friends, and we’re still cool.”

“Cool. Your dress is ready. I even ironed it for you.”

I laughed. “Cool. You can just bring it to school on Monday.”

“Oh, so you don’t wanna come and get it?”

“Nigga, I will not be coming back to your crib for a while. You can cancel Christmas if you think that’ll happen anytime soon.”

Hendrix laughed. “I feel you. So you sure you’re alright? You ain’t sore or nothing, are you?”

“Nah, but that bitch scratched my face with them long ass nails she got. I’m sure she popped a few of them bitches off. But it’s all good. She got what she asked for, and I got what I’d wanted since her and Keisha jumped me that night. So maybe we’re even. Then again, maybe not, but anytime they try me, it’s going down. You can best believe that.”

“Oh, I do.” Hendrix grinned. “Fuckin’ thug. That’s what you are. A fuckin’ thug.” He laughed, making me laugh.

“Whatever,” I said as my doorbell rang. “A’ight, we’ll talk later. But don’t forget to bring my dress Monday if we don’t talk no more this weekend.”

“Gotcha!” he said, and we ended the call. Once off the phone, I headed to the front door as Mama came out her bedroom behind me.

“You expecting company?” she asked.

“Nah. You?”

“Nope, and Kinsley ain’t home, so I don’t know who it is,” Mama said.

I opened the door to a huge vase full of colorful roses. “Oh my God,” I said, holding my chest. This shit never got old.

“Kiyomi Simmons?”

“That’s me,” I responded, smiling from ear to ear. “These are for you.”

“Oh, those are beautiful,” Mom commented, standing just a few feet away.

“Thank you,” I said to the delivery guy. I walked in the house as I looked over at Mama.

“Is that from the guy Dodge?”

“Yesss. He sent me something similar for my birthday, remember?”

“Oh yeah. I remember. So does that mean he forgives you for being at another man’s apartment yesterday?” she asked with a raised eyebrow.

“I would hope so because I like him,” I told her, whipping out the card to see what it said.

“What does it say?”

“Maaaa, why you so nosy?”

“Because you standing here in the living room that I pay every month for. So I’m gon’ be nosy until you get in your own place.”

“You’ll still be nosy. It doesn’t matter.”

“You’re right, girl. At least you know your mama.” She teased as I laughed. I opened the card up.

***Hey, babe. I just wanna put everything behind us and move forward. We really could have something special if we just get out of our own ways. Nobody’s perfect, and I understand that more and more each day. I really wanna see you, so I’m asking that you put on something nice and meet me at your favorite restaurant, Pappadeaux. I just wanna have a nice meal over good conversation with a beautiful woman that I’d love to call my lady. Most importantly, I miss you like crazy. Catch an Uber because you’re ridin’ back with me. When you walk in, give them your name, and they’ll direct you to our table. See you at five. Don’t be late.***

I started doing a happy dance and twerking around Mama. “Girl, sit down somewhere.” She laughed.

“Aren’t you happy for me?”

“I’m happy to see you’re happy, but you let him know that I still want to meet him the proper way the next time. He seems like a nice guy because if I was in his shoes yesterday, I probably would’ve showed a lil’ more anger than he did. Finding out he’s twenty-six to your nineteen don’t quite sit right with me, but then again, I could see you talking to someone that’s a lil’ more mature, being that you’re an old soul that’s been here before. Just don’t be making me no damn grandma. I’m too young for that shit.”

I laughed. “Girl, please. I ain’t ready for no babies.”

“I hope not, so you know what that mean. Do not stop taking your birth control pills and use condoms.”

“I knooooow.”

“I’m just telling your ass because you get so caught up in love you might forget.”

“Whatever, woman.” I teased as she smelled the roses.

“I love his taste in flowers. He’s definitely a handsome guy.”

“Ain’t he?” I grinned. “He’s so fine.”



“Where his daddy at?”

I laughed out loud. “Maaaaaa! Aht-aht, we ain’t doing that.”

“Girl, don’t be hatin’ on your mama. I need some loving too.”

