



PROPERTY

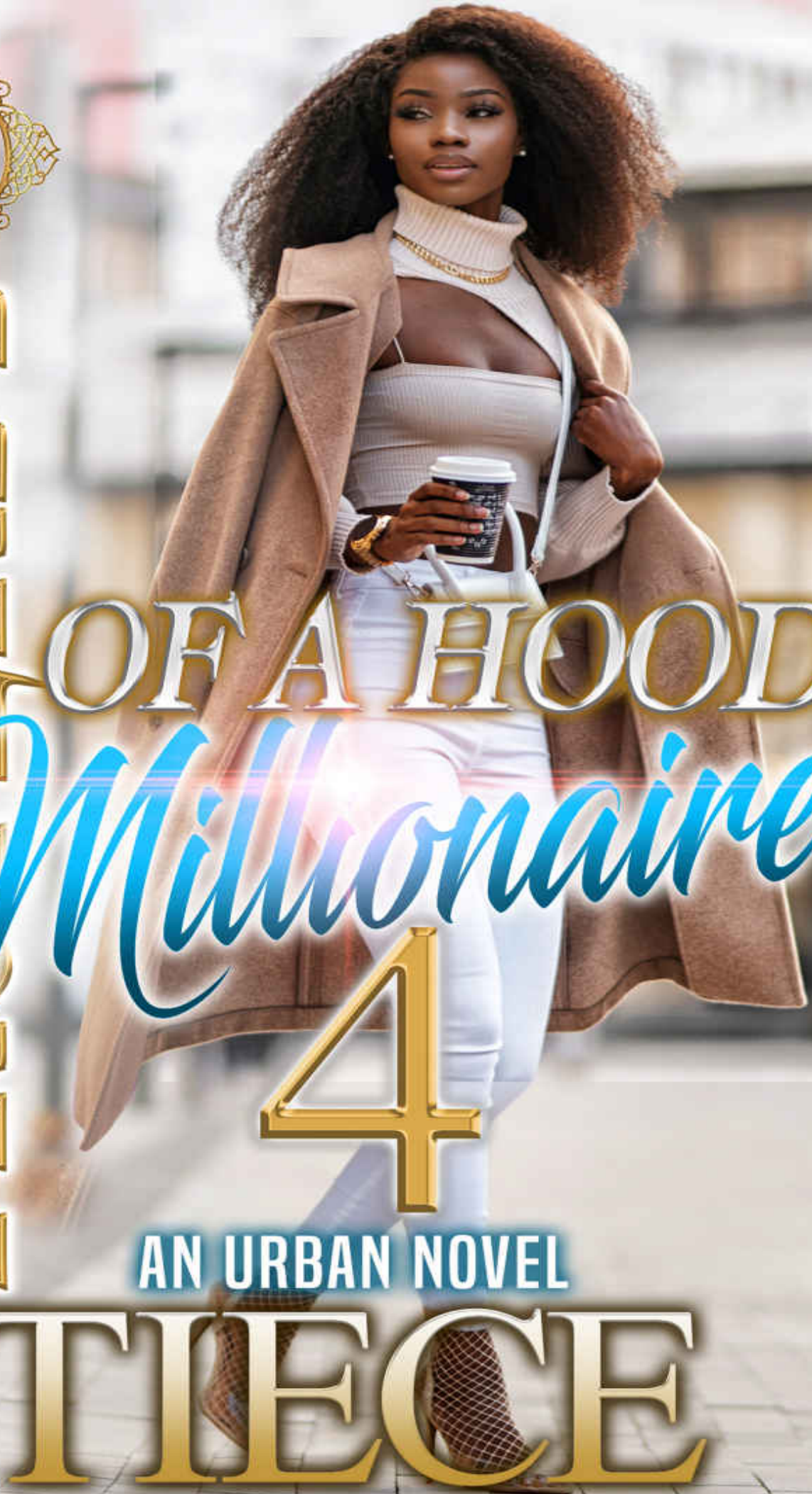
OF A HOOD

Millionaire

4

AN URBAN NOVEL

TIECE



PROPERTY OF A HOOD MILLIONAIRE 4

An Urban Novel

TIECE



Property Of A Hood Millionaire 4

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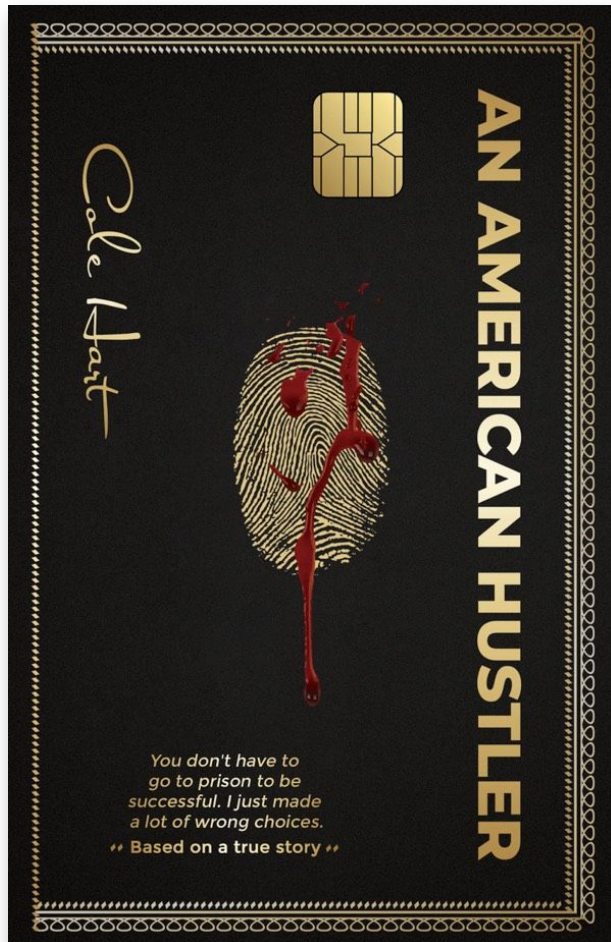
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FROM CEO COLE HART



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KIYOMI SIMMONS

I walked inside the house, sitting the car seat carrying the baby on the kitchen countertop. I was disgusted and irritated that this bitch would have the fucking nerves to drop her baby off on Dodge's porch like that. Who the fuck was this bad mammy having ass hoe? First off, she had the kid a whole week or two ahead of schedule and didn't even tell him. Now, she's playing hide and seek talking about Mommy is gone and can he take care of a baby that he don't even believe is his. This had to be some big screen, Netflix type of shit, because I felt like I was in a damn movie.

I sat on the bar stool at the island countertop, but on the other end down from the baby seat. Lord knows that baby didn't do a damn thang to me, but I wasn't even trying to look at him. I angrily rolled my eyes. It was entirely too early to be dealing with this shit. I couldn't—

“Bae, you ok?”

“No,” I responded, as Dodge joined me in the kitchen. He sat a black diaper bag that apparently I'd overlooked, over on the dining table. “Does that baby bag say Burberry too?” I asked, while earlier peeping that the throw blanket over the car seat was also Burberry.

Dodge nodded. “Yeah.”

“Burberry shit ain't cheap at all. Who the fuck spends that kind of money on a newborn baby that she leaves on the front porch of somebody's house? It's giving me mixed, dumb ass hoe vibes.”

“Yeah, same thing I'm thinking. It's just not adding up.”

“I noticed a D and a G embroidered on his throw blanket. Please tell me that bitch didn't name that baby Dodge Gamble.”

Dodge simply shook his head. “I was so outdone when she came out the back carrying him that I totally forgot to ask what his name was. But, if she done named that baby after me, I know something.”

“Whew chile,” I uttered. “This shit is getting crazier by the second.”

“The bitch done lost her everlasting mind. I never in a million years thought she’d pull some shit like this. Out of all the unpredictable, crazy things she’s done, this has got to be the wildest one. The baby is only a week old. What kind of mama is she? I don’t even know what to do. I’m beyond fucking annoyed at this point.”

“You and me both,” I uttered. “So, what now?”

“Hell, I have no clue,” he griped, walking in the bedroom, and then returning with his cellphone.

“Who you calling?”

“Her retarded ass,” he answered, now with the phone on speaker. Instantly, it went to voice mail.

“What kind of games is she playing?”

Dodge shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know, but I ain’t with this shit. If I know Keisha even a little bit, I wouldn’t think she’d leave him here for too long. Maybe this is her way of trying to get me to hold him, spend time ___”

“Bond with him,” I cut in. “She didn’t leave this baby here for nothing. She wants something. The bitch might be crazy but she’s making smart plays. I can’t say if it’ll work out in her favor, but she’s acting like it will,” I said, looking over at the car seat as if I could see the baby through it. The throw blanket still covered him up. “You sure this ain’t your baby?”

Dodge looked over at me with a frown on his face. “Really bae?”

“Yeah, really.” I nodded. “Could this baby be yours? I mean, Keisha has left him here. You could easily have the test done, especially now, and if he’s yours and if that bitch ain’t back, then you’ll have no choice but to bond with your son.”

“Don’t be talking like that. I’m already aggravated,” he impatiently responded.

“How else am I supposed to talk, though? I don’t know what to think. I’m sure you don’t know what to think either. But this bitch has it all thought the fuck out. She’s clearly a few steps ahead and we’re sitting here looking like dumb and dumber.”

“Her stupid ass gon’ be sittin’ behind bars if I call DEFAX on her ass. Order them muthafuckin’ steps—”

“Oh Lord, don’t say it.” I chuckled a little under my breath. Dodge could be quite funny when he wanted to be. As I sat there not knowing exactly what Keisha had up her sleeve, Dodge called her phone again, and again it went straight to voice mail.

“I know who to call.”

“Who?”

“Kay,” he answered. “She gotta know something.”

“Yeah, hopefully, since she’s the one that’s always stuck up Keisha’s ass.”

He placed the call, and it rang till it went to voice mail. I frowned. “You think she’s not answering because Keisha told her not to?”

“No fuckin’ telling, but I’ll pull up on her ass. See how they feel if I leave the fuckin’ baby on their doorstep.”

I quickly shot him the side-eye. “Baaeeee, don’t do that. Come here,” I said, to try and cool him off. “Come here,” I softly commanded. Dodge eased his way over to me. I could tell he was blowed and didn’t know what to do. He stood between my legs. “Don’t say that. At the end of the day, the baby did nothing to nobody. He can’t help that his mammy is a wide back, unpredictable, dumb ass hoe.”

Dodge grinned. “Stop it. The baby might hear you.”

I grinned. “Says the person that’ll leave the fuckin’ baby on their doorstep.” We laughed, as he wrapped his arms around me and then kissed me tenderly on the forehead.

“Keisha is not getting away with this dumb shit. I’m telling you now.”

“Oh, I know, but meantime, you have to figure out what you’re gonna do about the baby.”

He looked over at the car seat. “He’s sleeping right now.”

“Yeah, but when he wakes up he’ll need his pamper changed. You’ll need to feed him because he might get fussy—”

“Oh, you ain’t helping me with that?”

I looked at him with an unsure expression, then a blank stare followed by a sincere smile. “No sir. You’re on your own with this one.”

“Bae, really?”

“Yep, now move,” I playfully told him, while pushing his ass from between my legs. “I’m outta here.”

“Wow, you’re really leaving me?”

“I would love to stay, baby.” I grinned with a shake of the head. “But unt-unt.”

“Yo,” he called out, as I walked out the kitchen and headed to his bedroom. “You serious?”

“Yes sir,” I answered, putting on my clothes then my shoes. I grabbed the Louis Vuitton purse that he’d just bought me. “And I’m taking my gift too.”

He grinned. “You so dirty.”

“But I love youuuu,” I sang in a silly tone, as I walked past him. He was right on my heels like a toddler following his mommy. As I made my way through the kitchen, I looked over at the car seat again. My heart sank. I’d been keeping it together the entire time, but I was sick over this shit. I just couldn’t show it. Last thing I wanted was for Dodge to think I couldn’t handle Keisha’s shenanigans. Plus, I wasn’t leaving him no matter what, so if that was Keisha’s plan, she was in for a rude awakening.



I stepped in the house, witnessing a fat belly Kinsley sitting on the sofa Indian style and eating out of a pint-size bucket of salted, malted, chocolate chip cookie dough by Salt and Straw. Some of the best handmade ice cream that one could order online.

“Where you been?” she asked with a mouthful of the good stuff.

“Where you think?” I asked, plopping down beside her.

“You stayed the night with Dodge?”

“Yep,” I nodded.

“What’s that look about?”

“Just irritated, I guess.”

“About—”

“You don’t even wanna know.”

“I wouldn’t have asked if I didn’t wanna know, heffa.”

“It’s Keisha.”

“I keep telling you to stop letting that bird brain hoe get under your skin.”

“Well, she has definitely taken things way too far this time.” I sighed with an annoyed smack of the lips. “She had the baby.”

Kinsley’s surprised eyes widened, as she instantly stopped eating and looked over at me. “Oh, really? When?”

“A week ago.”

“What?! Dodge just now telling you? Oh, that’s some foul shit, sus. He must know that baby his. To think I actually liked his ass. How dare he keep that news from you. I can’t believe—”

“Damn, breathe bitch,” I cut in. She was talking so fast, wasn’t giving me time to explain shit. “He didn’t know. He went over last night to talk with her, and she walks out with a baby. That’s when he found out.”

“I know you fuckin’ lyin’!”

“Wish I was. Shit, I’m still in disbelief.”

“So, then what? She must know that baby ain’t his then. Ain’t no way she had a baby a whole fuckin’ week ago and didn’t tell that nigga. I know better.”

“Hell, I thought I did too, but that’s not even the half of it.”

“It can’t get no worse,” she expressed with a slight pause to eat another scoop of ice cream. “But then again,” she added while chewing. “We are talking about a dizzy bitch.”

“Exactly,” I uttered. “Well, check this unbelievable shit out. We wake up this morning to the doorbell ringing—”

“This early?”

“Yep, and you know the first thing comes to mind is Keisha and her bullshit.”

“Spill the tea. What the dumb hoe do now?”

“It was her—”

“At the door?”

“Yea and no.”

Kinsley frowned. “Huh?”

“When Dodge got to the door, she was gone but the baby was there.”

“Hold up, bitch. I’m confused. She left the baby on Dodge’s porch?”

I nodded my head. “Mm-hm—”

“Did Dodge call DEFAX? Because I’d have her ass locked the fuck up. What’s her problem? He need to teach her ‘bout playing—”

“He really do,” I cut in. “But, of course, he didn’t call. I wished he would’ve though,” I added.

“Well, did he at least call her ass? I mean, where the fuck is she?”

“Who knows? He called but it sent him to straight to voice mail. He called Kay too, but she ain’t even answering her phone.”

“So, what the fuck?!”

I shrugged. “I don’t know. I left him there with the baby. I couldn’t do that shit. I mean, he ain’t did nothing to me, but just the thought of him possibly being Dodge’s and having to deal with Keisha gives me uncertain butterflies, the kind I don’t like.”

“I know right,” Kinsley uttered, passing me the ice cream. “Eat some of this. You’ll feel better.”

“Okay,” I uttered, taking the ice cream. “But I doubt I’ll feel better. My feelings are hurt. This girl literally left her newborn baby on his porch and hauled ass. On top of that, he has a throw blanket with the initials DG on it.”

Kinsley scowled. “I know you fuckin’ lyin’!”

“I wish I was,” I expressed with a shake of my head.

“So, what’s his name? Dodge Gamble? How she pulled that one off?”

“I don’t know his name. Dodge don’t either. He never asked and she never told him.”

“That’s some bullshit. So, he got a whole baby and don’t know his name?”

“Yep.”

“Damn.”

“I know right. If this baby is his, that lets me know that she’ll go to the ends of the earth to try and sabotage our relationship. More so, to either get Dodge back or to drive him completely insane.”

“If it’s either of those options, I’m sure it’ll be to drive him completely insane, because ain’t no way he’s taking her grimy ass back, baby or no baby.”

“Not if I’m in the picture anyway. I just don’t know how to play at her game. It’s a lot, girl. As I walked to the car with Dodge standing in the door watching me, the baby had started crying. I didn’t even look back at him. Maybe I should’ve stayed and helped him. He probably don’t even know how to change a pampers, but—”

“That ain’t your problem. Let him figure this shit out first. We do know that he’ll stop at nothing to get that blood test done, especially now. Until he knows what’s really going on, don’t get too involved in this mess. Keep

your distance but not too far. We don't want her thinking it's sweet because it's not."

"I got you," I uttered, eating a scoop of ice cream. "So, what's going on with you? You only eat ice cream like this when you're on edge about something."

"Well, lately I've been on edge about a whole lot. I'm doing this baby shower next month—"

"Uh—we're doing this baby shower next month and it's going to be on Mother's Day. It'll always be a day to remember. So, don't ever forget you're not alone in any of this."

"I know but on top of that, I'm also looking for my own place. I would like to be in my own crib by the time I have the baby."

"Why are you moving so fast though? This is your first baby. You should stay home with us, so we can help you out."

"What you mean, sus? You moving in with me."

I laughed. "Bitch, I never said I was doing all that. My mama still cooks for me," I clowned.

"Well, your mama been a lil' preoccupied with her new man lately. Sammy has had her ass tied down. Since her job laid her off, they've been taking trips out of town and round here acting like teenagers in love. I almost caught 'em fucking in the laundry room the other day. Talk about embarrassing had she knew I was standing outside the laundry door."

"Hush." I frowned, almost wanting to cover my ears.

"Seriously, I just tiptoed off, but my face was looking just like yours."

"Get a room why don't they?" I laughed, still frowning.

"But Auntie living her best life. We need to let her do that. She ain't been in a serious relationship in a long time. She deserves to be happy."

"True." I nodded. "I'm happy for her. I just hate Sammy is Roz's daddy. I mean, damn, what a small world. Now, she's not talking to me. She's acting like I'm fucking her daddy. I ain't have nothing to do with him and Mama hooking up. Hell, we just met the man ourselves."

"You know what? Roz better get her shit together. Why she round here pissed at you for something you had no control over? Disloyal is gon' ruin her ass. That's the nigga she need to be worried about. She better get some thick skin, because his ass gon' fuck with her heart and her mind. Not only can't sus fight, but she's a big ass emotional baby. She is no match

whatsoever for Disloyal. We know he's only doing that to fuck with you. Too bad she ain't smart enough to see it."

"You're right about that. Sad part is I really like Roz. I loved our friendship and if I could get that back, I would. She just gotta be on the same page. I already don't fuck with females as is, and this is why." I shrugged. "I be wanting to knock a bitch out 'bout trying me."

Kinsley laughed.

"See, that's why I have you. Yes, I love me some Sha. She gets me also, but you know I don't kiss ass. So, if Roz can't get it together, then I'll act just like I don't know her."

"I already know," Kinsley agreed, getting the ice cream back. "Sooo, Meech wants to be a part of planning the baby shower."

"And I hope you're not opposed to that."

"I'm not." She smiled. "I want him to be there. It's been so long since I saw Gianni and even though I feel like I'm missing something, I can't dwell on what we had. It was brief and sweet, but that was it. I've learned that people come into your life for a reason and a season. Maybe his presence was for a reason. I was able to release a lot of bad memories when we'd talk. I spoke on things that I never would've ever mentioned, not even in therapy. But he made it a safe space to speak freely and for that, I'll forever be grateful to him."

"What kind of things did you talk about?"

She shrugged, eating a scoop of the ice cream. "I'm not in the mood to go back there, but just know it finally felt good to get some things off my chest. Maybe one day I'll share with you, just not today."

"Okay." I nodded, not wanting to press the issue. Even though I was surprised that she had shared something so personal with Gianni and not with me, I was still grateful that whatever it was, helped her. "Well, if ever you want to talk about it, just know I'm here."

"I know."

"So, are you excited about finding out what you're having?"

"Yes!"

"The baby reveal is coming up." I cheesed. I know what it is, and I haven't even told Mama. She keeps asking me with her nosey butt, but no ma'am."

Kinsley laughed. "Give me a hint."

"Wouldn't you like that, but unt-unt." I laughed.

“Meech wants a boy.”

I slightly frowned. “So, you think the baby is his now?”

“I don’t know what to think. He does, though, because he keeps saying that he knows it’s his son. He can feel it. He might be on to something, because I can’t feel whether this kiddo belongs to him or Gianni. I will be heartbroken if it’s not Meech’s, simply because he’s so invested. Weirdly enough, though, he’s still fucking these bitches, and that confuses me. You would think that he’d be working to get me back, but he’s more focused on the baby. I think he resents the fact that I slept with Gianni. Matter of fact, I know he does.”

“He was fucking Thomasina and any other hoe that swung his way before you even slept with Gianni, so he can sit his ass down somewhere. I hate when men feel like they can do hoe boy shit but be in their feelings when the shoe is on the other foot. Let him be mad about it, though. Those are his feelings not yours. You swallowed them pills, now let him swallow that one. You don’t question him. You don’t go off when you feel disrespected by his bitches. You just brush it off, but I’m telling you, anytime you need me to knock a bitch out just say it—”

“No, we are no longer knocking bitches out. Okay.”

“Mh-mm.”

“Being pregnant has changed me. I’ve become a lot mushier but definitely accepting of the things that I can’t change. I be cooling for the most part.”

“I know, which is a side that I’m not used to seeing. I guess the boujee kidnapper changed you.”

She laughed. “I said it’s the baby.”

“And if it’s Gianni’s then what?”

She shrugged. “Don’t wanna think about that right now.”

“Okay,” I said, as my phone chirped from an incoming text message. I glanced down at it.

I just left the baby on Keisha’s porch. DODGE

IKYFL! YOMI

I’m serious. I’ll call you in a little bit. DODGE

(surprised emoji) OMG! Bae! You better not leave that baby out there!

YOMI

I didn’t know if Keisha was home, or if Dodge was testing me, but whatever it was had me feeling some type of way. Ironically, I felt bad for

this baby. He just didn't know the world of drama he had entered. His mammy had to be the craziest woman on earth and now her erratic, selfish ways were rubbing off on my man. I just hoped he wasn't serious about leaving him on her porch. Suddenly, I became anxious. Dodge had better hurry up and call me back, so I could find out what the hell was really going on.

DODGE GAMBLE

I sat in my truck tapping lightly on the steering wheel, as I watched from where I was parked at to see if anybody opened the door. My heart sank while knowing that I'd just left a newborn on this bitch's porch. I sighed. What the fuck was she doing to me? I wasn't this person. Clearly, she was driving me crazy, slowly but surely.

"Open the door," I said to no one at all. I couldn't take my eyes off the car seat or Keisha's front door. Honestly, I didn't see Keisha or Kay's car parked in the driveway, but that didn't mean they weren't parked in the garage. I sat in silence waiting for about three more minutes. It really felt like I'd sat there for hours. Damn, I felt bad as fuck. I jumped out of my truck and hurriedly made my way to the car seat, just as the baby started crying. Shit made me wanna cry just for stooping to Keisha's petty ass level.

"Ok, I'm sorry. I'm here," I admitted, trying to shush the baby by rocking the car seat as I walked back to my truck. I opened the backdoor and buckled the car seat down, as I removed the blanket and looked at him. I stared for a minute, as he continued to cry. Noticing his pacifier, I reached down beside him to grab it and put it in his mouth. Instantly, he latched on and stopped crying. For a few seconds, I was dazed trying to see who he looked like. It was only at this moment I started to doubt if he really was mine. But before I could entertain the thought further, my cell phone rang. I closed the door of my truck shut and rushed around to the driver side. As I jumped in, I picked up my phone to answer it. Mainly to stop the noise so the baby wouldn't start back crying.

“Wassup bae?”

“I know damn well you ain’t leave that baby on Keisha’s doorstep.”

I grinned. I had to laugh to stop myself from crying. “I did.”

“Dodge! Go get that damn baby! Was she there?”

“Nobody came to the door, but he only sat there for a couple of minutes. I never even left. You know I wouldn’t do no shit like that.”

“Boy, I was about to say. I know better. That crazy ass lady starting to rub off on you.”

“I know.” I sighed, while pulling off.

“You can’t let her get to you, bae.”

“I know, but I wasn’t expecting to wake up and have to take care of a baby. I don’t even know how long she’s going to be gone.”

“I highly doubt it’ll be long at all. She might be a lil’ crazy, but she doesn’t seem to be the type that would ditch her son, especially with her believing it’s by you.”

I got quiet on the phone. This had to be some of the weirdest shit I’d ever had to deal with. Why was I starting to have doubts? I mean, damn. I used condoms and even pulled out, so I couldn’t understand how or when or

“Babe, you there?”

“Uh, yeah. I just got caught up in my thoughts.”

“Where are you heading?”

“I’m about to stop by Mr. Henry’s house.”

“Keisha’s daddy?”

“Yeah, I don’t know what else to do.”

“Well, at this point, it can’t hurt. He might keep the baby until she comes back. Hell, she might be hiding out over there.”

“No telling, but if she’s not there I’m definitely not banking on him babysitting. That man has a bad back.”

“Damn, that’s really fucked up, baby.”

“I know.”

“So, did you change him?”

“No.”

“Why? You don’t know how?”

“I do, but I didn’t.”

“Your ass don’t,” she laughed. “It’s ok if you don’t know.”

“Hush, I do.” I grinned.

“You should’ve changed him then. Did you try to feed him?”

“No, I’m just trying to drop him off where his mama at. She can do all that.”

“Babe, I need you to tighten up,” she said, just as the baby started back crying. “Well, get off this phone and call me when you make your pit stop at Mr. Henry’s house.”

I sighed with a slight huff. “I will, babe,” I responded, and then ended the call. I glanced in the rearview at the back of the car seat. “Ok, little man. We’ll be pulling up at your granddaddy’s house shortly. Please, let your foolish ass mama be there.” The baby’s cries got louder, as I shook my head. “I’m sorry. I’ll stop talking about her.”

I pulled up to Mr. Henry’s new house. I was happy to see that he’d made it out Project Ville. That place was holding him back. Hell, it held a lot of us back. Thank God we were able to survive and make it out alive.

I jumped out the truck and quickly made my way around to the baby. He was still crying. His lil’ voice had gotten hoarse it seemed from crying so much. If this was what it was like being a father, I didn’t think I ever wanted kids. “Ok, ok,” I said, as I grabbed the car seat and walked up to Mr. Henry’s door.

“Who is it?”

“It’s me, Mr. Henry,” I answered loudly.

Mr. Henry opened the door with a slight smile on his face. “I’ve been expecting you. Come in.”

“What do you mean, expecting me?” I asked, walking in and immediately sitting the car seat down on the sofa.

“Ohhh, come to Poppy,” Mr. Henry said, as he began to unstrap the baby to get him out. He held him up close to his chest, taking in a few deep sniffs. “You haven’t changed him, have you?”

“No sir,” I answered. “But what you mean by you were expecting me?”

“Here,” Mr. Henry said, as he pulled out his cell phone and scrolled to his messages. “Read this while I change him. This lil’ rascal got some shit on him. You ain’t smell that?” He frowned, grabbing the baby bag.

“Nah, I wasn’t paying much attention. All I could think about was why your daughter left him with me and hauled ass.”

“Well, read the message she sent me. I’ll be back with this little guy after I get him cleaned up.”

I nodded, after I’d gotten the cell phone from Mr. Henry.

“That man ain’t changed Poppy’s baby? What’s wrong with him and your mama?” he asked, as I shook my head watching him disappear down the hall.

“Nah, what’s wrong with his mama?” I mumbled, as I began to read the text message.

Hey Daddy. I know you’re gonna think I’m crazy for what I’ve done, but I did it for good reason and out of love for my son. I’ve been struggling with my mental health for a while now, but being pregnant had damn near tipped me over the edge. Once I had the baby, I tried to shake it off and be here for him. I can’t lie, he definitely made me feel better, but I can’t do this. There have been moments where I’d wake up in the middle of the night with suicidal thoughts. Never have I thought about hurting him, so don’t think that. However, I’m no good for him either if I’m in this state of mind. I’ve fought against these urges since he’s been here, and I can’t take it no more. Putting on this brave face isn’t working anymore, either. I smile to hide the pain that I’ve struggled with for years, and it’s finally caught up with me. I know you’ve been saying I needed help ever since mom died and I refused it. I simply held on to the anger and took it out on everybody around me. However, the only person it has truly affected was me, and not in a good way. I’m tired of being this bitch of a daughter that’s hard to deal with. I’m tired of fighting to prove my love. I’m just tired of feeling like this, period. So, I’ve signed up for a four-week mental wellness retreat with a well-known psychologist that guarantees to help heal me of my depression.

Don’t worry about me, I’ll be fine. Dodge has our son. I’m sure he’s going to come by because he had no idea that I was going to leave him. Yes, that was definitely bad parenting skills, but I knew he was home. Plus, I circled back to make sure he had come to the door to get him off the porch. I love my baby and I want nothing more than to be the best mommy I can be for him. He deserves that.

Please make sure that Dodge takes care of him until I return. I’m sure he’s going to have a fit that I left him like that, but it’s his responsibility as his father to watch him when I’m not around. Tell him to just suck it up and be the man that I know he can be to our child.

Kiss my baby for me when you see him. Tell Kay to help relieve Dodge sometimes, so that he doesn’t feel overwhelmed, but don’t let him push my

baby off on y'all to stay until I get back. He's been dodging me far too long now. It's time he steps up as a man and do what's right. Period.

I love you, Daddy. No matter how much of a headache I am, I really love you. KEISHA

I found myself reading over the text message a third time. I couldn't believe Keisha had left me like this and was gone for four whole weeks. That was a damn month that she expected me to keep her baby. I knew she was bat shit crazy, but I didn't know she was that damn crazy. I guess her mental health was important, and I hated reading that she'd been having suicidal thoughts because I wouldn't wish that on nobody. No matter how much I despised her ass, I still didn't want her to be going through something like this. I just hated she used me as a pawn to take care of her baby.

"So, what you think?" Mr. Henry asked as he joined me. "Did you read it?"

"Yeah, like three times."

"And?"

"And? I hate she's going through this, but that baby ain't my responsibility."

Mr. Henry sighed. "I don't know what to make out of this. Keisha is erratic and does the strangest things at times. She's always been like that, even before their mom died. It just got worse when that happened. She's been adamant about him being yours," he said, while feeding the baby. Hell, I was so caught up in the text message that I didn't even realize he had fixed him a bottle.

"So, what's his name? I noticed DG on his blanket," I said, hoping that Keisha hadn't done what I was thinking.

Mr. Henry grinned, as he glanced down at the baby.

"What?" I asked, as my heart seemingly pounded faster while waiting for an answer.

"His name is Dolce Gabbana."

I frowned. "Stop the madness, Mr. Henry."

"I'm serious. She named him Dolce Gabbana Henry. She says his last name will be updated when you sign his birth certificate."

I shook my head, almost speechless at this point. "Hold up, so Keisha named him Dolce Gabbana?" I asked again. "DG."

"Yep, DG." Mr. Henry chuckled. "Only my daughter."

“You’re right. Only your daughter. She better hope they don’t sue her ass for infringement.”

Mr. Henry laughed. “That’s exactly what I told her.”

“So, since it seems like you know how to take care of a baby and he is your grandson, I think he should stay here with you.”

“Oh, no. I can’t do this. Not on an everyday basis. He is my grandson and I love him, but Keisha left him with you, not me.”

“Yeah, but Mr.—”

“No, son. I’m sorry. You’re on your own with this one.”

I sighed. “So I keep hearing. You know if I call Child Protective Services on Keisha she’s going to jail.”

“Only if you prove the baby ain’t yours,” he shot back with a sarcastic stare. “I mean, take the test. Find out if he’s yours. Keisha doesn’t have to be here for you to do that.”

“I figured.”

“So, get it done. I mean, after all, she did leave him with you. Apparently, she knew what you would do. It seems to me that she wants you to do it.”

“You’re right.” I nodded. “I don’t even know how to take care of a baby though.”

“Think about it. Just because Keisha’s a mom this is her first child too. I’m sure she’s just as new to this as you are,” he said, burping the sleeping the baby and then securely putting him back in his car seat. “Of course, I’m here if you need me, but—” he said, glancing down at his watch. “I have some place to be in about an hour and I have to get myself together.”

“Oh, I don’t wanna hold you. Guess I’ll figure this out,” I told him, as I grabbed the car seat and threw the baby bag straps over my shoulder.

“Everything you need is in Dolce’s bag. That stuff should last you for a couple of weeks. Maybe not the pampers, but he’s a newborn. You can easily shop for those.”

“Okay, I guess,” I responded. Honestly, I was clueless as a muthafucka, but there was one thing Mr. Henry was right about, and that was getting the paternity test done. “A’ight, I’ll keep you updated, because once the test proves I’m not his daddy, I’ll be back to drop him off and this will be between y’all, not me.”

“Do what you gotta do, son.” Mr. Henry grinned. “See ya later, Poppy’s baby.”

I walked out the house and headed for my truck. Once I had buckled down the car seat, I headed straight to Granny's house. I needed help and she was the perfect person that I could lean on.

As I drove to her house, my mind began to wander like crazy. Was it really something that Keisha knew that I didn't? What the fuck?! I screamed inside. This shit was un-fuckin'-believable.

In no time, I was pulling up to Granny's house. My mind had been rambling so long that I didn't even remember how we got here. I got out the car, walking around the truck and opening the back door to get the baby out. I knew Granny was going to freak out the minute she saw him. No telling if that would be good or bad, but I was about to find out.

I walked in the house, just as Sha entered the entertainment room where I was sitting the car seat down on the large, round ottoman.

"Who baby?" she pondered in a high-pitched tone.

"Hush girl, with yo' big mouth."

"Who baby?" she asked again, like she didn't give two fucks what I'd just said.

"Keisha's—"

"I know you fuckin' lyin'!" she shrieked, as I shot her the side-eye.

"Shhhh—"

Now in a softer whisper, she asked, "What the hell are you doing with Keisha's baby?! I didn't even know she had it."

"Hell, me neither," I said with a shake of the head. "Man, listen, long story short, Keisha had the baby. I showed up to her house yesterday evening to talk with her and she comes out the back with a baby."

"Wow—"

"I was even more surprised than you. He's a week old, she tells me. On top of that, she hands him to me. I don't know what to think—"

"So, you take him with you?!" she asked in a high-pitched whisper.

"No. Hell nawl," I assured her. "I told her that we could go through the DNA swab this morning, but instead, she dropped the baby off on my damn porch."

"She did what?" Granny asked as she joined us. "I've heard everything that y'all were in here talking about, because I didn't want to think that you were being a fool for this girl. But she did what?"

"She dropped him off and left him on my front porch. Well, with a note that I should take care of him until she returns."

Granny and Sha's mouths dropped open. "Wow," they both expressed in unison.

Granny removed the throw blanket from over his car seat and looked at him. She stared for a minute, as I stood by watching her, not knowing what she was thinking.

"Granny," Sha called out. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," she said, glancing back at me.

"What you thinking? Is he mine?"

"You should know that, stupid. You were the one sleeping with her, not Granny," Sha sassed with a slick roll of the eyes.

"Hush girl, with yo' ugly self."

"Both of y'all hush," Granny shot back with a shake of the head. "He is a fine, beautiful baby. Do you think he's yours?"

"No," I answered.

"Hm-hm," Granny mumbled.

"What that mean?"

She looked at me with a shake of the head. "Call your aunt Deana. I believe Sammy has a niece that works at a lab that can work up a blood test for you and him. Deana can point you in the direction, I'm sure."

"I have a test in the truck."

"Boy, do what I said. We ain't doing no home test kits. You need one done by professionals so it's no shit when those results come back."

"Yes ma'am."

"So, where is she?" Granny asked, now getting the baby out of his car seat.

I frowned. "Who, Keisha?"

"Who you think, fool?"

I looked over at Sha, wanting to snap on her nappy headed ass, but she was lucky Granny was standing here. "Um, according to the text message she sent Mr. Henry this morning, she's away on a mental wellness retreat. She'll be gone for four weeks."

"A month?! What the heck—"

"Sha, if you don't hush that mouth of yours, I'm gonna slap you right in it," Granny fussed.

"Thank you," I expressed, agreeing with every word she'd just said.

"So, you went by her dad's house this morning?"

“Yes ma’am. I just left there, but while I was there he let me read Keisha’s text message to him. Trust me, I had already called and text her. Her phone keeps going to voice mail.”