“Well, you won’t get it from Dodge’s daddy. I know that.” We laughed as I headed down the hall. “I’m ’bout to shower and get myself together. I have an hour and a half to get there.”

“Yeah, well, you’re doing the right thing with your slow ass.”

“Maaaaa.”

“You know I ain’t lyin’.”

I had quickly handled my business, getting myself ready, the whole time feeling super excited about this date that I was going on. All I wanted to do was wrap my arms around Dodge’s neck and thank him for forgiving me. I wasn’t doing nothing else to jeopardize what we were building.



The Uber driver pulled up in front of the restaurant as I reached inside my purse and pulled out a compact mirror to check my face. I’d applied a lil’ MAC makeup to cover the scratches from fighting and a lil’ eyeshadow to enhance my almond-shaped brown eyes. I hated to toot my own horn, but damn I was one pretty ass bitch. I smelled good, looked good, and couldn’t wait for Dodge to lay eyes on me. I was sure he was going to want our food to go after seeing how bad I was.

“Thank you,” I said to the Uber driver and got out of the car. I sashayed my lil’ jiggle ass inside the restaurant smiling from ear to ear.

“How many?” the hostess asked.

“I’m Kiyomi Simmons. I’m meeting someone that should already be here.”

“Yes, he not long ago arrived. Follow me,” she said as I followed behind her. I was so busy looking around and off to the side getting my nerves together to face the man that I absolutely adored that when we stopped and she said, “Here’s your table,” I was totally caught off guard.

“Loyal, what the fuck are you doing here?”

He frowned. “What you mean? You got the roses, right? I tried to switch it up for you. You liked ’em?”

“Oh my God! I didn’t know those roses were from you.”

“Who else would they be from?”

I frowned, giving the nigga the stankest face I could muster up. “Nigga, are you serious!” I asked, trying not to cause people to stare but was loud enough for him to understand my tone.

“Oh, you thought that nigga sent you roses and told you to come here? Think about the card I sent. Why would he be sending you some shit like that?”

I did think about it the minute I saw him, but it still could’ve come from Dodge. Plus, he’d just sent me a similar vase of roses like that for my birthday. The card was typed out with no signature. This shit had to be one of the craziest ever. “I’m outta here,” I said, turning to walk out.

As I headed for the exit, Loyal jumped up to follow me. “Come on, Ki. Give me a chance.”

“No!” I sassed, and ironically, the minute I hit the door to walk out, I bumped right into Dodge. Both of our eyes stretched wide open from the surprise of seeing each other.

“What you doing here?” he asked with a weird smile. “I was just picking up some food to surprise you,” he said, apparently not paying any attention to Loyal, who was standing directly behind me.

“Um...”

“Nigga, you too slow. Why you think she’s here? I beat you to the punch,” Loyal cut in.

*Oh boy!* I thought because at that moment, it was no more talking. Dodge hauled off and punched Loyal so hard in the face he knocked him straight off his feet. Down goes Disloyal. He hit the ground in slow motion. It was like watching paint dry. The shit was unbelievable.

A party of people close by quickly rushed over to help Loyal get up as one was saying they were calling the police. Even if Loyal wanted to fight back, he wasn’t ready for a blow like that. It left him dazed for a second or maybe even a couple of minutes. As he tried to regain his composure as to what had just happened, Dodge looked at me with an angry stare.

“So you come here with this nigga? What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“Nooo! I thought it was you,” I quickly said.

“How the fuck you could possibly think this nigga is me with his lame ass?”

“Nooo, I didn’t mean it like that. He had sent me roses and a card that said to meet him here, and I did, but I thought I was meeting you. The card

was typed out, and the roses were similar to the ones you got me for my birthday. That's why I was leaving, and he was following me, pleading that I stay. Once I saw it was him, I didn't want no parts of this."

Dodge looked over at Loyal as he was still shaking his head like he'd been trying to bounce back. Some man was in his face asking him if he was alright.

"I promise I thought I was meeting you here. I can show you the card. It's at my house. You can see it for yourself."

At that moment, Dodge's anger turned to just wanting to protect me as he walked over and grabbed Loyal by the rim of his Gucci T-shirt.