“So, she’s willing to leave her newborn son with someone that’s not even claiming the baby to go on a wellness check—for a month,” Granny repeated as if she was deep in thought while holding the little one against her chest. “Why now?”

“Well, in the text she said that she’s been struggling with her mental health for years. It seems that after having the baby she started having these suicidal thoughts, not directed toward him, but more so wanting to end her life, I guess.”

“She needs too,” Sha blurted out.

“Sha! I’m not gonna say it again! Hush that fly ass mouth of yours. This is a serious thing we’re discussing here. If you can’t genuinely be concerned about what’s going on, then get yo’ lil’ po’ ass outta here!”

“Dang, Granny—”

“You heard me! Sit over there and shut the hell up or else.”

Sha pouted. “Yes ma’am.”

I simply stood back not saying a word, because at this point, Granny wasn’t having the nonsense and Sha knew without a doubt that she’d pushed the limits on this one.

“Sit down, son,” Granny insisted. “Keisha is going through something that’s really serious. For her to leave her baby in this manner really speaks volumes as to how badly she needs the help. I’ve always said it, but it takes a real woman to come to grips with it. Unfortunately, you’re caught up in this because she believes he’s yours. She believes she has left him in very good hands. I can’t hate her for how she moved on that, even though it may have seemed selfish on your part. She’s ultimately on a journey of self-healing and however that comes about, I wish her the best in being able to do that,” she conveyed, while gently rubbing the baby’s back as he squirmed a little.

“But Granny, I’m not ready for this.”

“You don’t have to be ready, but you have no choice in the matter. Until you find out if he’s yours, you have to stay ten toes down for this baby. If he’s not yours, then we’ll cross that path then. Right now, he hasn’t done a thing to any of us but be born into a world that’s already cruel enough, especially to our black men. We aren’t turning our backs on him, nor are we

turning our backs on her seeking the help she needs to take care of herself. You gotta respect that about her if you don't respect nothing else."

I simply nodded my head. A part of me wanted to shed a tear or two because Granny had a way of smacking a nigga hard as hell in the face with facts and the truth. She was the main person I respected in this moment.

"Do you understand?"

"Yes ma'am," I replied.

"So, get on the phone with Deana and find out how to set up an appointment with Sammy's niece. If that doesn't work out, there are plenty other labs that can get this done for you without Keisha being present."

"Yes ma'am." I nodded, while pulling out my cell phone.

"What's his name?" Granny calmly asked. "I noticed DG on his blanket. Did she name him after you?"

Sha slick rolled her eyes with a smack of the lips, but she knew not to say a peep of a word.

"Well, um. I thought the same thing, but I literally just found out that his name is Dolce Gabbana Henry."

Sha covered her mouth, as Granny looked over at her then at me. "Okay, I'm leaving the room now and taking him with me. Sha," she said with a shake of the head. "Uncover your mouth. The room is yours now." She smirked while walking out. I looked over at Sha, as she looked over at me. I could see it coming—

"Dolce Gabbana?!!" she shrieked. "What the heck?!!"

KINSLEY SIMMONS

I walked out of the mall with bags galore. I didn't even know what I was having yet, but this lil' bundle of joy already had everything he or she could possibly need. I made sure to stock up on some shit just in case my baby shower turned out to be wack, meaning my guests didn't get the gifts I thought they'd come through with. As I made it to my car, throwing the bags in the back seat and then getting in on the passenger side to stuff my face with the Cinnabon I was craving, my phone began to chirp from an incoming text message. I glanced down at it.

I know your ass ain't left me in this busy ass place. Where you at?

APPLE

I grinned to myself.

I just made it to the car. Hurry up and come on. My feet hurt. I was tired of waiting on your ass. All you wanna do is shop for lingerie. I'm sure Rosco has seen enough sexy from you. **KINSLEY**

Sus, that's how you keep it spunky in the bedroom. I just be making sure he ain't watching other bitches. Lol. **APPLE**

Oh, I'm sure he's not. **KINSLEY**

He better not be. Lol Here I come. **APPLE**

I looked back at the mall doors to see my bestie walking out. She was indeed a straight trip and madly in love with Rosco. I'd hate it if she found out about a side piece. Honestly, she'd be liable to kill a bitch or him.

The second Apple threw her bags in the backseat and got in the car, she looked over at me. "Your damn feet don't hurt. Your greedy ass just couldn't wait to eat that Cinnabon."

I laughed, now with a stuffed mouth. “So! I have to feed my baby.”

“Nah, that baby ain’t asking for that shit.” She laughed. “That’s your ass.”

“Whatever, I know what my child likes.”

“Yea, yea,” Apple said, as she backed out of the parking lot. “So, where to now?”

“Um—Meech text asking if I’d come through. I’m assuming he wants to see what all I’ve gotten the baby, so we don’t bump heads.”

“So, we’re going over there?”

“Nah, I told him that I was tired and just wanted to go home.”

Apple shot me the stank face. “You so fucking lame. My nigga over there. You know they cooking on the grill today. Rosco said that Meech made sure to buy a few slabs of ribs just for you.”

My eyes widened, as I licked my lips. “Oh, he didn’t tell me that.”

“I’m sure he was just trying to surprise you since we all know that grilled ribs has become your favorite meat to eat. It could be below zero outside and you still want a bitch to be grilling yo’ ass some ribs.”

I laughed. “You ain’t gotta be hatin’. You love ‘em too.”

“Yeah, but only when someone else is grilling ‘em.”

“Anywayssss,” I sighed, while continuing to smack on my Cinnabon. “I guess we can swing through for a little while.”

“So, since you’ve taken leave from work the girls have been talking.”

I frowned. “What you mean talking? You know how I am. If a bitch got something to say—”

“Girl, you know you ain’t gotta worry about that. Ain’t nobody in that bitch brave enough to talk shit about you to me and I not check her ass instantly. “Ion play about my bestie, period!”

“I already know.” I nodded. “And your bestie don’t play about your ass either.”

“I know.” She grinned. “So, I’ve noticed that you and Meech seem to be on one accord when it comes to the baby.”

“We are, and I guess that’s a good thing.”

“What are your feelings, though, when it comes to him possibly being the father? You know, with Gianni still not quite out the picture.”

I shrugged. At this point, I was over talking about Gianni. I guess I would always have a place in my heart for him and what he meant to me, but reality had long been set in. He wasn’t coming back this way and there

was nothing I could do about it. Thoughts of feeling like he would had he known I was pregnant always plagued my mind, but a part of me was hurt that he hadn't even checked on me. In that case, he would've known exactly what I was going through.

"I don't know. I still think about him, but I have no clue where he's at or where to look. The only person that probably could find out something is the last person I'd want to ask—"

"Meech?"

"Yea, him and Dodge for that matter. I wouldn't even wanna put Dodge in that position, so I've just washed my hands of the whole thing and have decided that it happened, it's over, and now it's time to move on. If this baby is his, then that's something I'll have to live with. Being a single mom shouldn't be so bad. My aunt did it with flying colors. Hell, plenty women do it with ease or at the least make it look easy."

"Well, you have the god-mommy here and I ain't going nowhere. You got Nicole and Yomi to also help you out, so you won't be lacking for nothing. Just remember that."

I smiled. "I know, and I so appreciate everything that y'all have done for me. Without y'all, I don't know what I'd do."

As we made our way to the destination, we laughed, talked shit, and blasted the music, when Bia featuring Nicki Minaj, "Whole Lotta Money," started to play. That was hands down one of my favorite hype songs to play when I was spending money like a rich bitch.

We pulled up to Meech's crib. He'd finally gotten his own spot. It was at least three thousand square feet with five bedrooms, three bathrooms, and a large ass backyard that had a jacuzzi, picnic area where they grilled at, and nice, relaxing patio with a fireplace. It definitely was a bachelor pad fit for a king. Although, he'd been saying shit like it was our family home. However, it never really felt like that with all the traffic from his homeboys and bitches sliding through. This was why I rarely visited him.

The second we got out the car, Rosco stepped outside. "This nigga must have a tracking device on you," I teased with a soft chuckle.

"No, but I've been trying to figure out how I can put one on him." She laughed.

"Oh, you laughing but you're dead ass serious."

"I am." she grinned.

“Wassup bae?” Rosco said as he met us in the yard, giving his woman a fat kiss on the lips.

“Ewwww, why y’all always gotta be so mushy?”

Rosco and Apple grinned. “You jelly?”

“Hell nawl,” I answered with a frown. “Well, maybe just a lil’ bit.”

“I knew it,” Apple laughed.

“Wassup Kinsley? How you been?”

“I’ve been good,” I answered, as we made our way inside the house. “How have you been?”

“Great,” he responded. “Always better when this one comes around.”

“Awww, you so sweet, bae.”

“Only for you,” he responded with that big ass handsome smile of his. If I didn’t know any better, I’d say this nigga was blushing like a muthafucka. I had to smile because it was indeed the cutest shit ever. I was glad bestie had found herself a good one. “Meech bought some ribs for you.”

“I heard. He knew how to get me over here,” I said, as I spoke to Cobra and Mike. Of course, Cobra’s lil’ boo, Tootie, was sitting at the bar sipping from a red cup. It was the strangest thing. It seemed that he and Rosalyn had called it quits; rather, she had broken it off with his ass. Then he started bringing the chick Vee around, but now he’s bringing this chick Tootie around. I didn’t care for either of them because they both were in cahoots with Keisha and Kay, two bitches that I despised. With a fake smile, I spoke to Tootie but only because she spoke first. “Where’s Meech?” I asked.

“He was outside on the grill—”

“I bet Boss Hog probably done took over with his fat, greedy ass,” Rosco joked, as everybody laughed.

“You spot on,” Cobra agreed with laughter. “They’re all back there, him, Jeff, and Boss Hog.”

“Don’t forget the bitches,” Apple cut in. “I already know it’s bitches back there. Anytime y’all have a gathering, the bitches follow. That’s why I make it my business to show up, because nan bitch bet not try mine—”

“Bae, chill,” Rosco teased, as he kissed Apple on the lips. “It’s only one woman for me and they know. All of ‘em,” he assured her.

“Lucky girl.” I smirked, just as Tootie looked over at me with awkward smile.

“Meech is upstairs,” she said in a soft tone. I don’t believe nobody really heard her but me since they were in their own lil’ conversations.

“Thanks,” I said, leaving the entertainment room and heading for the backyard. I peeked through the patio doors to see the fellas and, of course, the bitches were there too, enjoying themselves. True enough, Boss Hog was on the grill, but I didn’t see Meech. Guess Tootie was right, so I headed up the stairs. “Meech,” I called out. “Meeech,” I said again, opening the door to the upstairs game room. I wasn’t surprised that people were in there too. It was always somebody around, and I meant somebodies with an s. Shit reminded me of working at the club. I headed for his bedroom and knocked softly on the door. With no answer, I opened it and instantly with surprised eyes—

“What the fuck?!” Meech let out, as he pushed Thomasina off his dick. She glanced back over her shoulder, smiling at me as she wiped her mouth.

“Wow, you have me come over here just so I can witness a bitch blowing your whistle?”

“Bitch?! I got yo’ bitch,” Thomasina sassed.

“Hush girl,” Meech butted in, giving her ass the side-eye.

“Don’t tell me to hush! You and this hoe don’t go together. Y’all ain’t even fucking each other. Why you think I’m on my knees right now.”

“You on yo’ knees cause that’s yo’ favorite position. Now leave, please,” he calmly said, as he fixed his pants.

“Nah, she can stay. I’m leaving,” I said, as I turned to walk out.

“Yeah, bitch, leave!” Thomasina yelled, and at that time, I forgot all about being pregnant. With a swift turn around, I was in that hoe’s face so fast that I didn’t even see when I’d slapped the taste out her mouth. All I remember was Meech holding me back and shoving Thomasina on the floor.

“Bitch, don’t you touch her!” he scolded her ass.

“Oh, really Meech?! This how you gon’ do me after I’ve been the one here for you! This bitch don’t even know who her baby daddy is and yet here you are, Captain Save A Hoe, coming to the rescue of a baby that might not even be yours!”

“Turn me loose,” I screamed, trying to pry myself from Meech’s grip.

“No, you need to chill out!” he exclaimed, then directed his menacing stare toward his bitch. “Sina, if I have to say it again, I’m gon’ bust yo’ ass. Don’t fucking play with me.”

Thomasina fumed inside. I could tell this shit was eating her up. But I wanted more than my licks back for her raggedy ass trying me. She started

out the room then stopped to look back at Meech. “This bitch ain’t gon’ do nothing but hurt you again and when she do, don’t come my way.”

“Bitch bye!” I shouted. “Cry baby ass!” I could see the tears in her eyes as she left out the room, but they were probably more so those of being embarrassed by this nigga than that of him hurting her feelings. Then again, it was probably a deep mixture of the two.

“Wow, I can’t believe you in here tryna fight and you’re pregnant,” he said, finally turning me loose. But when he did, I hauled off and slapped the taste out of his mouth.

“How fuckin’ dare you ask me to come over and you’re in here letting a bitch suck your dick!”

“You said you weren’t coming!” he expressed while holding the side of his face. I’m sure that shit hurt because my hand was burning like a bitch.

“Well, I’m here, nigga, in the fuckin’ flesh. Now what?!”

“Now nothing. You should’ve said you were coming instead of acting all stuck up like you don’t wanna be around me.”

“I never said I don’t wanna be around you. You just have a whole lotta shit going on. It’s never a time when it’s just me and you chilling or talking, not when we’re here.”

“You never acted like you cared either way.”

“Typical nigga,” I uttered with a shake of the head.

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean? You’re the one that’s not as in as I am when it comes to us.”

“How the fuck are you in when another bitch is slobbin’ yo’ knob? Matter fact, she ain’t the only bitch that be slobbin’ yo’ knob, but you’re in? In what? A fucking slew of relationships with maggot ass bitches, and you expect me to sign up for that?! Ain’t no way I’ll sleep with yo’ community dick ass, nigga! I’m pregnant, you not about to give me nothing, and I’m sure as hell ain’t about to let you knock off my pH balance!”

“Wow, this coming from the woman that slept with a nigga who she didn’t even know, and now you’re pregnant and don’t even know who the father is. I can’t believe you’d fix your mouth to come at me. What kind of ho—”

I tried slapping his ass again, but he caught my hand this time.

“Keep yo’ fuckin’ hands off me, Kinsley. I don’t hit women, but I will choke yo’ ass out. Luckily, you’re pregnant. Ion play that shit.”

I snatched my hand out of his. “I wish you might put yo’ hands on me in any kind of way not wanted. You’ll wake up missing a dick and ya balls, nigga.”

Meech shook his head. “You got issues.”

“Ya mammy got issues,” I told him with a slick roll of the eyes. “You can have this. I want no parts of it. Glad I walked in on you doing ya thang. Just a reminder of why I slept with a nigga I didn’t know. And if this baby is his, I’d rather be a single mother than to have a baby daddy that’ll have my child around all these different hoes. Bitch might have herpes tryna kiss my baby on the mouth.”

“Kinsley, stop it.”

“No, you stop it! I don’t know why it’s cool for niggas to be hoes and fuck off. Oh, everybody is always rootin’ for that nigga! But when the female does something out of the norm, it’s a huge problem and she’s frowned upon. Well, fuck that, fuck you, and fuck them! Ain’t nobody gotta walk in Kinsley’s shoes but Kinsley! Say what you want about me. I know who the fuck I am.”

“Do you?!”

“Damn right, I do!” I told him as I stormed out the bedroom. Ironically, the second I landed downstairs, Thomasina came rushing at me, only to be knocked the fuck out by Apple.

“Bitch, I wish you might!” Apple yelled, with a handful of this bitch’s hair. As she and Thomasina went at it, I stood back to watch Rosco and anybody else that was close by try to break it up. I didn’t have to lift a finger or throw a kick in. Apple handled this bitch just fine on her own. As Meech rushed down the stairs, I figured this was my cue to leave. I’d had enough for one day. I looked back at his ass with a mean, glaring stare before heading for the front door. Once I’d gotten close to my car, Apple was rushing outside too.

“You ok, bestie?”

I nodded, now the one with tears in my eyes. “Yeah.”

“Just get in, let’s go.”

“Kinsley!” Meech called out, but I kept walking. I didn’t appreciate him putting me in the line of fire. He should’ve known what my reaction would be to see some shit like that. Even when I tried to leave, that monkey-mouth ass bitch of his still kept trying me. Otherwise, it wouldn’t have even been a

fight. “Kinsley!” As he caught up to me, I’d gotten in the car and quickly closed my door shut and locked it. “Open the door. Let’s talk!”

“Oh, don’t run now, hoe!” Thomasina yelled as she made her way outside.

“Hold up. This bitch ain’t had enough?” Apple asked, as she started back at her ass.

“Apple, no!” I yelled out. But Rosco grabbed her ass around the waist and brought her back to the car, as Cobra carried Thomasina back in the house. It was so much going on, till I didn’t know what to think. Yes, I’d started it by slapping that bitch in her mouth, but it wasn’t my fault. I honestly had blanked out for a second. That’s why I didn’t like confrontations. I’d lose my cool and act a fool faster than a blink of an eye.

“Kinsley, open the door.”

“Meech, just go back in the house with your bitch. Leave me alone. I’m good.”

“Meech, I think you should leave her alone,” Apple cut in, as she shot Meech the stank face. “I like you. I have nothing against you, but if that bitch try Kinsley again, I’m turning your shit out.”

“Come on now, bae. Don’t do that,” Rosco said.

Meech nodded, hitting the hood of Apple’s car hard as hell with the palm of his hand. “A’ight, a’ight,” he angrily let out, walking back in the house.

“You ain’t have to say that.”

“Why? Because that’s your boy? He should’ve never invited her over here if he was going to have that messy ass hoe here too. What was he thinking about? He know they don’t get along. This shit been a long time coming. All her and her girls been doing is trying Kin, but today was the day.”

“I understand, bae. I get it, but cool off. Y’all go on leave. I’ll check on you later.”

“Okay,” Apple said, as Rosco kissed her on the lips. “I’ll just call you when I make to Kinsley’s house.”

“Okay, y’all be safe. You okay, Kinsley?” he asked, as Apple started the engine.

“Yeah.” I nodded, but I didn’t even want to look his way. Hell, I was embarrassed out here, big as hell and fighting. I knew better. I should’ve just left when instinct told me to.

As we pulled off, Apple looked over at me. “You wanna talk about it?”