"Aye!" the man called out, trying to make Dodge turn him loose.

"Back up, homey," Dodge told the man and then directed his attention back to Loyal. "If you ever contact her again, I'm fucking you up, and I mean that. She don't want you," he said, mushing Loyal in the chest. I thought he was going to punch him again, but instead, he grabbed me by my hand. "Where's your car?"

"I caught an Uber."

"Good. Let's go."

I smiled so big, feeling like Superman had swooped in to save me, and hopefully that was the last of Loyal trying his luck in getting me back. The first thing I did when we got inside Dodge's car was block Loyal's phone number and then delete it totally out of my phone book. I was really done with his ass for good this time.

We pulled up in Dodge's driveway as I looked over at him. "I'm sorry about yesterday, and I'm sorry about earlier. I know you must think I'm a real fuckup."

"Nah, shit happens. You just so happened to get caught up in it, but that's gotta stop."

"I agree. I will be wiser from now on."

"So what does this mean?"

"What? Me and you?"

"Yeah, what do you want out of this?"

"Honestly, I really never expected to get my heart broken a few months back and be even thinking this way now. But when you left yesterday, my mama had a serious talk with me. I explained who you were and how I felt about you. She wasn't so keen on your age, but then she softened a bit because she knew that no matter how she felt, I was still gonna talk to you.

So she gave me her blessing and said that if I ever had a good person by my side, then to grab ahold of the moment and don't let go."

"She said that?"

I nodded my head. "Yep, soooooo I want you. I wanna be with you. I wanna be your right now, your later, your next year, and possibly your forever. I know that sounds premature, but something in my gut tells me that you're the one."

He smiled. "I thought it was only in my gut."

"Nah, I feel it too," I told him.

"So we're doing this?"

"Me and you against the world." I smiled.

"I like that."

"You better because you're stuck with me now."

He laughed, leaning over to kiss me. It was the sweetest, most-genuine kiss I'd ever felt. When I say this man did something to me, he did, and I was super happy to have him in my life as my person. Without saying another word, I crawled over the armrest and straddled him.

"We gon' do this right here, right now?"

I laughed while unbuckling his belt. "Kinsley always told me to keep it spicy. So that's what I'm doing."

"Say less." He grinned, and we made love in the front seat of his car. Luckily, his house was out in the country and surrounded by a private fence. We could get as nasty as we wanted with no one watching but us, and that was exactly what we did.



## DODGE GAMBLE

“I’m so excited about this Halloween party tonight.”

I smiled, looking over at Kiyomi as she laid out her costume, showing me what she was wearing.

“I’m gonna be so fine in this leather one-piece jumpsuit. You like my hair, babe?”

“Yeah, your hair looks good. They say blondes have more fun. Is that true?”

“I don’t know. You tell me. We’ve certainly been turning up a lot these past couple of weeks, and last night, this wig made me feel like I was really the real Storm from the X-Men. I caused a whirlwind in that whirlpool.”

I nodded with an approving chuckle. “You definitely did that.”

“That new mansion y’all got is bad ass! We need to stay there more often.”

“Why, because of the whirlpool?” I teased with a shake of the head.

“Yeah,” she admitted with a seductive grin.

“Back to your costume before you get me started and there won’t be a Halloween party.”

“You’re right,” she said, kissing me on the lips.

“Don’t judge me, but I’ve never watched the X-Men. None of ’em. So I don’t know who the hell Storm is.”

“Storm is played by Halle Berry. She’s the black version of Mother Nature. She can set it off at any given time. The sun can be out and lovely as ever. If Storm gets mad, she’ll turn the sun to an ice storm and fuck up your whole day.”

I laughed. "Why you playing, that sounds exactly like you."

"It is me." She laughed.

"I can see why you and Kinsley both chose the same costume. Birds of a feather flock—"

"Together, dammit."

I laughed. "I can't sit over here with you all day clowning around. I have business to tend to."

"I knooooow, but I wish you could."

"I know," I said, standing up from her bed. "The party starts at seven, so don't be late."

"Oh, we'll be on time or before time. I can't wait to see who Granny dresses like."

"Probably Madea." We laughed.

"You right. I know she's so happy about that nice ass house they live in now. Must be a huge change from living in that apartment."

"It is, and she's still getting used to it."

"I'm sure. Anyway, get on outta here. You know I can talk with you all day, especially when you're in my face."

"I know," I said, kissing her on the lips. "Text or call me if you need me."

"Will do."

I walked out the room but stopped shy of Kinsley's bedroom as she and Meech sat in there talking.

"Sorry to interrupt, but you ready?"

"Uh... yeah," Meech said as she stood up.

"A'ight, I'll be in the car." I said but directed my attention to Kinsley. "I like y'all costumes. Y'all are gonna be the Storm sisters?"

Kinsley laughed. "Yeah, something like that," she said. She had the matching blonde hairstyle as Kiyomi. I had never paid much attention to it, but they actually looked a lot alike.

"Well, I'll see y'all tonight. Make sure slowpoke ain't late."

"Oh, we'll be there early, if not before."

"Y'all not only look alike, but y'all sound alike too."

They laughed as I walked out the house. Once in the car, I took in a much-needed deep breath and then let it out. I'd had so much shit on my mind 'til it was 'bout to drive me crazy. Dontae had been hitting my line, saying that he needed his money and the remainder of his diamonds or else.

I didn't know what his *or else* meant, but I had a good idea. He said that time was running out, and he wasn't fucking around. Only problem I had was not being able to get in touch with D. I still had two months left before we'd meet up, and this shit had me on edge. I mean, Dontae could make his move at any given time before then. I highly doubted he'd wait that long to get what he'd been asking for. Surely, he knew I didn't have the diamonds and damn sho didn't have that type of money. I mean, I wasn't a broke ass nigga, but I wasn't Jay-Z type of wealthy either.

"Finally," I uttered as Meech came out the house. I wasn't trying to rush him or nothing, but I definitely had a long day ahead of me. The second he got in the car, I looked over at him.

"How'd that go?" I asked since he and Kinsley had been barely talking.

"It was smooth. I mean, she's in a much-better head space it seems. She admitted that she and her mom are having their first therapy session next week. She said that they were supposed to have an appointment two weeks ago, and apparently, her mom called and said she couldn't make it. But she said that if she doesn't go this time, she's going by herself."

"Wow, that's crazy. Well, at least she's trying to do something about whatever is going on with her."

"She still won't tell me, but I'm glad that Rosco filled me in on some of the shit that she'd dealt with in the past. It certainly explains a lot."

"Yeah, that's true. So what you think about Rosco fucking around with Apple? She seems like cool people."

"Yeah, I agree." He nodded. "She seems genuine when it comes to Kinsley too, so I respect that. When she spoke on her to Rosco, he did say that it wasn't malicious and that she definitely loved her like a sister."

"Right, because some of these hoes be telling a bitch's business with no regards whatsoever."

"Exactly. Messy bitches. But nah, she ain't like that. She was concerned it seemed, and I appreciate somebody wanting the best for her. I ain't gon' lie; I miss being with her though, but I totally get it. We could've fucked around a few times since we called ourselves going our separate ways, but I've respected her boundaries. It takes a strong woman to be able to control the flesh. Guess it's a part of her healing journey. She says she wants to be a better person overall, and that starts within. So I can respect that."

"Definitely," I agreed. "I like that about her."

"Me too," Meech said. "But—"



“But what?”

“I’ve got needs.”

“Like I don’t know that. So…”

“Yeah, I fucked Tammy the other night and Thomasina last week, a few times.”

“Nooooo, not you and Thomasina.”

“Yeah, it happened.”

“Damn, well, I guess. Shit, you are a single man. Single men can do whatever the fuck they wanna do.”

“Well, but you can’t now. Not that it stopped any of us any the past, but you seem like a different person when it comes to Kiyomi.”

“That’s because I am. I really like ‘the baby,’” I teased. “She’s more mature than a lot of these bitches I’ve dealt with, even the older ones. Sure, she has some unpredictable ways, but hey, she’s a work in progress, and so am I. I’ve had enough pussy to last me a lifetime, so that ain’t of importance. With the bag I carry, I have to move differently, live life differently. Sometimes, you have to cut certain shit off, especially these bitches in order to keep elevating. So that’s where I’m at in my life.”