I shook my head no. I really didn’t want to talk about nothing. Meech had said something that really hurt my feelings. To some, maybe I deserved it, but it wasn’t like his actions weren’t excusable. The shit really had me boiling inside, but all I wanted was to get the hell off his premises. I didn’t know if I’d deal with Meech period after this, but I guess I couldn’t call those shots until after the paternity was known. *Lord, please don’t let this be his baby.*

KIYOMI SIMMONS

It was early as hell as I walked in Walmart to make a store run for Mama. As I entered the supercenter and grabbed a buggy, I glanced down at the list she'd written out before leaving the house. Damn, she should've ordered this shit online. I don't know what she was thinking, got me walking all over this big ass store buying all this stuff.

After I'd gotten mostly everything, I glanced back down at the list to notice that I had two more items to get, laundry detergent and tampons. I headed over to the feminine products and damn, what the fuck?! Instantly noticing Disloyal's ass standing down the aisle, I turned to walk away.

"Ki," he called out. "Ki!"

"Damn," I whispered, but gradually turned back around to face him with a salty, fake ass smile on my face.

"If I didn't know any better, I'd think you were trying to *dodge* a brother," he teased, emphasizing the word *dodge*. I slick rolled my eyes, already knowing he was trying to be petty.

"Wassup Disloyal? How are you?" I asked, like I really cared when I damn well knew I didn't.

"I'm great." He grinned. I couldn't lie, the nigga still looked good, with his fine ass. I guess that wasn't going to change just because his personality was ugly as hell. "I never thought I'd run into you here."

"Same," I shot back. "What you doing on this aisle? Shopping for ya mammy or them big ass sisters of yours?"

He laughed. "You always got jokes, but leave my mother and my sisters out of this please."

“Oh, okay, my bad. Maybe you’re getting some pads or tampons for yourself since you’ve been moving like a real pussy lately.” I smugly grinned back.

“Ki, Ki, Ki, sounds like a woman scorned to me.”

“Sounds like a woman that could give two fucks if you ask me,” I sassed back, as some lil’ white lady walking by with her two kids shot me the stank face.

“Ki, chill out. We are not together. How long are you going to hold a grudge? Damn, just be a woman about it. You’ve moved on and so have I.”

“Have you?” I asked, knowing this nigga was flexed up like a muthafucka. “So, you in love with Roz now?”

He frowned. “What? Roz? Nah, you know that.”

“Oh, so now you’re admitting that you don’t want her?”

“Never have. Don’t get me wrong, she’s a cool ass female. She’s also cute as hell. I like her company and all, but shawty don’t fuck me like you do—”

“Did,” I corrected him. “That shit is past tense.”

“You know what I meant.”

“So, you’re just playing with her to get back at me?”

“I’m not really playing her. I mean, I like her. But, who knows? If she embraces her inner freaky side, I might just go all in.”

“You are really a trip. Basically, you’re playing with her heart.”

He grinned. “She knows. You might think I don’t talk to her about this shit, but I do. Don’t let Roz’s innocent baby face fool you. She was in on this shit from the start.”

I scowled. “That can’t be true.” But then again, the more I thought about it, he had a point. “You’re probably right. I’ve definitely felt like she was fucking with you to get back at me for something I had nothing to do with. I just figured she really liked you, though, or at least was falling in love.”

He grinned. “I honestly don’t want her to fall in love. I mean, at first that was the plan, well, the part she didn’t know about. But now, I don’t wanna take it that far. She’s a good girl. I just hate we got in as deep as we have. Those were my intentions in the beginning, but then again, not really.”

“You aren’t making any sense,” I said, with a slick roll of the eyes.

“I can tell she’s falling even though she tries to make it seem like this is what we planned from the start. So, I’ve been backing off a little.”

“Yeah, because you’re an asshole that enjoys toying with women’s hearts. If she wasn’t trying to be so petty toward me, she never would’ve set herself up for that. From my knowledge, I didn’t even know she knew who you were to me.”

“Oh, she knew because I told her. We just acted like she didn’t.”

“Wow,” I uttered. “You’re grimy as hell and she ain’t far behind you. And to think—” I said but cut it short. He wasn’t the nigga to vent to about Roz. She was really my friend at one point, and to be in on fucking with me by fucking with him was low down. But, if that’s what she thought she wanted, she was sadly mistaken. She was the one gonna end up hurt, and I was going to be the one on the sidelines looking at her dumb ass. Had she come to me like a real friend should’ve, she wouldn’t be in this shit now. Oh well, he’s her problem now not mine.

“So, be honest. Did it get to you that I’d moved on with her? You can tell me. I won’t tell nobody. I know I still got the key to your heart.”

I rolled my eyes. “Boy, dem locks been changed.”

“Yeah right. You just acting hard, that’s all. You know you still want me,” he said, licking his lips like he was the shit.

“You know what? Fuck being a pussy, you’re a real dick, Loyal,” I said, pushing past him. As I started to walk off, not even caring about grabbing the tampons that were on this list, here comes this bald-headed, younger version of Halle Berry walking up.

“Bae, did you find the—” she got out, but cut those words short the second she noticed me. “Didn’t realize you had company.”

I frowned. “Oh, sweetie, I’m not his company,” I smugly responded with a clear attitude. “This is Walmart, love. If that’s the case, he has a lot of company,” I commented, glancing around at the people in the store.

“Is there some unfinished business here?” she asked, looking from me then at Loyal.

“Nah, babe. We good here. I was just telling Ki—”

“Uh—that he’s happy in love with you. You ain’t gotta worry about lil’ ol’ me. Trust, I *dodged* that bullet a long time ago.” I grinned. “Y’all have a good one.” I walked off. I didn’t have time for that foolishness. Loyal was really living up to his Disloyal nickname. I mean, him and Roz were grimy as fuck, but little did she know that she’d only be playing herself when this lil’ shit was all over. Clearly, Loyal was still fucking the bitch he left me

for. I didn't know if Roz knew this or not, but if she did, she was weaker than I thought she was. With friends like her, who needed enemies.



Back at the house, as me and Mama put the groceries up, I thought I'd bring up seeing Loyal's ass. "Guess who I saw at Walmart?"

"Who chile?" she asked, looking over at me with curious eyes.

"Disloyal."

She grinned. "Y'all kill me calling that boy Disloyal."

"Well, he is, and guess what he told me?"

"What?"

"That he and Roz aren't really an item."

"And you're surprised?"

I shrugged. "I guess I'm not surprised about him not wanting her, but what I am surprised about is that she's been in on whatever this lil' get back that she and him have come up with."

Mama frowned. "What you mean by that?"

"Meaning that from day one, she knew about me and him because he told her, and I guess from there the plotting began."

"I feel sorry for her, because this lil' game they're playing is only going to backfire on her."

I nodded. "I agree, because she really likes him. Even though she's not talking to me, Sha tells me things. Loyal thinks everything is under control, but I beg to differ."

"I'm not shocked. I'm surprised you are though. You should've known that."

"Yeah, I should've, because Dodge called it out some time ago. I just didn't peep game."

"I just hate it's like this because I don't have a fair chance when it comes to meeting Sammy's kids the proper way, including Rosalyn. If I could just have a talk with her I believe I could smooth things over."

"None of this is your fault though. That's on Sammy and their mama. They hid the fact that they were separated and getting a divorce. Plus, Roz is too grown to be in her feelings like that. She acting like she's the baby of the bunch. She's the one making this a bigger deal than what it really is."

“I get where you’re coming from, but I can understand why she’s so hurt. I don’t like that she’s taking it out on you because y’all were pretty close, especially knowing that your mean ass don’t fuck with too many girls.”

“Right.” I nodded.

“But, hey, maybe she’ll come around one day.”

“If *one day* is too far out, I won’t be stun her butt when she do.”

“So, what’s going on with Dodge and the baby?”

“The same, basically. It’s been a week now and he still hasn’t heard from Keisha. I think it’s lame as hell that she don’t call to check on the baby. Like, what is her problem?”

“She’s emotionally drained and definitely unstable right now. I can see her walking away to get herself together, but it is kind of weird that she doesn’t check on her baby.”

“Weird is an understatement.”

“So, wassup with the blood test?”

“Because he had to wait a couple of days before going in for them to take it—you know, with all this Covid stuff going around—it won’t come back until next week some time. I thought they came back the same day, but I was wrong.”

Mama grinned. “Your ass is just anxious.”

“I am,” I said with a serious stare. “I haven’t been spending time with him like that unless Granny has the baby with her or if Dodge takes him to Mr. Henry’s house for a couple of hours. Honestly, I feel a lil’ jealous because even though he’s not trying to build a bond with this baby, he is. He keeps saying that if it turns out that he’s not his, then he has no problems dropping him off. He’s been really serious about that.”

“Do you believe him?”

I shrugged. “I do. I mean, at that point he has no reason to keep him, bond or no bond. What I really would like about it, though, is that Keisha will be permanently out of his life. Ain’t no way he’ll deal with her psycho behind after that.”

“And if it’s his?”

I frowned, not even wanting to answer that question.

“Well, I know your mean ass don’t wanna hear this, but I think you should go around more, whether the baby is his or not. I don’t think it’ll be

as bad as you're making it out to be. The baby is harmless. Dodge is your man, right?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Well, you should be here for him, especially in this moment. He needs to know that his girl will have his back no matter what."

I shrugged. "You're right," I uttered, not thinking about it that way.

"I know it bothers you to even think that he could possibly have a baby by another woman, but technically, y'all weren't together during that time. Maybe messing around, but he didn't exactly cheat or anything like that."

"You right."

"Plus, if I were you, I'd take a picture of the baby and post it on your page. Or do something publicly that Keisha will see and absolutely hate. I bet she comes home from that retreat quicker than they think she will."

I laughed. "Mama, you so petty."

"I'm just saying." She laughed.

"You might just have a point, though."

"Girl, I'm just messing with you. I can see me now having to bail your ass outta jail for whooping her ass again."

I laughed out loud. "You got that right, cuz if she steps up to me about her baby, that's exactly what's going to happen."

The doorbell rang, interrupting our chat. I glanced over at Mama. "You expecting company, chile?"

"No," she answered. "Go see who it is. I gotta get dinner started."

"Okay," I responded, as I headed for the front door. I opened the door up to a beautiful vase of colorful roses, as I smiled. "Who are these for?" I asked the guy holding them.

"Kinsley Simmons," he responded.

"Kinsley," I uttered. "She's in her room but I'll sign for 'em." While taking the vase from him with one hand, I signed the digital box with the other. As the delivery guy walked off, I closed the door shut and headed toward the kitchen.

"Who was it?" Mama asked.

"A delivery guy."

Mama glanced back and smiled the second she saw the roses. "Wow, those are beautiful. Must be from Meech with the falling out they had."

"Yeah, that's the same thing I was thinking."

“Well, take ‘em to her. Maybe that’ll brighten her day. She has been moping around here since then.”

“But I think it’s a lil’ more than that.”

“Talking about Gianni?”

I shrugged. “I believe so. She acts like she’s over him being that he’s not here, but I don’t believe it. She is clearly in love with that man and for all we know, he could be married with a house full of children running around.”

“You could be right,” Mama responded. “I just hate she got herself caught up in that. However, I don’t like how Meech is treating her either. I mean, it ain’t like they were together for a long period of time, so both of them had the right to see other people. Plus, Kin can be a lil’ hard on relationships, we do know that. Still, it doesn’t give him the right to think that what he’s doing is fine, but when she does it it’s a problem.”

“Same thing I was saying. It’s like catching mad hate from him over that but he was already sleeping with other women.”

“Exactly. I’m trying to stay out of her business because I know how she is, but I really wanna have a talk with him. I don’t like to see her feeling a ways because of something he said or just in letting other women disrespect her.”

“Right, because the minute I see the heffa, it’s going down. I promise ya.”

“Yomi, stop it. You better not fight that girl.”

“Just wait for it.”

“I’m not playing with you. Kinsley can handle her own battles. Plus, from what she told me, Apple handled that one for her.”

“And I’m gon—”

“Chile, just hush,” Mama said, with a playful roll of the eyes. “Take Kin those flowers and get out my face.”

I grinned. “Yes ma’am.” I knocked on Kinsley’s door and then walked in.

“Damn—”

“Oh hush,” I said before she could even start griping, as she glanced over at me. Her eyes instantly lit up the minute she saw the roses.

“Are those for me?”

“Yes ma’am.” I smiled. “Who you think they’re from?”

She shrugged. “The way I’m feeling, it would be nice if they were from —”

“Gianniii.”

Kinsley chuckled, as she walked over to get the vase of roses. “You know what to say.”

“I thought you were over him.”

“Doesn’t mean I don’t wish these roses were from him,” she said, pulling the card out to read it.

“What it say? You know my nosey ass wanna know.”

“Nothing new,” she uttered, while reading the card.

I’m sorry, Kinsley. I could’ve called or showed up on your doorstep to show how sincere I am about what happened, but I’ve been struggling with some things for a while now. I’m sure you know my heart and my intentions have never been to hurt you. I believe we deserve a chance to see things through and to explore the options of possibly even being together. I miss you in my life.

Meet me at The Four Seasons tonight at eight. When you walk in, let the front desk receptionist know who you are, and they’ll take it from there. You should be getting another package if you’ve not gotten it already yet. I hope you love what I picked out. I hope to see you soon. By the way, expect the unexpected.

Always...

“So, are you going?” I asked with a perplexed expression.

“I would if I knew this letter was from Gianni,” she said to my surprise.

“Wow, Kin. You just gon’ disregard Meech’s feelings like that? Clearly, the nigga is reaching out because he’s sorry about what happened. I think you at least owe him the chance to apologize face to face. Even if you tell him that you don’t wanna be with him. Don’t do him like this. I know he never meant for you to walk in on him getting that sloppy toppy, but shit happens.”

“Oh, so now you’re team Meech?”

“No, I’m team Kinsley. You should know that. Don’t play with me. Honestly, if I were you, I wouldn’t take him back. He’s been really messy fucking around with this one and that one, knowing you’re pregnant. I mean, I don’t know if he’s doing this to get back at you or to get over you or because his feelings are hurt, but like Mama says, *it ain’t what you do it’s how you do it*. Now those are my feelings, but you at least owe him a sit

down. You weren't exactly perfect in the few months y'all were talking either. You wasn't fucking off, but you started to get in your own head, and you know what I mean when I say that."

She sighed. "I know, and you're right. I'm sorry. I'm just still in my feelings about that day. I feel like Meech tried me, and you know how I am. It's hard for me to get past the shit when people hurt me."

"I know, but at some point you gotta let your guard down. It's obvious that Gianni is not coming back this way. We don't even know how to get in touch with the nigga, even if this baby is his. He's the type that'll probably just pop up on your doorstep one day when you've moved on and are happily married. Like, *wassup Kinsley*," I said in a deep tone, trying to be funny. "*I'm back*."

Kinsley grinned. "Hush girl. If he waits to show up after I've gotten married, he can just turn right on around and leave. I ain't with that shit. Don't put me on the backburner for years and then pop up out of nowhere like it's all good. Nigga nawl. I ain't playing them kinda games."

I laughed. "But what if the baby his though? Then what?"

"Then I'll tell his ass he owes me a lot of back child support and I fucking want it, ASAP!"

We laughed out loud, just as the doorbell rang. Kinsley looked at me with enlightened eyes. "You think that's the package Meech was talking about?"

"I'm sure it is," she said. The minute she got that out, Mama called her name.

"Yea, that's it," I chimed in. "Are you going to give him a chance?"

Kinsley shrugged. "I don't know. I might. Depending on what's in this package," she teased, walking out the bedroom. I was right on her heels. I wanted my cousin to be happy and if Meech was doing all this to prove himself, then she needed to give the nigga a chance to be here for her, whether she took him back or not. I just hoped that she wouldn't self-sabotage a love that could turn out to be her forever.

DODGE GAMBLE

I lay in bed looking up at the ceiling with thoughts running through my mind. It had been a week since I'd had Dolce, and even though I was trying not to get too attached, the lil' fella was starting to wear on me. Granny and Sha did their best keeping him more often than none, freeing up most of my time if needed, but I still found myself wanting to be in his presence. I never thought I'd say that I was actually enjoying the fact that at some point throughout the day or night, he's going to be around me.

I'm sure Keisha wanted this. I'm sure this was her goal, her mission, and I hate to say it, but that part of her plan was working. For one, I have a heart and she knows it. She knows I'm not one to play around with a nigga or a bitch and if either test me, they got a problem. But she knows me. Deep down within that sick, psychotic thought process of hers, she knows my heart. And the irony of it all is that I also know hers.

Leaving Dolce was only part of her strategy. The plan itself was much bigger though. She knew she needed help and getting it was a must in order for her to be the best mom she could be for him. I knew it sounded crazy and nothing I'd ever say to Kiyomi, simply because she's going to see the worst in Keisha regardless. Honestly, I can't blame her. But Keisha ain't all bad. She's just been broken for a long time. It started early on for her, even in their lowest of living conditions. Then her mother was killed right in front of her. I knew that had to be devastating. My mom had been missing for over seventeen years, and I didn't know what's worse; knowing that she's dead or not knowing if she's alive. However, on top of Keisha's already unstable reality, losing our child had to be the hardest. It's like it

took the last lil' bit of her soul and ripped it apart. Once she'd gone so deep down that rabbit hole of depression and anger, it was too hard for her to crawl back out. The lies, the fights, her unpredictable behavior, her promiscuous ways all played in what she found to be her new way of living. It's a lot of layers when it comes to her sanity. So, I can be man enough to say I'm happy that she's finally getting the help she needs.

As I sighed thinking about the paternity test results coming back soon, my cell phone rang. I glanced down to see that it was Kay.

"Wassup?" I answered.

"Hey, I'm going to keep Dolce overnight if that's ok. I know you need a break—"

"You must've talked to your sister?" I butted in.

"Yeah."

"I figured. So, it takes her calling for you to want to keep him overnight?"

"No, I was planning on keeping him anyway, if you didn't mind. Keisha did call fussing. Of course, she was saying that I could watch Dolce more, but I have a business to run while she's away. If I could, I would, but I'm off today, no hair appointments, and I want to keep him overnight."

I sat pondering over if he should stay the night with her. I knew I should've said yeah but— "He's only two weeks old. Bad enough Keisha left him at a week old—"

"Don't do my fuckin' sister, Dodge. She had her reasons, and you know it. You'd rather she gets the help she needs than to be a dysfunctional mother for your son."