“Shit, I feel ya.”

“But I don’t know how much life is left with Dontae on my ass,” I said. “This shit is bugging the fuck outta me because I don’t know his next moves. I mean, I’m staying on top of shit on this end, but I have no clue what that nigga is thinking or planning for that matter.”

“Well, let’s try not to focus on that today. Granny is really excited about this Halloween party that’s at her new house.” He smiled. “I’m so happy for her.”

“Yeah, me too.”

“Listen, we can’t stop living just because Dontae is lurking. Of course, we can’t get too relaxed—”

“Which is why I have the fellas coming to secure the spot. It’s a fucking Halloween party, and even though it’s pretty intimate and invite only, you know bogus ass bitches and niggas can still pop up with a fuckin’ mask on —”

“Hell, some of ’em have faces that’s already a damn mask.”

I laughed. “You right. So Mike and Boss Hog will be at the door, just making sure that the area is secure. I’ll also have Jeff and Mike strolling the property and keeping an eye on the guest party.”

“Sounds like a plan, and I’m definitely coming strapped. Not where nobody can see it, but trust it’ll be close by.”

“Man, I hate even thinking like this, especially at a gathering that’s supposed to be celebrating more than just Halloween. Hell, we don’t even celebrate Halloween, so it’s just a means of a theme to party and show Granny love in her new crib.”

“I already know,” Meech said just as my cell phone buzzed of an incoming text message. As I drove toward my crib, I glanced down at my phone and opened the text.

***Hey, just wanted you to have these. I’m right at three months today.***  
**KEISHA**

Attached were two sonogram pictures of the baby.

“Man, on top of all that, check this shit out,” I said, handing my phone to Meech.

He grinned with a shake of the head. “So she’s hell-bent on putting this on you?”

“She won’t quit. But listen, bro. I’m telling you that ain’t my kid. I don’t feel any ties or connections to her or it. Keisha was fucking around. That’s for sure. I know I wasn’t the only nigga hittin’ it, and on top of that, I stayed strapped up. Hell, I was strapped and still would pull out, most times spittin’ in that hoe’s mouth.”

Meech laughed. “You gon’ have to take the test to prove her ass wrong. That’s the only way you’ll get rid of her ass.”

“I already know it,” I said with a shake of the head. “I can’t wait either, because having a baby with her is the last thing I need in my life. She’ll make me and Kiyomi’s life hell.”

“Oh yeah. She gon’ do that for sho.”

“So what you doing when we make it to the crib?”

“I’m heading on over to the mansion. Speaking of mansion, that bitch badass, ain’t it?”

“You sound like Kiyomi.” I grinned. “But it is nice as hell. Yo, when are you gon’ settle down and stop all this damn skippin’ ’round? You ain’t tired of all that damn moving?”

“Hell nawl. Keeps me on my toes and folks out my business. A bitch can’t keep up, and that’s the way I like it. But I feel where you’re coming from. I think I will settle down, meaning get one spot and chill the fuck out.

Besides, it looks like the fellas are starting to catch feelings with these women, and well, I can't be staying in them big shits by myself."

"Right, same thing I was thinking because I hardly come through like that now. I prefer my alone time with my girl, not hanging around y'all wild asses."

"Exactly my point." Meech chuckled as we pulled up in my yard. Of course, I did a quick scan of the grounds, just making sure everything looked as it should. I checked my cameras throughout the day from my cell phone if I wasn't home, so I wasn't too concerned about nobody showing up here.

"I was gonna come in for a second, but I think I'm gonna head on out."

"You never said if you were wearing a costume or not."

"Oh, I am," he said.

I frowned, knowing his ass was lyin'. "Who you coming as?"

"A dope boy dressed in an all-black Dickie fit."

I laughed out loud. "Nigga, you wild!" I headed for the front door but stopped in my tracks as Meech called out.

"Aye, check this shit out!" he said, holding up a piece of paper that somebody had left on the windshield of his car.

With an instant scowl, I rushed over. "What the fuck is that?"

Meech shook his head, handing the paper to me. My gut churned the second I read it.

***Am I invited to the Halloween party?***



A part of me wanted to cancel the party, but I decided that it wouldn't have been fair to Granny and Sha, because of the time and effort they'd put in to plan the event. So here I stood outside in the backyard after greeting mostly everybody that had showed up. The costumes were nice as hell, the drinks were flowing, the buffet of scary appetizers were literally to die for, and so far, everything seemed to be running smoothly. I made sure that the fellas were checking in on a regular because someone was somewhere lurking like a muthafucka.

In a strange twist, my cameras didn't even catch whoever left that note on Meech's car, but I already knew who the culprit was. Ironically, when I

reached out to see what the fuck his deal was, the number was suddenly nonexistent. I could feel something bad happening. I just hoped that they didn't show up here with the bullshit. The last thing I needed was for Granny or my family to be caught up in the middle of some shit they had nothing to do with. But being here was the only way I felt I could watch them.

"How you feeling?" Rosco asked as he joined me in the backyard.

"I don't know how to feel. How you feeling?"

"'Bout the same," he responded as my cell phone rang. I held up a finger to answer it.

"Wassup, slowpoke. Where y'all at?" I asked.

"Me and Kinsley on the way. It wasn't me this time. It was her slow ass." Kiyomi laughed. "Anyway, we're stopping by the store right quick, and then we'll be there in less than fifteen minutes."

"What y'all stopping by the store for?"

"Kinsley wants to get a pack of cigars."

I grinned. "Go figure. Well, y'all be careful and get here soon as y'all leave the store."

"You sound worried? You alright?"

"Yeah. I just have some things going on, and the quicker you get here, the better I'll feel."

"Aww, well, say less, babe. I'm coming."

"A'ight."

As I glanced back over my shoulder at the back windows of the house, I could see my family and friends on the inside enjoying themselves, dancing to the loud music, and having a good time.

"Well, the party is nice as hell. Granny and Sha did a good ass job getting this together."

"They did." I nodded. "Well, I think you'll feel better after the news I'm about to tell you," Rosco said as Meech stepped outside.

"Good, I've been waiting on you to get out here."

"Yeah, what's this about?" I asked, being that Rosco was the one that asked I meet him in the backyard. Apparently, he'd asked Meech the same thing.

"Yeah, what's up? You know I'm on the lookout. I don't need no distractions," Meech added.

"I think this distraction will be well worth it."

“If it ain’t about knowing what Dontae is up to, then I doubt it’s of importance, but...” I hesitated as a nigga dressed in all black stepped out from the side of the house, wearing a scully covering his face with the eyes and lips cut out. Quickly, I reached for my gun that was neatly tucked in the back of my pants.

“Whoa!” Rosco yelled out with his hands in the air while quickly jumping in front of the dude. Not only was my gun ready to blaze this nigga, but so was Meech, who had also whipped out his piece.

“Y’all, chill!” Rosco exclaimed as he moved to the side, and then my heart left my chest—

“Yoo,” the guy said, removing the scully. “It’s me, D—”

I literally could’ve fainted as I stood just watching this nigga in the flesh. I couldn’t believe he was here. After two agonizing years, he was actually here. To be in shock at this moment was an understatement. D slowly walked over to me, both of us with instant tears streaming down our faces. As I looked him over, examining his appearance, he stood doing the same. It felt like an out-of-body experience and a dream come true all rolled in one. Then he wrapped his arms around me. This was when I knew it was real as I tightly gripped him back.

“Man, I’ve missed you, baby boy!” he said.

I was choked up like a muthafucka, but I managed to get it together so I could talk. “I’ve missed you too,” I said through relieved tears. The embrace seemed to last forever until my phone started ringing. At first, I paid it no mind, but it started ringing again. I backed away for a second to look at the display screen. It was Kiyomi. “Hold up,” I said, wiping my face. “This my new girl.”

“Oh, he has a new girl?” D jokingly asked Rosco and Meech as they laughed but were also wiping tears of joy from their faces.