"That's still yet to be determined and I hope you told her that."

"Why you think she left him with you? She wanted you to have the blood test done. She's adamant that Dolce is yours, and I believe her. I've never seen her so sure of something in my life."

"If he is mine, she had to have done some sneaky shit to make that happen because I used protection for a long time with Keisha, especially during the time when she supposedly gotten pregnant."

"Condoms aren't baby proof, Dodge. Just because you use one don't mean that a woman can't get pregnant."

"That's true, but I know better."

"Yeah, whatever," she sassed with a pop of her lips. "For somebody that don't wanna be the dad, you sure are getting fussy over him."

“If I don’t, who’s here that will? Because apparently, work is more important to you and Mr. Henry can only keep him for a few hours, but at least he calls for him. Hell, this the first time you’ve asked to keep him.”

“Ok, and,” she hissed. “I’m just his auntie. You’re his daddy. He should be with you the majority of the time. The fuck!”

“Girl, chill out. Matter fact, gon’ pack his stuff up and bring him back to Granny’s house. If you don’t wanna do that, I’ll come get him. I’m not finna sit on the phone going back and forth with you. Hell, you should’ve went to that mental camp with yo’ sister. Both of y’all crazy.”

“Really Dodge? I just picked him up at ten this morning. It’s only three.”

“Yeah, really Kay,” I responded.

“You can be a real dick when you wanna be.”

“I don’t doubt it,” I told her. “Now get his stuff ready.”

“His stuff is ready and if you want him so bad come get him, because I’m not coming out no more today.”

“You ain’t said nothing. I’ll be there in a couple of hours or so.”

“Yeah, whatever. Stupid ass.”

I grinned and then ended the call. That had to be the funniest shit I’d heard. How the hell she call me stupid? Her face was posted right by the word in the dictionary. Keisha’s was right above hers.

I shook off the bullshit as Kiyomi crossed my mind. I hadn’t heard from her since I’d sent our usual good morning text if we weren’t around each other. With my cell phone already in my hand, I called her. On the first ring, she answered.

“I literally was just about to call you.”

I smiled. “Oh yeah?”

“Yeah, what you doing, handsome?”

“Nothing much, just hung up with Kay.”

“How’s she doing with the baby?”

“I guess everything is good. She didn’t let on that she was having any problems. She even wants to keep him overnight, but I didn’t agree.”

“So, you told her no.”

“Yeah.”

“Why? This would’ve been your first night free of him. I mean, you’ve practically moved in with Granny since you’ve had him. She and Sha help

out a lot, but at night he's always with you. Tonight, you could've taken a break," she explained.

"I know."

"I mean," she said, then paused.

"What?"

"Nothing."

"Bae, I know you've been patient this whole time and I appreciate it, but Dolce has nothing to do with this. For some reason, Keisha left him with me. Yes, at first I was beyond pissed, even dropped his lil' butt back off on her porch—"

"Definitely did that—"

"But, he is growing on me. I feel the need to protect him. He's only two weeks old and letting him bounce around from house to house, especially at night, isn't something I feel is in his best interest. When Keisha returns, he'll be back with her most of the time."

"What do you mean most of the time? What if he's not yours?"

"Then I have no problems giving him back. I am not taking care of a baby that's not mine. It's not like I'm with Keisha. We aren't together. She'll have to put on her big girl drawls and figure this shit out. But, as of now, my duty remains that I'm to keep him until she gets back."

Kiyomi sighed. "That sounds a lil' weird, especially if he's not yours. I thought you said you'd give him to Mr. Henry or Kay and let them figure it out until Keisha returns."

"I did say that," I said with a cautious pause, because I knew Kiyomi wasn't ready for this kind of conversation, but I had to have it sooner than later. "Mr. Henry has back problems. I don't see him being able to be up and down with Dolce on a daily basis, and Kay already doesn't feel like she has to keep him. Clearly, from the talk we just had, she's only the auntie and keeps him when she wants to. So, what am I supposed to do if he's not mine? Tell Mr. Henry or Kay to tell Keisha to get her ass back here and get him?"

"Well—"

"Don't answer that," I interrupted, because I knew exactly what her answer was. "He's a baby and I know Keisha really needs help. If this is going to help her be a better mother to him, then I'm not interfering with her process of getting well or better. I don't expect you to understand, but

I'm never the one to kick a person when they're down, even Keisha. We have history, a lot of history. You have every right not to stick beside me—"

"I think you are the definition of a real man. You're the sweetest nigga I know, and I don't mean that as in sweet, sweet, but you are selfless, a man of God, and anybody would be lucky to have you in their life. What I'm saying is that I'm the luckiest girlfriend in the world and I'm sticking by my man."

I smiled. "You don't know how happy you just made me hearing you say that."

"And I mean it. I don't know what Keisha's ulterior motives are, but if it included anything on the scale of me leaving you or us going our separate ways because of this, we aren't," she assured me. "Even if he's yours, he's ours."

"If you were here, I'd literally kiss you on that fat ass of yours."

She giggled. "You know I love when you put your lips on my ass."

"I know." I grinned.

"So, speaking of kissing ass," she said, as I listened in. "Ya boy Meech sent Kinsley a nice ass colorful bouquet of roses. In the letter, he apologized and wants to meet up with her tonight at The Four Seasons around eight."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah, you didn't know?"

"Nah, he ain't said nothing to me about that," I responded. "Maybe he's ready to talk it out. Last we spoke about that crazy ass incident was him saying he was just going to fall back. He felt like Kinsley had an unpredictable attitude and he just wasn't for it. Plus, he was still in his feelings about her slapping him."

"And you don't think he deserved it?"

"Well, I'm not exactly saying that, but women have to be careful who they put their hands on, especially if that nigga ain't puttin' his hands on them."

"Wow, so Meech fights women?"

"No, I'm not saying that. I've never known him to fight a woman. Uh—yeah, he's jacked one or two up for trying him, but fight is such a strong word. We fight niggas not women. However, he felt some type of way about Kinsley slapping him, especially with her being pregnant. A lot of that angered him because she was technically the one that slapped Sina first."

“Sina should’ve shut her mouth, but that’s ok because when I see her ass—”

“Nothing.”

“What you mean by that?”

“Ain’t nothing gon’ happen because you ain’t got nothing to do with that. Apple took care of Sina and from what I heard, she did a damn good job. So, let it go. That’s over. Plus, Meech is trying to make up, so let him.”

“You’re right,” she agreed, and just like that, she moved right on from that talk. “He did send over a bad ass Moschino T-shirt dress with the matching Moschino thigh-high boots to match it.”

“For her to wear tonight?”

“Yeah, the message in the card said he wanted her to wear that outfit. I’m jealous too, bae. I would’ve looked bad ass in that shit.”

I chuckled. “Don’t worry, I got you. Meech is on the way over here. I gotta ask him about this shit, especially if it’s making my baby jealous.”

“Yeah, tell him I think he did a great job picking that outfit, even the roses. They were literally like a rainbow color on each rose. I’ve never seen that before. He really outdid himself. Maybe I should slap you and see what I get.”

“One of these knuckle sandwiches.”

“Boy, did you just say a knuckle sandwich?” She laughed so loud, I started laughing too. “Well, I’ll keep my hands to myself.”

“No, please don’t do that. I need you to touch me.”

She giggled. I could tell she was blushing. “You already know I can’t keep my hands to myself when I’m around you. Matter of fact, I’m coming over and I’m staying the night. You still at Granny’s?”

“Yeah, but I gotta leave to pick up Dolce. You sure you wanna stay the night? You haven’t been around him like that.”

“That’s about to change.”

I gleamed inside, almost not knowing what to say to her changed behavior toward this situation. “Okay, well, how about I pick you up and then we go get the baby together. We can grab some takeout and stay at my house tonight.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“So, I’ll see you later, in probably an hour or so.”

“I’ll be ready.”

“Cool,” I said. As she ended the call, a knock sounded off at my room door. “Come in.”

“What you doing ducked off in here? All this damn house Granny got,” Meech teased.

“Nigga, I was just talking about your sweet ass.”

Meech frowned. “Nigga, I ain’t never been sweet.”

I laughed. “Nah, Kiyomi just told me ‘bout the shit you sent Kinsley earlier this morning, apologizing and shit in the card. You got my woman jealous about that outfit you sent. Who picked it out for you? Because I know you didn’t get it on your own.”

Meech laughed. “Nigga, stay out my business. You know I got taste.”

“Yeah, lots of taste, asking her to meet you at The Four Seasons.” I grinned. “You ain’t never been that romantic.”

“Yeah well, when you’re apologizing to a good woman for fucking up, I guess that’s what you do.”

“You’re right. I could learn a thing or two from you. I was like, damn, my boy ain’t fuckin’ around.”

“Nope, I’m not.” He grinned.

“So, what’s wrong? You look like you got something on your mind.”

“Eh, I’m good.”

“You sure? You better pep up, you meeting ya baby mama at eight o’ clock. That’ll be here before you know it.”

“Yeah,” he said with a slight pause. “You’re right. I just don’t know how Kinsley is going to react once she sees me face to face.”

“Hell, from what I’m told, she seems like she’s ready to talk it out.”

Meech cleared his throat. “Yeah, hopefully she is,” he responded. “I ran into Roz on my way up. She was heading out. I asked where you was, and she looked like she’d been crying. Is everything alright with her?”

I shrugged. “No telling with Roz. That nigga probably breaking her lil’ heart. Who knows? You know Roz ain’t the toughest kid on the planet,” I teased, even though a part of me wanted to break that nigga’s face if her crying did have something to do with him.

“You’re right.” He grinned. “So, what you got planned for today? Besides laying up in this room looking ugly.”

“That’s the nigga I know.” I laughed. “The only thing I’m doing is picking up Dolce from Kay’s, but Kiyomi is going with me.”

“Oh, she’s on board now?”

“Yeah.” I nodded. “I’m actually surprised too.”

“Well, that’s good. How is the lil’ fella? Do you feel like he’s yours now?”

“He’s good, and honestly, I can’t say if he’s mine or not. Granny says that he could be, but Keisha could’ve marked him too. Whatever that means, but I’m guessing she thinks Keisha thought about me so much that she made him favor me.”

“That is a thing. I certainly believe in it,” Meech said.

“But I believe she said that to make me feel better because I’m not claiming him. I gotta tell you, though, Keisha is a very calculated person. She knows something. But for me, I guess time will tell once the test comes back.”

“Damn, that’s crazy. I ain’t gon’ lie, he favors Granny to me.”

I grinned. “Boy, stop.”

“He do. He got her complexion, her bright eyes, y’all hair.”

I laughed with a shake of the head. “All babies have pretty decent, good strands of hair.”

“Shittin’ me. I was fuckin’ around with a bitch who had a baby a lil’ older than Dolce and that baby hair was nappy as fuck. I mean, he had a head full of bullets.”

I laughed out loud. “Stop it. Don’t talk about that woman’s baby.”

“Shit, she had the same nappy bullets on her pussy. I told her ass I couldn’t fuck her. Bitch shit might shoot back when I bust one.”

I fell out laughing. “Nigga, you slow.”

“I’m for real,” he said, while chuckling. “Anyway, I’m gon’ let you get ready to handle your business. I got things to take care of before eight o’clock tonight.”

“You got a big night. If things go as planned, y’all might be getting back together.”

Meech shrugged. “Who knows? Only time will tell.”

We dapped each other up and then he left, as I put on my shoes to head out behind him.



An hour and a half later, I pulled up and parked in Keisha's driveway. I looked over at Kiyomi. "You ready for this?"

She smiled. "Yeah, why not? I know I've been distant, but I had a long talk with Mama earlier and what she said made sense. I accept what you accept, even if we agree to disagree. I love you and I know how much this means to you. Plus, one day we'll have babies of our own and this tells me that you'll be a great father."

I smiled. "You better know it. I'll be right back," I told her, getting out the car and walking up to the door. I hated coming to Keisha's house. It always brought back memories of when we were together. No, it wasn't all bad but damn, it wasn't something I cared to admit I even dealt with at times. Keisha had a way of making people hate her. Luckily, I was working on those feelings slowly but surely. As I rang the doorbell, I glanced back to see a car pulling up. It was Hendrix. I had to grin to myself. Lil' nigga was hanging in there. Kay probably was blowing in his ass or sucking his balls from the back, trying to make sure he didn't leave her.

"Why you come so early?" she asked, opening the door.

"I told you I was coming, didn't I?"

"Yeah, but I didn't think right now."

"Well, I'm here, so is he ready to go?"

"I guess so," she said, peeking around me, as Hendrix got out of his car. As Hendrix passed my truck, Kiyomi let the window down and called out to him. The second I looked back in Kay's face, she started.

"I know damn well you ain't brought that bitch to my house. What the hell are you thinking? If Keisha was home, she'd have a fit."

"Well, Keisha ain't home, is she?"

"Wait till I tell her that you brought her here. On top of that, she's about to be hanging around my nephew."

"Keisha didn't give two fucks about that the morning she dropped him off on my porch. I'm sure she saw Kiyomi's car parked out front. So—"

"Whatever, Dodge," Kay said, throwing up her hand. "Come on in so you can get your child."

I simply shook my head. She and Keisha were going to make Dolce mine one way or the other. After getting the baby, I walked out. I didn't want to be in there no longer than I had to.

"Hendrix, you coming in or not? Because when I lock this door, it's gon' be locked the rest of the evening," Kay yelled out. It was obvious she

was in her feelings about Kiyomi and Hendrix talking.

Hendrix grinned with a shake of the head. "I'm coming, girl." As he passed me, we dapped each other up and he headed in the house with crazy. I strapped the baby down and then got in the truck with my lady.

"That woman too crazy." Kiyomi laughed.

"Shit, who you telling. If I gotta deal with this for next eighteen years —"

"You'll be doing it with me and together, we'll get through it."

"Awww, you so sweet." I smiled, leaning over, and kissed her on the lips.

"I know," she teased.

As I drove home, all I could think was that I was a lucky ass man to have a woman like this by my side. She was young, but so mature for her age. Yeah, she certainly had her hot-tempered moments, but it was something she could control. I was sure of it. The main thing that I loved about her was the way she loved me and in life, that's really all that mattered.

KINSLEY SIMMONS

I sat in my car waiting for valet to come escort me out and take my car to park it. I'd made it to the hotel, and as I looked down at my watch, it was six o'clock. I'd gotten a text from Meech to meet earlier because of a change of plans, yet I was still conflicted about us linking up. Only because I was unsure of what I'd say to his personal apology. Of course, I knew I'd accept it, but a part of me felt like he was also looking for something in return. Something more than I was willing to give him. As I waited, I sent him a text message.

***I'm on my way in.* KINSLEY**

***I'll meet you downstairs in the lobby area.* MEECH**

I read the text with a slight shrug. The only exciting part about us meeting was this nice ass outfit I had on. I was rocking the fuck out of these gold and black Moschino boots with the teddy bear and gold chains embroidered all over. I knew Meech had style, but brother had really stepped his game up.

In no time, I was walking into The Four Seasons. It was definitely a top-tier luxury hotel. I'd been here once already on a date before, but it was more like a booty call. I was only here for sex, not feelings. The guy was somebody I kicked it with for about eleven months. It was actually one of the longest so-called relationships I'd ever had. That was mainly because we were both disconnected from the idea of falling in love and just enjoyed being in the company of each other.

As I looked around the lobby area, this gut-wrenching feeling caused me to tingle inside. It almost felt like butterflies, but why?

“Wassup, beautiful?” Meech said, holding a vase of red roses as he snuck up behind me. It had to be at least three dozen of them.

I smiled. “Wow, you must be in the rose giving mood today.”

He smiled back. “Well, uh, you can never have enough flowers to brighten your day, right?”

“You’re right about that. Thank you,” I said. “But can you carry them for me? This belly is only letting me hold on to this beautiful purse you got me.”

“You look good by the way.” He cheesed, staring me up and down.

“You do too,” I told him. I always loved his laid-back swag, and when put on his Versace fits, it was everything. I could never deny the fact that he was indeed a handsome, fine ass man.

“Thanks.” He nodded.

“Glad you got this t-shirt dress or anything else might’ve been too small,” I said, rubbing my belly.

“I know right.” He grinned, grabbing me by the hand and looking around the place. Hell, I thought somebody was gonna jump out from nowhere and serenade me with a song or some sweet tunes from violins. After all, he did say, expect the unexpected. “So, um, let’s get outta here. I made us reservations.”

“Oh, you did? I don’t know why. I thought we were staying in for some reason. But then again, you didn’t buy me this outfit for nothing.”

“You know what to say.”

“Where are we going?”

“Ruth’s Chris.”

“One of my favorites.” I gleamed. “I especially didn’t eat because of this.”

“Well, good, because as always you can order whatever you want to eat.”

“Yes!” I happily exclaimed. “This lil’ joka be hungry.”

“You do know it’s a boy, right?”

“How do you know? I think it’s a girl, but I’ve fallen in love with the idea of it being a boy.”

Meech frowned. “You getting what you want, not what you think it is.”

I laughed as we walked out to Meech’s car parked right in front of the hotel doors. Of course, he had valet. He was no cheap nigga and didn’t mind splurging on me whenever he felt the need to. He opened my door like

a gentleman would, buckled the roses down in a seatbelt in the backseat and once behind the wheel, off we went to Ruth's Chris.

On the drive over, he glanced over at me. "I just wanted to apologize for what happened. I'm truly sorry. I shouldn't have said those things and I'm sorry you had to walk in on me—"

"Apology accepted," I butted in. I didn't want to hear about that latter part again. Shit really disgusted me, especially seeing that it was Thomasina that was slobbin' his knob. Her wide-mouth ass could suck the skin off a nigga dick, which was why I'm sure he was enjoying every bit of it.

"I'm sorry about all that."

"I apologize too. I shouldn't have slapped that bitch, but her mouth is so fuckin' reckless."

"I know."

"But I'm sorry I took it there, especially because I'm pregnant. I also apologize for putting my hands on you. I was so mad, I snapped. It still didn't give me a pass to hit you. For that, I'm sorry."

"It's okay. I really deserved it and for the record, I'd never put my hands on you like that. I was just heated. It was too much going on, shit I couldn't control, and my feelings boiled over. As long as we're past that, we'll be good."

"I agree." I nodded. At that time, I really didn't want to talk about anything else. All I wanted to do was ride in peace and listen to the sweet sounds of Ralph Tresvant and Johnny Gill singing "All Mine." Meech might've been a certified thug, but he knew what to play when I was in his presence.

We pulled up to Ruth's Chris as my stomach starting growling. I could smell the food from the inside of the car. "Whew, I'm hungry."

"I bet you are." Meech grinned. He got out of the car, walking around to my side, and let me out. We walked inside Ruth's Chris and were seated at our reserved table. I ordered a sweet tea and a glass of water. Meech ordered Hennessy straight, no chaser. Had me jealous that I couldn't take a shot or two with him. At that moment, I felt relief that I didn't feel any pressure. Things were going pretty smooth and just as our drinks made it to the table, two men wearing too lil' suits came to our table and started serenading me. I grinned, as I looked over at Meech.

"Really?"

"Yeah really, with your mushy ass."

“Expect the unexpected, right?”

He frowned. “Huh?”

“Expect the unexpected. That’s what you wrote on the card.” I grinned.

“Yeah, my bad. I’m just feeling this Hennessy. I was already taking shots before you even showed up at the hotel.”

“I could tell.”

“Anyway, I really wanted to talk with you about us and our future. Honestly, whether this baby is mine or not, I still wanna be a part of his life. I wanna be a part of your life,” he added. “If possible, I want us to work things out and be together.”

I cleared my throat.

“I can be a changed man. I only slept with all those women because I was hurt and didn’t know how to process those feelings, but I’ll stop. I’ll stop today,” he told me with sincere eyes. “I just want us to be good.”

I smiled, but it was only because I didn’t know what to respond. It was something in me that didn’t feel right. Here this man was pouring his heart out to me and yet, I felt nothing for him. He looked good, smelled good, was treating me like a queen, and still I felt nothing—at least not what I was supposed to be feeling. I didn’t have that spark. Those unexplained butterflies had long disappeared since we walked out the hotel. I had love for him, but not enough love to wanna be with him. I really didn’t even know how to explain it, but I didn’t want to hurt him no more. A part of me was thinking to just go along with the flow and maybe feelings would resurface over time, but I owed myself more. This wasn’t about Gianni or me thinking we would be together, but more about what I needed and wanted. Sure, some women prayed for men like Meech, but what I prayed for was stability and real love. Not saying he couldn’t give me that, but I just didn’t feel like it was supposed to come from him.

“You good over there?” he asked, while tipping the men before they walked off.

“Yeah,” I said, while looking at the menu trying to avoid the inevitable.

“You got quiet on me. So, what you think about what I just said?”

“I appreciate your kind words and the heartfelt message—”

“But.”

“But I don’t wanna just go all in when I feel like it’s a lot that has been done over the past few months. Mainly, the way you handled your hurt, so to speak. I know I was no saint and my mommy issues have caused me

quite the damage when it comes to settling down, but I have to know that what I'm signing up for is the real deal."

"Are you saying that I'm not the real deal?"

"You are definitely the real deal. I'm talking about my future, though, my baby's future."

"You know I'll be good to you and the baby. Y'all will always come first."

"No doubt," I said, just as the waiter walked over.

"Y'all ready to order? Would you like to start with appetizers?"

"Um, yes," I answered, just happy for the distraction. "Let's start with the sizzling crab cakes and some calamari."

"You can add the spicy shrimp also," Meech added.

"Okay," the lady said, while jotting down our order. "You can go ahead and order you entrée as well if you'd like."

"Sure." I cheesed. "Let me get the 16-oz ribeye and lobster tail, garlic mashed potatoes, and lobster mac and cheese."

"How would you like your ribeye?"

"Medium well."

"Would you like a Caesar salad, a steak salad, or lobster bisque?"

"A Caesar salad," I told her.

"And you, sir?"

"I'll have the salmon filet, broiled with lemon, butter, and parsley. Everything else, including the sides, I want the same as her," he responded with a handsome smile.

"Gotcha."

Once the lady walked off, I looked over at Meech. I knew he was waiting on a for sure response, but it wasn't something I could give him yet.

"Can we just enjoy the evening? We've apologized for our bullshit, and I think that's a step in the right direction. What you think?"

"I agree." He smiled. "I really want you to know that even if this baby isn't mine, I'm not going nowhere. I'm still going to be a part of his life."

"That's nice to know," I said with a half-smile. Most would've jumped at that proposal and been all smiles, but I was still uncertain. Could he really love another man's child the way I loved him? How would that really make me feel? It was bad enough that my feelings were all over the place, and being big, pregnant, and very hormonal wasn't helping.

We ate dinner over laughs and good talk. I was glad he had put aside the pressure of it all and just allowed us to enjoy each other's company.

"So, where now? Back to The Four Seasons?" I pondered. The only reason I asked was because I didn't mind us chilling overnight, but I still wasn't about to fuck him. Telling me how he felt didn't erase the fact that he'd been fucking numerous bitches. I meant it when I said he wasn't going to throw off my pH balance with that bullshit. I had a baby that I loved wholeheartedly, and his well-being came before mine. So, that was it. We weren't doing that.

"Well—I um, changed locations. We won't be staying the night there. We're heading over to The St. Regis."

I frowned. "Why you switch locations? Apparently, you had already paid for that room, right?"

"Yeah, but I was able to set up something even more special for you tonight and changing locations was just a part of it. Look, I didn't know what I was thinking other than getting a store clerk to help pick out your outfit last night and then waking up with the thoughts of just sending it to you. I just wanted to apologize in the biggest way possible. But, as the day went on and I was still making plans, I decided to switch locations at the last minute. That's why I still had you meet me at The Four Seasons, because there I was going to give you your roses and to also throw you off of what was really up my sleeve."

"Expect the unexpected." I smiled.

"Yep, that part." He smiled back. "You'll love what I have set up at The St. Regis too."

"I've never been there."

"Good, I was hoping you hadn't."

We got up to leave and headed out of the restaurant. As we walked outside, I noticed someone sitting on the hood of his car. "What the hell?"

Thomasina grinned. "Really Meech?"

"Damn," he uttered, but it wasn't like a *damn bitch, why you here* type of utter, but more like a *damn, I wasn't expecting to see you here*, utter. "Sina, just leave. I don't have time for your bullshit tonight. We can talk about whatever you wanna talk about later."

"I think we need to talk about it now."

"Girl, I ain't with this shit," I said, as I walked right past her, heading to the passenger side of the car. I really wasn't in the mood, and I sure as hell

wasn't about to lose my cool a second time. She really wasn't worth it.

"You really are a fool," she told Meech and then directed her attention to me. "I felt sorry for him, but really I feel sorry for you."

"Why?" I calmly asked.

"Just get in the car, Kinsley. Don't pay her no mind. I can't believe you've been following me."

"No, I wanna know why I'm the one she feels sorry for when she's the one that's out here making herself look desperate and foolish," I said, now waiting on an answer from Thomasina.

"Meech, you wanna tell her?"

"Sina, leave before I do something—"

"Do what, Meech? What you gon' do to me? Not a damn thang or yo' ass will be in jail. Do you wanna tell her?"

"Tell me what?" I asked, looking at Meech and then back to Thomasina. "Better yet, since you're here, you tell me," I insisted, now starting to get upset because these muthafuckas weren't gonna keep playing with me.

"Sina, I'm tellin' you," Meech let out with a menacing stare.

"Pipe down, Meech. If she wanna talk, let her talk, then we can be on our way. Because at this point, I'm not leaving until I know what's on her mind," I said.

"I stayed the night with Meech last night—"

"Sina—"

"Don't fucking Sina me, nigga. You were all in my ear about letting this one go because you knew it wasn't going to work. You wanted me and you to work things out because, in your words, I was the one that always loved you and had your back."

"Mm-hm," I mumbled.

"I was on that cognac and drunk as fuck. I don't remember what I said."

"Oh, you remember, nigga. We were together up until he left to go to Dodge's crib, but then I just happened to catch him at the light around 5:30, so I followed him. To my surprise, he goes to The Four Seasons, getting out of his car with a large vase of roses. I parked where I could just watch him, while sending him a text asking where he was—"

"Sina—"

"He told me he was still at Dodge's house, so I knew then that something fishy was going on. I waited, and then you pulled up." She grinned.

Meech dropped his head, not saying a word.

“Why play with my feelings if this is what you want? I’m not fighting over you no more. Matter of fact, I’ll be removing this tattoo tomorrow. I’m done being your fool.”

“Sina, you wanted me. I didn’t want you!”

“That ain’t what you was saying last night. You know what we had. We only broke up because you couldn’t keep yo’ dick in yo’ pants,” she said, and then looked at me. “Hell, the same way you caught me sucking him off, was the same way I caught him with another bitch sucking him off,” she said to me, now with tears in her eyes. It wasn’t until that moment that I felt sorry for this girl. She was really heartbroken by Meech’s actions.

“Meech, is this true?”

“Man, I don’t know what hallucinations Sina is having, but last night nor this morning played out how she’s making it.”

“All I’m gon’ say is to be careful with this one,” she told me. “He’s sweet and loving. Yes, he’s serenaded me the same way in the past, after he’d gotten caught up in his lies. I mean, he loves to fuck other women. He loves to have threesomes or foursomes. He has an addiction to sex—”

“That’s a lie.”

“Meech, stop it. The charade is over. This girl is pregnant. You owe her the respect of keepin’ it a stack with her.”

“Get in the car, Kinsley,” he said, but this time like he meant business. “Sina, get yo’ ass out the way before I run you over.”

Thomasina grinned. “He always uses that macho shit to try and deflect what’s really going on. Meech, you really had yourself a good one. I’m done with yo’ ass, for real this time.” After saying that, she walked off. I could see her wiping the tears from her face as I got in the car. I didn’t even look over at Meech. It was so much going through my head; I didn’t know what to think, how to feel, or what to say. This nigga really had it going on and manipulation was definitely his strong suit. I mean, it had nothing to do with how he treated me or claimed to love me, he was just calculated with it. For somebody to take out the time to get me clothes, flowers, and plan all this but was also in another bitch’s ear all while doing it, had to be dealing with some crazy shit. I didn’t know what it was, but I didn’t want no parts of it.

“Take me home.”

ROMEO “ROSCO” GUNNER

“So, what’s this lil’ meeting about? I have things to do.”
 “Rosalyn, relax,” Mama said, as I shook my head waiting for Royce to join us with her slow butt.

“Ok, I’m here,” Royce chimed in as she entered the entertainment room, plopping down on the large sectional next to Mama. “So, wassup? Roz, what’s wrong with you?”

“Nothing,” she griped under her breath.

“I called this meeting because there is a lot going on within the family and it’s time we lay some things on the table, speak about our feelings, and get past this separation that Mama and Dad are going through.”

“I don’t feel like I need to be a part of this. They made their decisions without us. Our voices didn’t matter then, and they don’t matter now,” Rosalyn spat.

“Is that how you feel, Royce?” I asked.

“No, I don’t mind talking about it.”

“Do you feel like Roz, Rhoda?” I asked.

“No, I would like to say something.”

“Okay, good. Mama, are you fine with this meeting?”

“Yea.” She nodded. “I just wish your daddy would’ve showed up.”

“Why?” I asked. “He doesn’t need to be here for this. He has moved out. Y’all are the only ones in this house now, and there needs to be a peaceful resolution so that things can somewhat get back to normal.”

“I don’t know how much normal it’ll be with Daddy gone now,” Rosalyn said.

“Clearly, you’re the main one that has things to get off your chest. So, say what you feel, Roz,” Royce said, all the while filing her nails like she was so unbothered by what we were doing.

“Royce, don’t talk to me like that. You know I’ll beat you up, right?”

“Girl, you won’t hurt a fly. I mean, literally. Just because you’re a year older than me don’t mean you can beat me up.”

“Right, Roz, you remember the time when Royce slapped ole big-face Jade in the mouth for talking smack to you?” Rhoda asked in her lil’ squeaky voice.

I grinned under my breath but couldn’t let their shenanigans continue.

“Aye, y’all chill out. This can go on all day if nobody stops y’all,” I told ‘em.

“I’m not sitting in here listening to this mess,” Rosalyn said as she got up to walk out but was instantly stopped by Mama.

“Sit yo’ ass down. I mean, seriously. You are the main one that needs to be here. You’ve been walking around here in your feelings, acting like a big ass baby, and I’m sick of it!”

“But—”

“But my ass! You call yourself mad at us because we didn’t tell y’all about the divorce. Okay, that was a piss poor decision on our parts, and I take the blame for that. I should’ve said something back when your father and I were having problems. But this shit didn’t happen overnight. We’ve been unhappy for a long time.”

“Y’all didn’t look unhappy to me.”

“Rhoda, baby, we’ve been unhappy for a long time. You’re sixteen years old now, I know you didn’t catch the signs back when we fell out of love. None of you did. By the time Romello was born, we knew then that it was just a matter of time before we went our separate ways. Your daddy is a provider, so he stayed and made sure that we were good.”

“But y’all looked happy. Y’all weren’t fussing or fighting,” Royce chimed in.

“That’s because we understood the importance of communication and we stayed on the same page, at least most of the time. I can’t say that my feelings aren’t all over the place, because your father is a good man, but if he wasn’t happy then how could I be? I don’t wanna put all the blame on him either, but—”

“He cheated on you,” Rosalyn bluntly said.

“He didn’t—well, he did go outside of our marriage looking for attention that I wasn’t giving him—”

“It’s not your fault,” I cut in.

“I know, but all the blame shouldn’t be on him. I was always focused on y’all. You know, school, ballet, plays, after-school meetings, soccer ball, football. You name it I was there.”

“’Cause Daddy was always working,” Rhoda added.

“Daddy paid the bills, kept food on the table and a nice roof over our heads. I can’t fully blame him because he kept his fatherly duties first. His husband responsibilities were often compromised, but my wifely obligations were often slacking, too.”

“You were weak.”

My eyes stretched, as Mama looked over at Rosalyn. “What’d you say?”

“You were weak,” she repeated, to my surprise.

“Oh, I was weak?”

“Yeah.” She smugly nodded. “You let Daddy do whatever he wanted to do. You never put up a fuss or a fight. He came home when he wanted to. He walked over you and you let another woman take yo’ husband.”

“Roz, that’s enough! You ain’t gon’ be talkin’ to my mama like that.”

“Hush, Rosco! It’s the truth!” she sassed, as Mama coolly got up, walked over, and stood in front of her.

“After everything I’ve done your entire lifetime, you got the nerves to call me weak?!”

“Mama—”

“No, sit down, Romeo. I got this.”

I didn’t say another word. I sat my black ass back down. If ever she called my government name, shit was real.

“So, you think I was weak, Rosalyn?”

“I—um—”

“Say it again, Miss Bad Ass, ‘cause you sure as hell got a lot of lip today.”

Rosalyn looked over at me, and then at Rhoda and Royce. She stood up, now face to face with Mama. I’d never seen no shit like this before. I didn’t know what had gotten into Roz, but we were about to be planning her funeral if she didn’t choose her next words carefully.

“You were wea—”

Mama backhanded Roz so hard, I thought she broke her neck. The lick was so loud I damn near jumped out my seat. Roz screamed out, holding the side of her face. “You slapped me!”

“I brought your ass in this world, and I’ll take you out! Don’t fuckin’ play with me, girl! Just because your daddy ain’t around don’t mean you can size me up! Young lady, I will lay your ass out! You hear me?!” She had jacked Roz up so fast, I had to jump up and get between them. Roz took off upstairs, bawling her eyes out. I knew she was in disbelief because none of us had ever seen my mama come out of character, not like this. We had parents that didn’t believe in hittin’ us. We got shit taken away or couldn’t come out of our rooms nor have company over. It was never nothing physical. But Mama surprised the hell out of me.

“You okay, Mama?” Rhoda asked in cautious tone.

“Yes baby, I’m just fine. Sorry y’all had to see that.”

“She was asking for it,” Royce uttered.

I actually smiled inside. It was good to see Mama let some of that aggression out. I knew she hated to do it on Roz, but like Royce said, she asked for it.

“Mama, you sure you’re good?” I asked.

“Yeah, where were we?” she softly asked, like nothing had just happened. “Go check on your sister. I’ll finish this talk.”

“Yes ma’am,” I said, as I got up and headed upstairs. I could hear Mama saying that she was glad Romello was taking a nap. Hell, I was glad too, because I knew that would’ve scared him shitless. With him being the youngest, he was always babied.

Once at Roz’s door, I knocked lightly. “Yo!” I called out.

“Go away,” she said, still crying.

Instead of going away, I simply turned the doorknob. It was unlocked, so I walked in.

“I said go away,” she said, with her face buried in her pillow. I walked over and sat on the side of her bed.

“I’m not going away until I know you’re okay.”

“Why do you care? It’s not like you’re around like that anymore.”

“I do come around.”

“Not without your other half. I bet you can’t even fart without her tryna be right there to smell it.”

I grinned a little. “Stop it, Roz. You know it ain’t like that. I’m worried about you. You’ve been really going through some emotional shit lately. I don’t believe it’s all about Mama and Dad either. Sit up, talk to me.”

“I don’t want to,” she cried.

I knew her feelings were hurt. That slap was nothing but an ego blow. Mama almost knocked her ass into next week.

“You’re not a baby anymore, Roz. You need to woman up and put yo’ big girl panties on. This act of yours ain’t you. Everybody knows you’re not hard. Matter of fact, Romello probably can whoop yo’ ass—”

Rosalyn laughed. “Stop it. He’s only five years old. I’ll knee his lil’ ass in the nuts.”

We bust out laughing. This was the Roz I knew. “Mama feels bad for hitting you.”

“Boy, no she don’t,” she said with a serious expression, then bust out laughing again. “She dazed the fuck outta me. Guess I deserved that.”

I grinned. “Yeah, she almost Debo’d yo’ ass.”

“Hush, boy.”

“Nah, but seriously, you owe her an apology.”

“I know I do. I didn’t mean what I said.”

“I know you didn’t.”

“I don’t know what’s been wrong with me. Hearing about the divorce just played on my mental. My feelings were so hurt over that. Just picturing them not being together, a couple, ya know.”

“I know.”

“Shit had me a lil’ fucked up. Then I met Loyal. That has only added to my ongoing issues. I mean, damn. I know I fucked up by talking to him. But at first, I really wanted to get under Yomi’s skin.”