“Wassup, bae?” I answered, putting it on speaker so D could hear her sultry voice. But all we heard was screaming in the phone so loud I nearly dropped it just from the sounds of knowing that she was somewhere in danger. “Kiyomi!” I called out as my heart raced.

“Somebody took Kinsley!” she cried out. “They took her, babe!”

D looked at me through fearful eyes. and the only word that came out of his mouth was the first thing that popped in my mind.

“Dontae!”

To Be Continued...

## AFTERWORD

Note to my Readers: Dr. Elise Harris is also the psychologist and main character in *The First Wife*. It's a three-part series right now, but I'm working on part four, which I believe might be the last one. It'll be released sometime in 2022. So if you'd like to know more about her, check it out.

OTHER BOOKS WRITTEN BY TIECE...

- \*Just Can't Leave Him Alone 1-5, Originally Titled, CheckMate (Complete Series)**
- \*Classy & Ratchet, Originally Titled, Ratchet Bitches 1-2**
- \*Dopeboyz & the Women That Love 'Em**
- \*The First Wife 1-3 (Part 4 still in the works)**
- \*Shanice Capone's Truth, A Shorty Story (Located at the end of The First Wife part 3)**
- \*Southern Gossip 1-2**
- \*It's Either Me or Her 1-2**
- \*Ms. Thang and The Connect 1-2 (Complete Series)**
- \*Crushin' On a Down South Boss; 1- & 2 Coming Soon.**
- \*Rich Boy Thuggin' Is A Whole Vibe (A Complete Novel)**
- \*Thug Me Good & Lie to Me; A Thug Romance (A Continued Series)**
- \*A Boss Valentine in Atlanta (A Short Story)**
- \*These Games We Play**
- \*Shorty Found Love with a Dope Boy, Originally Titled, Thug Lovin' Is the Best Lovin' 1-2  
(Now A Standalone Novel)**
- \*My Girl Got a Girlfriend 1-2 (Now A Standalone Novel)**
- \*For The Love of My Trap King 1-2 Originally Titled, Shawty Is My Rock (A completed Series,  
Will be turned into a Standalone Novel)**

## BOXSETS

**\*Falling In Love with The Goat 1-3 (Complete Series) Available in a 3-book Box Set.**

**\*I Need Love 1-4, Originally Titled, SCARLETT (Complete Series) Available in a 4-book boxset**

**\*Drunk in Love 1-4 (Complete Series) Available in a 4-book boxset**

**\*Woman To Woman 1-3 (Complete Series) Available in a 3-book Boxset**

**Coming Soon in a Boxset:**

**Ms. Thang & The Connect 1-2 Complete Series**

**The catalog is continually being updated with each new release, title change, or boxset release...  
Stay tuned...**



Cole Hart  
SIGNATURE NOVELS

## THANK YOU

To our loyal Cole Hart Signature readers,

Cole Hart Signature is always growing and changing. Some of you have been following Cole Hart since the beginning of his career, while others have seen us go from Cole Hart Presents to Cole Hart Signature. Then there are our daily new supporters who've only known us for what we are as a company today. Despite our changes, how or when you became a fanatic, we want to kindly thank you for the support.

We appreciate all our Cole Hart Readers because without every single one of you, we wouldn't be the company we are today.

If this book is your first introduction to our company, welcome! And be sure to sign up for email list by click the link, <https://geni.us/ColeHartReaderSignUp>, and joining out text-mail list by texting ColeHartSig to (833) 617-0182. Cole Hart Signature also has a Facebook group where fans get to discuss the plot, characters, overall releases about their favorite book. If itching for new and interesting conversation, click the link, <https://geni.us/ColeHartSignatureRead>, to join today!

Lastly, Cole Hart Signature is always interested in partnering with aspiring authors, new or experienced, who thrive in the African Urban Fiction and

Romance Fiction genre. If you're interested in joining our team, go to [www.colehartsignature.com/submissions](http://www.colehartsignature.com/submissions).

Once again, we truly appreciate all the support over the years.

Much Love,  
CHS

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