“You were wrong for that.”

“I know, and then one night turned into months and now we’re here.”

“And here is where?”

“Where he dropped my ass like a bad habit a couple of weeks ago.”

“I told you that situation was going to turn out to be a bad one. Kiyomi was nothing but a friend to you. You didn’t have to do her like that. She didn’t know Dad was dating her mama. It was just a crazy coincidence.”

“I know.”

“So, you also owe her an apology.”

“I don’t even know what to say to her. I really did the most. I slept with her ex, tried to lowkey rub it in her face, and turned my back on her during the time she needed me the most. I mean, I should’ve been there when Dodge found out that the baby was his. I feel like such a horrible person.”

“You aren’t though. Hopefully, she understands what you’ve been going through yourself. It’s still no excuse, but at least you’ve come to your senses. It took long enough, but you know—”

“Hush, Rosco!” She playfully punched me in the thigh.

“Girl, I need to take you to get boxing lessons or something. That lil’ weak ass lick.”

“Boy, stop!”

“Shit, you’re the weak one.”

We played, as she called herself beating me up. Them lil’ baby licks weren’t even felt. I laughed the whole time. Once we calmed down, I had to ask.

“So, why did that pussy ass nigga drop you like a bad habit, when he’s the one that’s a bad fuckin’ habit?”

“He said he had a rude awakening with the girl he’s with.”

“So, he was in a relationship this whole time?”

“Yeah.”

“You knew that?”

“Yeah.”

“Damn, you are fucked up.”

“Roscooo! Damn, give me a break.”

I grinned. “Okaaaay! My bad. You just gotta be wiser when it comes to men. Most of the time we are no good, but there is a good man out there somewhere. Don’t ever feel like you gotta settle.”

“I know.”

“Well, I’m heading over to Dodge’s house. He’s having a lil’ kickback today for the guys. I seriously think you should call Kiyomi and apologize.”

“I just have to build up the guts for that. She might not wanna hear it.”

“I believe she will.”

“I don’t know, but I’ll think about it. Let me clean myself up and then I’ll apologize to Mama. Tell Dodge to call me, because I haven’t said nothing to him either. I know he was blown when he got those results.”

“Blown is an understatement, but I believe he had started to have a feeling that lil’ DG was his. Plus, being a daddy had started looking good

on him.”

“And that crazy ass girl ain’t back yet?”

“Nah, not yet. I believe she’s returning next week though. I’ll find out more when I get over there, because I wanna know what’s going on too. With all of us living our own lives, in our own places now, we’ve not been touching basis on a regular. That’s why Dodge was having this kickback.”

“I get it. Life takes over and before you know it, you’re in your own lane, doing your own thang.”

“That part,” I said with a smile. I gave her dap. “Love you, kiddo.”

“Love you too,” she said.

“We’ll catch up later.”

“Okay,” she said, as I walked out the bedroom. I headed down the stairs to see that Mama’s talk was over. I believe from this point on everybody in the house would be somewhat back to normal. At least I was hoping so.

“You gone?” Mama asked, as I walked past the kitchen where she was getting ready to cook.

“Yeah, I’m going to Dodge’s crib, but I’ll be back.”

“Okay, love you, and thanks for getting us together today. We needed that.”

“No problem, Mama.”

“How is she?” she asked, pointing up.

“She’s fine. She’ll be down to talk with you shortly.”

“Okay.” She smiled. “See you later.”

“A’ight,” I said, and then left the house.



After Boss Hog had gotten done grilling and we’d eaten, had our bellies full, and were now just laid back watching a good basketball game, it was definitely time to chop it up.

“Can y’all believe that Tootie and Vee got into a fight last night?” Cobra said.

“Yeah, this nigga called me ‘bout to cry like a lil’ bitch,” Dodge joked.

“Nah, man.” Cobra laughed. “Man, Vee pulled out a blade on Tootie and damn near cut that girl arm off.”

We cracked up laughing. “Nigga, you drunk. Tootie got five stitches.”

“It was eleven stitches.” He called himself correcting us.

“Yo, you crazy, man,” I let out. “You can’t be serious.”

“I’m serious ‘bout leaving Vee crazy ass alone. I ain’t fuckin’ around with her ass no more. She showed up to my house and went the fuck off. I swear we had just hung up the phone, and the next thing I know she’s beatin’ my door down.”

“Been told you to stop fuckin’ that broad. Glad my sister left yo’ ass, because Vee would’ve gotten fucked up if she cut my Roz like that.”

“Shit, I already know,” Cobra said, just as Dodge looked over at Meech.

“Why you so quiet?”

“I’m just chillin’, bruh.”

“You talk to Kinsley yet? Her baby shower is next weekend, right?”

“Yeah, and not really. Shiiit, since Thomasina showed her ass, Kinsley ain’t been fuckin’ with a nigga like that. We don’t even talk on the phone like that.”

“She didn’t even want you at the gender reveal,” I mumbled.

“Glad I didn’t go. It’s a girl. I wanted a boy.”

“Nigga, that’s fucked up,” I expressed with a displeased frown on my face.

“Y’all know I’m just playing. If she’s mine, I’m gonna make sure I’m the best daddy in the world. She gon’ know what’s like to have a father in her life.”

“Good,” I said.

“So, do she even want you at the baby shower?” Dodge pondered.

“She said I can come, but the way she’s acting, I don’t even wanna go to that either.”

“But what if the baby is yours?” I asked. “You might not wanna miss that. Plus, if that’s the case, Kinsley will have to come around eventually.”

“I agree,” Boss Hog said with a mouth full of food.

“Nigga, yo’ fat ass still eatin’?” I asked, as everybody laughed.

“Fuck you.” He grinned, shootin’ the middle finger at me.

“Look, y’all know I don’t sugarcoat shit. Meech, you was wrong, bruh.”

“How the fuck?” he griped.

“You was still fuckin’ Sina knowing damn well how she is, but then tryna court Kinsley knowing damn well how she is. You had to know that they would’ve bumped heads again. I mean, it was nice how you planned

all that shit for Kinsley to apologize, but why even plan all that if you were in bed with Sina the night before? Make it make sense.”

“Sina had a bitch with her. She ain’t wanna tell that part, though.”

“So, you went so you could have a threesome?”

He shrugged. “Yeah, you would’ve went too.”

Dodge shook his head. “I love pussy, but I have a lady. That’s all I need and she’s good to me. Sina was good to you, you fucked off on her. Kinsley, yeah, she got parent issues, but she’s a good girl—”

“She fucked a nigga she didn’t know,” Boss Hog cut in, still chewing food.

“Nigga, shut yo’ fat ass up,” Dodge joked, as we laughed. “Nah, but seriously though, Kinsley is good people. She made a mistake, but let’s keep it real. You would’ve fucked up more than a few times had she stayed with you. Am I right?”

“Nigga, nah.”

“Nigga, you lyin’. Kinsley just had you gone for a minute, but I could’ve seen that wearing off at some point. Luckily, she hauled ass first. She really saved herself from the back-and-forth bullshit. I used to get tired of Sina hittin’ me up cryin’ ‘bout yo’ ass.”

“Shit, me too,” Cobra butted in.

“And me too,” I agreed.

“Why she ain’t never call me?” Boss Hog asked.

“Nigga, ain’t nobody callin’ you unless they want a recipe.” I laughed.

“Y’all niggas got jokes today.” He grinned.

“Man, I wanna hear this shit. I got problems. Sina acting crazy and won’t talk to me, and Kinsley buggin’ out too.”

“It’s yo’ fault though,” Dodge told him.

“Nigga, why you ridin’ my ass, when yo’ baby mama come back?”

Dodge grinned. “Shit, she can stay where she’s at for all I care.”

“How’s that working out, though, now that you know?”

“I really won’t know until she’s back to be honest. I mean, nothing really changed. His routine is still about the same. I let Kay take him to see Keisha twice already. She is his mother. I’m not tryna take her privileges. As long as she’s tryna get herself together, then that’s all that matters.”

“How are you and Kiyomi these days?”

“Shit, my lady did a whole switch on my ass. She really adores him. Like, from the minute we found out, she was on it. When I say she

impressed the fuck outta me. I gave her a shoe box with twenty grand in it, and guess what she did?”

“What?” I asked, along with everybody else.

“She gave the shit back. Said she’d rather work for her money, so I got something else lined up for her.”

“Hold up, she gave twenty thousand dollars back?” Meech asked.

“Hell yeah.”

“Oh yeah, that’s a keeper,” Meech responded.

“Why you think I ain’t fuckin’ up? She did that. Granny don’t even watch him as much now because she’s here helping out. She bathes him, feeds him, spoils him. Hell, she even feels some kind of way when Kay brings her po’ back ass over here to get him. For one, Kay loves tryna be funny. Like the other day, she said, *y’all wait till my sister comes back. Won’t be playing house no more.*”

“Kay always with the shits. I told Tootie I’on like her ass,” Cobra expressed.

“That bitch crazy. I don’t see how lil’ Hendrix still fuckin’ with her. Shit, I’m surprised, but then again, Kay done put that wop on his ass. He can’t get away.”

“When he’s drafted, that’ll be his get outta jail free card. He better take it and run with it,” I chimed in.

“Right,” Dodge agreed. “But, hey, I can’t complain. Matter of fact, Kiyomi has him now. She took him to her house while we’re here enjoying the kick back. They’ll be back later.”

“Damn, that’s beautiful,” Boss Hog commented. “I’m glad you got you one. It’s been a long time coming.”

“I know right,” he said with a big smile on his face. I could tell that Kiyomi was good for him. She might’ve been a lil’ younger in age, but she was way more mature than most of the women he’d dealt with. On top of that, she didn’t take no shit, which was what he needed in his life to get rid of Keisha’s ass. I was happy for him. Hell, I was happy for me too. We could be good guys if we wanted to. We just had to want it, and I guess Meech hadn’t gotten there yet. Him or Cobra, and if they continued to move like the creep squad, then they’d continue going through the bullshit. Thank God I was past that stage in my life. Only time would tell if they’d ever get there.

HENDRIX WRIGHT

Vee had pissed me off enough with her angry bullshit over that no-good nigga, and now I was at Walgreens looking for some damn peroxide, Neosporin, and bandages for the cuts on her hands. She lucky as hell Tootie didn't press charges on her ass or she would've been in jail tonight. I don't know why she insisted on seeing a man that clearly didn't want her ass. She claimed it was over numerous times but over and over again, I still couldn't tell.

I bent the corner in search of the medical supplies as my heart dropped with a sweet tingling sensation. There was the girl of my dreams standing down the aisle holding a baby and looking like a Queen, handling her motherly duties. However, I knew that the baby wasn't hers, which was all the more reason why this shit was so fuckin' attractive.

A part of me just wanted to turn around and head to another store, only because for once, she was somebody I knew I couldn't have. So, as I turned to leave her be, she called out my name.

"Henny, what you doing in here? I know you wasn't just tryna leave?"

"Nooo, I mean—shit, I ain't wanna bother you," I answered with a slight smile. Being in her presence felt awkward sometimes, especially knowing I had these undeniable feelings, and she didn't.

"Don't do me like that. You know I got nothing but love for you."

"Do you?" I teased.

"And do," she responded with that beautiful smile of hers. "What you doing in here tonight?"

"Getting Vee some first-aid shit."

She frowned. "What she need that for?"

"Her and Tootie got in a fight last night."

"Lemme guess, over Cobra, right?"

"It didn't take a rocket scientist, that's for sure. I don't know why she won't leave that nigga alone."

"Well, you know how it is when you're in love. Is she hurt? I mean, was it a bad fight? I know how them girls get down."

"Yeah, Vee cut Tootie in a few places, so I've heard, and in the process she ended up cutting up her own hand."

"Damn, that shit was bad. See, that's why I don't fuck around. I already have enough drama from your girl and her fuckin' sister."

"Is Kay still trippin' on you?"

"I don't believe she'll ever stop. It's cool, though, because I'm on my good girl shit. She's lucky I won't tag her ass, but it's only because of him," she answered, rubbing the baby on his back.

"I see you got lil' DG tonight by yourself. You've gotten attached."

"He makes it easy." She smiled. I just loved when she smiled. It always did something to me. "At first I didn't know how to feel, but then I gave it a chance. I know this sounds crazy now, but I'm glad he's Dodge's baby. I mean, I'm not ready for any of my own, but I believe things happen for a reason. This had to be one, because I'm not going anywhere."

Hearing her say that jabbed a little, but I knew it. It was just confirmation. "So, Kay tells me that Keisha is returning tomorrow. How do you think that'll work when she finally gets the baby back?"

Kiyomi shrugged while patting the little one on his back. "I don't know. That's why I'm in here now, getting something for this headache. Don't get me wrong, she definitely doesn't scare me nor do I feel like my relationship with Dodge is in any trouble, but Keisha is unpredictable. You just never know what to expect."

"I feel you."

"If she tries to take the baby away from Dodge, she's in for a rude awakening. He already has a lawyer on stand-by for that."

"He got too much money for her to be playing like that. Plus, she's been gone for a whole month now. That's not gonna look good to no judge. I don't care what her reason for leaving was."

"Exactly! But, hopefully, she comes back with good sense, because if she gets too far out of line, her ass is mine."

I laughed, but that shit was turning me on. Kiyomi was definitely no joke and them Henry sisters knew it. “For the baby’s sake, I hope there is only peace from here on out.”

“You need to talk to your lil’ hatin’ ass girlfriend. I mean, I can’t believe you’re still with her crazy ass. That woman has just as much issues as her sister. They should’ve gone on that retreat together.”

I chuckled. “That’s some funny shit, but she’s not exactly my girlfriend. We just fuck on a regular.”

Kiyomi laughed. “So, that’s your cutty buddy?”

“Some like that.” I grinned. “But I don’t know what’s gotten into her. When I told her that I would leave her ass alone after y’all fought, she calmed down. I mean, she seemed like a totally different woman, but lately she’s been on edge for some reason. I caught her going through my cell phone the other day.”

“Maybe it’s because you’re getting ready to leave soon. I mean, you’ll be playing for the pros this time next year.”

I smiled with a pleasing nod. “Yeah, and I can’t wait. Shit feels good.”

“It should.” She smiled back. “Well, think of it this way, it’ll be your way out, because your girl seems attached at the hip now.”

“I know. I was saying we need to take a break. I just gotta tell her.”

Kiyomi chuckled. “Good luck with that.”

“Yeah, I know right. Anyway, I don’t wanna hold you up. It’s getting late, so I’ll let you go.”

“I know right. We have Kinsley’s baby shower tomorrow. It’s also Mother’s Day, so it’s gonna be a busy one.”

“Yeah, definitely busy for you. I’ll be home watching the game and chilling.”

“Cool, we’ll see each other around. I have a few more weeks with ya in school till you bounce and leave us little people behind.”

“I’ll never do that. You know I’ll come find you if you ever need me.”

She smiled. “I know. Anywaysss, let me get this little one home before his dad starts blowing up my phone.”

“Can you blame him?” I asked, checking her out from head to toe.

“Stop it.” She blushed. “Talk to ya later.”

“A’ight.”

As she walked off, I couldn’t help but watch that fat ass jiggling in them zebra-print tights. I swear they looked painted on. Grabbing my manhood in

a nonchalant way, I quickly headed over to the correct aisle to get the shit I needed, and then I bounced.

Once in the car, I shot Kay a text message.

***We need to talk.* HENDRIX**

***Bout what?* KAY**

I irritably shook my head. I knew she was going to ask that.

***Just come over if you ain't got nothing to do.* HENDRIX**

***Why can't you come here?* KAY**

***Don't fuckin worry 'bout it.* HENDRIX**

***OK! I'll come over.* KAY**



“Look at you.”

“What?!” Vee responded with hostility.

“Don't fuckin' snap at me. I'm just sayin'.”

“You've said enough and I've listened. I don't wanna hear shit else.”

“Well, go back to your own house. Oh, I forgot, you moved in here with me because yo' ass ain't gotta house now.”

“Boy, I can easily move my ass out just like I moved my ass in here.”

“Don't let me stop ya,” I expressed. “You sittin' here covering wounds on your hand because of your uncontrollable anger. I keep telling you that Cobra ain't for you. When you gon' learn that? Didn't you just have an abortion by the nigga not long ago? He wasn't tryna stop you from doing that, did he?”

“He didn't know.”

“So, you didn't tell him? Oh, you ain't tell me that.”

“I don't have to tell you everything.”

“I'm actually glad you don't.”

“Can you just get outta here. Don't you have company coming over?”

“I do, but that ain't got nothing to do with what we're discussing right now.”

“I don't wanna hear it, Hendrix!”

“Vee, you know I love you. I'm not tryna be a pest in your side, but if you don't stop this foolishness, ya ass is going to jail. You already know Pops ain't bailing you out.”

“I wouldn’t call him anyway. He wouldn’t even let me move in with him for a few months.”

“That’s because Pops knows you. He doesn’t want to deal with your crazy shit. You’re getting too old to still be doing the dumb shit you be doing.”

“Okay, Hendrix. I get it,” she said as instant tears started to run down her face.

“What’s wrong? Don’t do this. That nigga ain’t worth it, Vee.”

“I’m crying because I’m tired, Hendrix. I just wanna move away. I can’t stay here no more. Nothing is working out for me. I lost my baby. I lost my man. I lost my house. I mean, what’s next? I just need a clean slate. Do it all over again.”

“You just need therapy to help you come to grips with what you’re going through and why. I don’t care about you staying here. You can stay for as long as you want. Hell, I’ll be leaving soon anyway. I just don’t want you to keep playing the fool for somebody that doesn’t love you. Unfortunately, he never will.”

“I know,” she said, wiping her tears. “It’s just hard. I’ve loved this nigga for a long time. One minute he acts like he wants me, and then the next he don’t.”

“Honestly, he never do. His actions show you that.”

“I know. I need a drink,” she said, walking in the kitchen. I was right behind her.

“I just want you to be okay.”

“I will be,” she said. “Keisha comes back tomorrow.”

“You need to cut her ass off too. Keisha has been a toxic part of your life. That’s why you can’t keep it together. You got too much bad energy pulling you apart.”

“You said a mouthful then. You’re also right. I’m not fuckin’ with Keisha. I don’t care how much of changed woman she claims to be. I need a do over.”

“You definitely need new friends.”

“What about you? You need to leave Kay’s crazy ass alone too. If she’s going through your phone, she’s back on her Keisha bullshit. They act just alike. Sometimes, Kay is just a lil’ cooler, but she’s every spit of that sister of hers.”

“Oh, I know, and I am. That’s why she’s coming over tonight. I don’t know what her problem is, but I’m over it.”

“Well, good for you,” she said, just as the doorbell rang. “Don’t mind me. I’ll be enjoying this wine while you tame that tiger at the door.”

I grinned. “I hope she don’t pull out the claws.”

“If she does, at least you bought enough first-aid kit for two.”

“Yeah, I might need it,” I groaned, hating to do this but I knew it needed to be done.

“Hey, babe, what’s this talk about?” Kay asked the minute she walked in my crib.

“Well, hey to you too.”

“I don’t have time to play games with you. Just tell me why I’m here.”

“Damn, she must be a psychic or something,” Vee uttered, as she sat on the sofa sipping on her wine.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Kay asked, glaring at Vee like she wanted her to get out of line.

“Oh, nothing.” Vee shrugged with a smirk on her face.

“Come on, let’s go in my room.”

Once in the room, I sat on the loveseat as Kay sat on the edge of the bed. “Are you breaking up with me?”

My eyes widened. I guess she was a psychic. “Technically, we’re not a couple, Kay. But because I’m getting drafted this summer, I think it’s best if we take a break.”

“I knew that’s why you called me here.”

“Don’t take offense to this. We’re still cool.”

“No, we’re not.”

“Damn, it’s like that?”

“How the fuck you expect me to be cool about us taking a break? I love you.”

“Okay.”

“And that’s all you gotta say, okay?!”

“Calm down, Kay. This attitude of yours is getting outta hand. You’ve been acting out lately. Like, I don’t know what’s wrong with you. I can’t do this no more. For one, I’ve never cared to fuck with a jealous woman. You’re older than me, you shouldn’t be acting so crazy. That day Dodge pulled up and I stopped to talk to Kiyomi, you had a fit. It was no need for

all that cussing and fussing. Then when I started out the house, you threw a vase at me. If that vase would've hit me—”

“I'm sorry. I know you would've been pissed.”

“Pissed is an understatement.”

“I'm sorry though. I don't know what's gotten into me. For one, I feel overwhelmed and it's all Keisha's fault. She's been hounding me about the baby, yet she's not here to keep eye on him herself. Like, I have no problems watching my nephew, but since Dodge found out the baby was his, she's been adamant that I bring DG to see her twice a week since then. That's a two-hour drive, so that's four hours total. So, okay, that has had me not feeling like myself. On top of that, she returns tomorrow, and I think she's coming back with more of her bullshit.”

“Didn't she leave to get help though?”

“Yeah, and I think she got some help. At least it seems like it, but her controlling ways haven't changed much. Plus, she says that she's happy now since she's met somebody new. I mean, who the hell did she meet that fast? How can she be so happy when she was supposed to be working on herself, not finding a love interest. I just feel like I gotta get out of that house. I need my own place. I can't keep being Keisha's do girl. It's costing me my peace.”

“I know because you've certainly changed since we initially had our talk about your attitude. I can't blame everything on Keisha, but that's certainly a big part of it.

“Now, ya lil' friend, I just don't like her ass, and ain't nothing nobody can say to make me soften my feelings for her.”

“Well, I don't think my lil' friend cares about you not liking her. For her to be younger, she's a lot more mature than you are,” I told her ass. I needed her to know that her behavior wasn't cool, and I definitely didn't like it.

She scrunched up her nose, clearly not liking what I'd just said. “That's your opinion.”

“I know it is. I'm just going by what I see.”

“Yeah, I hear you,” she griped. “Anyway, I'm tired. If you think we should take a break, then I'm fine with that,” she said, getting up to leave. I was actually surprised she wasn't showing her ass. I stood up to follow her out. As she entered the living room, she looked over at Vee.

“What?” Vee pondered, staring back at her.

“If you put yo' hands on my bestie again, it's gon' be me and you.”

Instantly, Vee stood up. “What you gon’ do, boo?”

“I’m checkin’ yo’ ass, bitch.”

“No, oh hell nawl. We ain’t doing this,” I intervened, pushing Kay toward the door. “See, this what I’m talkin’ ‘bout.”

“Nah, this ain’t got nothing to do with you. Her scarecrow-looking ass can’t fight if she gotta use a box blade to do her dirty work. She lucky—”

“Talk to me, bitch. I’m right here.”

“You lucky Tootie didn’t press charges. But then again, I’m glad she didn’t. We’ll catch yo’ ugly ass in the streets.”

“You can catch this fade now!”

“Ain’t nobody catching shit in my crib. Time for you to go, Kay. I ain’t playing with y’all asses. I mean it!”

Kay looked at me with a smirk on her face. I really thought she was about to swing on my ass, but instead, she self-righteously grinned and then left without resistance.

“Man, you just don’t know how to shut up sometimes.”

“I wanted that bitch to jump. I was gon’ dust her ass off.”

“Vee, you not dusting nobody off with that bad ass hand of yours. Sit down somewhere. Shit don’t even be that deep.”

“So, how did it go?” she asked, like nothing had just happened.

“Hell, smoother than I thought till she came out and saw yo’ ass still sittin’ here.”

“I live here.”

“Yeah, don’t remind me,” I uttered, as I headed to my bedroom. I was glad to get Kay out my hair. I felt like Vee. I needed a do over, and hopefully going into the league would be a new start for me. I was past ready to leave all this bullshit behind, even my feelings for Kiyomi.

KIYOMI SIMMONS

“Bae, you up?”

“Yeah, I’m coming,” I replied, putting away my toothbrush and then washing my face.

“Come on,” he impatiently called out.

“Dang, what’s the rush?” I pondered, as I walked out the bathroom with nothing but a robe on and a pair of bedroom furry slippers.

“Look.” He pointed at all the boxes that were laying around in the entertainment room.

I frowned. “Lower your tone. You’re gonna wake up the baby.”

“My bad, I’m just so excited.”

“What’s all this?” I asked, while wondering why his ass was so anxious. He was always buying something, no damn telling.

“It’s yours.”

“Huh?”

“It’s yours. All these boxes belong to you.”

“Bae, it’s just May, my birthday isn’t for another four months.”

“Yeah, but it’s Mother’s Day today and you’ve been an amazing woman in Dolce’s life. You deserve the best.”

I smiled, feeling grateful inside. I wasn’t expecting anything today. “I’m not really his mom though.”

“You’re the only mom he knows right now.”

“Bae, you’re gonna make me cry.” I teared up, looking around the room. There were at least six boxes there.

“Happy Mommy’s Day.”

“Do you think he’ll call me that one day?” I asked in a soft, doubtful tone.

“Just as sure as you’re still around,” he assured me.

“Don’t tell me that. I’ll be buying matching fits and pajamas for Christmas. Yours will say *Daddy*, mine will say *Mommy*, and Dolce’s will say, *Son Son*.”

We laughed.

“No, but seriously. You are the best thing that ever happened in my life. I don’t think I could’ve done this with as much ease if it weren’t for you. Yes, Granny and Sha helped out a lot in the beginning, but you stepped in and instantly took over. Dolce has even stayed nights at your house. To have your mom and Kinsley accept him means everything to me. I still don’t know what Keisha did, or it could be the fact that condoms aren’t always babyproof like they say, but she definitely got what she wanted.”

“Not everything, because she don’t have you.”

“She’ll never have me either. We’re either gon’ co-parent cordially or she gon’ find herself fighting for custody. I’m certain that’s a losing battle for her.”

“I know right. Hopefully, she won’t take it that far. Although, I’m sure she’s still pissed about me posting that picture of Dolce on my page and tagging you in it.”

“That’s what she gets for being nosey. It’s crazy how I hadn’t heard from her in three weeks then suddenly, she texts me talking shit. The only thing I said was keep on and I’ll see you in court. I bet her ass didn’t respond after that.”

I chuckled. “Yeah, but she ain’t letting that slide. I might have to beat her ass behind that one. Mama is already on stand-by to bail me outta jail.”

Dodge laughed. “It won’t even go that far. I promise I’ll knock Keisha’s ass out this time if she touches you and I’m around.”

I blushed a little. It was nothing like having a man that would go to war for me, even against his crazy ass baby mammy.

“So, do you have to go meet her or drop him off today?”

“Yeah, we’re meeting at Mr. Henry’s house around noon. I told her ass she’s not welcome here no more.”

“Okay, good.”

“Now, stop all that talking and open these boxes,” he excitedly insisted.

I tore the tape off the first box and then opened it. Taking a deep breath in, I was wowed by what was inside the box. “Baeeee, are you serious?!”

“Yes, I’m very serious. You won’t take money from me, so now, make your own.”

I began to pull out bundles after bundles of expensive hair. I mean, the good, good shit. It was Brazilian, Spanish, Remy, Luxe, and Virgin hair. You name it, I had it. I couldn’t believe he’d done this for me. All I could do was cheese so hard my jaws started to hurt.

“Now, you can start that business you’ve been talking about.”

“Wow.” I rejoiced as tears began to wail in the corners of my eyes. “I’ve never had someone do this for me.”

“I’m not just someone.”

“I know, you’re my man and I’m your appreciative girlfriend.”

“You’re my lady,” he acknowledged. “Now open the rest.”

I began opening the other boxes. “Are you fucking serious, bae?!”

“You like ‘em? I had those made. They’re just to get you started. You can always have them redesigned later.”

“Omg!” I let out. Omg was my saying anytime I was excitedly overwhelmed or shockingly confused. In this case, I was definitely beyond thrilled and over the moon with happiness. “These are the purses that I told you I wanted to have designed and sell some day.”

“Yeah, they are, and some day is now, like in the present day. They’re your purses, bae. Made with real saffiano leather, they have *Yum Yum* embroidered all over in small block letters, with your YY, circled gold or silver keychain, tassel charm hanging on the side—”

“Omg! I can’t believe you sit up and listen to the shit I be rambling about. These designs are exactly what I wanted. I couldn’t have asked for ‘em to be made any better. You should be a designer, bae. You’re really good at this.”

“Well, I don’t wanna toot my own horn but—”

“Toot, toot.” I grinned, kissing him softly on the lips. “You are the best! The absolute best!”

“As long as you’re smiling, that’s all I want and need.”

I opened another box to find lip gloss with *Yum Yum’s Beauty Bar* labels on them. When I say this man paid attention to everything that came out of my mouth, he really did. If I didn’t know before, I surely knew now. He loved me without a doubt, and that was even more reason to stay. Just as I

was headed to open another box, the doorbell rang. Dodge looked over at me with a slight shrug. I looked over at him, and the first words that parted my lips—

“Keisha.”

Dodge shook his head. “That better not be her ass.” He got up and went to the door, and as he peeked out the side window, he glanced back at me. “I can’t.”

“I’m not surprised. If she hadn’t come, then I would’ve been. Just open it. We may as well get this shit over with.”

Dodge opened the door and in walked Keisha. I didn’t know what retreat she’d been on, but she still looked the same to me. Maybe it helped her mental, but then again, her dumb ass was standing in Dodge’s house after he’d asked her not to come here, so I’d say that shit didn’t work, either.

“Hey Dodge,” she spoke, sounding a lil’ different, I guess.

“Wassup, Keisha. I asked you not to—”

“Bae,” I butted in with a shake of the head. It was no need going there. We just had to beat her at her own game.

“You here for Dolce?”

“Yeah, and talk with you,” she answered.

I stood up. “I’ll get him ready.”

“No, you can hear this too,” Keisha told me.

I sat back down on the sectional, all ears. I didn’t know what the crazy bitch wanted to talk about. I just hoped she didn’t pull out a gun and start busting at us.

“I know you asked me not to come here, but I felt it was only right that I stopped here first. I wanted to thank you for watching Dolce. I thank you too,” she said, looking over at me. “I’m really in a better space and I hope that we can cordially co-parent.”

“I hope so too.” Dodge nodded. “For the record, I hope that this retreat helped you.”

“It did. I found love while I was there.”

Me and Dodge frowned. “You found love?” he asked.

“Yes, I know it sounds crazy, but it’s true.”

“I don’t know why that surprises me. It’s typical of you,” Dodge irritably expressed.

“Don’t do that.”

“No, but how you go off to get yourself right and find love? Make it make sense, Keisha.”

“Well, I wasn’t expecting it, but it happened.”

“Apparently,” I mumbled under my breath while trying my best to remain seated and friendly.

Keisha shot me the side-eye but continued. “You remember Alvin from school?”

Dodge got quiet as if he was thinking a bit. I just sat looking from Keisha to back at him. I was lost.

“Alvin Sullivan? Crazy Alvin that caught time for armed robbery but was released because they said he was insane?”

“Well, he wasn’t exactly insane. He just played the role to be released early. He’s really a good dude. We met at the retreat. He’s working on himself just like I am. We started talking and the next thing you know...” She bashfully grinned. “We’re together now. He can’t wait to meet Dolce.”

“Oh, hell nawl,” Dodge quickly let out. “You expect me to let my son go with you and your crazy ass boyfriend?”

“Well, he’s not with me right now. But, yes, I expect you to let *our* son come with me, since I’ve been more than fair to let him hang around yo’ bi—uh, lil’ girlfriend,” she countered, but I caught that. This bitch hadn’t changed a bit. She went to the retreat to fuck, not get better.

“Wow, you never cease to amaze me. I can’t believe you’re doing this. Why are you bringing this man into Dolce’s life? You’re making a huge mistake, Keisha.”

“I know what I’m doing. I’m happy, Dodge. Just be happy for me too.”

“If only I could be,” he opposed. “I will never be happy about that. I know that nigga. Did you forget how I knocked his wack ass out that time in Project Ville? He was tryna rob D back then.”

“You would bring that up,” she differed with a roll of the eyes. “We talked about that too, and he said he was just trying to stay afloat back then. He meant no harm, but he deserved what you did to him. That’s why he never retaliated.”

“I wished he would’ve. Then he wouldn’t have been here to be playing daddy with my son.”

“Dodge, please. Calm down. Alvin is not a threat. He’s really a good guy now. He’s making an honest living. He makes good money. Give him a chance.”

“I don’t trust him.”

She huffed with an annoyed smack of the lips. “You don’t even know him.”

“I know enough. His past ain’t that far back.”

“It’s been at least eight long years ago.”

“Eight years these days seem like two.”

“Yeah, with how fast time flies,” I uttered, then quickly thought, *Hush, Yomi.*

“Apparently, only to y’all,” Keisha refuted. “You sound silly, Dodge. Admit it. You just don’t want Dolce around another man, but you want her to be playing mommy dearest when I’m not around.”

“That’s not true,” he responded, just as I cut my eyes at him with a mean glare. “I mean the part about me not wanting him around another man,” he quickly acknowledged.

“Look, you take the time to process this. I’ll leave Dolce here with you. Just bring him to Daddy’s whenever you get out. I’ll be over there for most of the day. He’s meeting Alvin. Hey, that’ll also give you a chance to see what Alvin is about. Just give him a chance.”

“Yeah, I hear you.”

“Text me before you head over. I just wanna make sure I’m there.”

“Yeah,” Dodge replied. I could tell he was fuming inside. His ass was blown by Keisha’s news.

“Kiss him for me. I can’t wait to hold him in my arms.”

“I bet you can’t,” I mumbled, as she turned to leave.

Keisha stopped in her tracks like she’d forgotten something, but yeah, it was to address my ass. “Oh, and if you don’t mind, can you please keep my son off your social media pages? I wasn’t posting him yet, and I don’t want nobody else to do it either.”

“Mm-hm,” I coolly answered. That was my way of keeping a level head because I really pictured myself knocking this hoe’s teeth out her mouth.

“Thanks,” she conceitedly said. “Whew chile, Mommy’s back!” she shrieked out of nowhere and just like that, she was gone.

“That lady is beyond weird,” I said.

Dodge looked over at me with a disappointed shake of the head. “And to think I was really tryna give her the benefit of the doubt.”

“Who is this Alvin dude? He sounds like a bad guy.”

“He has a rep and it’s not good. I’ve never known him to be anything other than a bad guy. The dude served time in prison for armed robbery. On top of that, I’ve actually put hands on him before, and she has the nerve to trust this relationship. Come the fuck on! They met at a wellness retreat. That should tell you something. He’s just as unstable as her slow ass.”

I just shook my head. Keisha had a way of getting under Dodge’s skin. I could totally understand where he was coming from, though, ‘cause what the fuck was she thinking?

“I hope you figure this out,” I told him, as I looked over at the time. “I really gotta go make sure that things are getting set up properly for Kinsley’s baby shower today.”

“Yeah, I know. I just hate you’re involved in this crazy shit.”

“I’m involved with you and that will never change, so I’m involved in this bullshit too. I just can’t stay to dwell on it right now. But hey, we’ll talk when you leave Mr. Henry’s house. You’re still coming to the shower, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay good. We’ll talk then. I’m gonna get dressed, and make sure Dolce has a bottle ready for when he wakes up. Oh, and I laid out his outfit last night. His shoes are next to it. You don’t have to give him a bath. I did that last night too.”

“Thanks, bae,” he stated, gently grabbing me by the face and kissing me on the forehead. “You are the best.”



I walked in the house with thoughts of Keisha’s shenanigans invading my space. It wasn’t the fact that she was back but more so that she was going to get Dolce back. I’d grown very attached to him and I felt like he was also bound to me. This would be the first night in weeks that he wouldn’t be around me. Just thinking about it made me feel a lil’ sick on my stomach. Feelings of Keisha separating us just didn’t sit right with me, and especially in the manner that she was playing her cards.

“Hey Apple,” I said, as I walked in Kinsley’s room. She was sitting on the side of the bed scrolling on her cell phone. “Where’s Kin?”

“Hey sus, she’s in the bathroom taking a shower. Did you stop by the venue and check on things?”

“I just left there. That’s why I’m almost two hours late making it here. My ass was in there helping them decorate like it was my job.” I grinned. “I just want this day to be perfect for her. She really deserves it.”

“I agree, and with everything that’s been going on, she needs to let her hair down and enjoy herself. Is Glenda coming?”

“Not that I know of. I don’t even believe she was invited. She ain’t did nothing but cause Kin stress, and today we’re not having it. So, I hope she doesn’t know anything about her shower. She just needs to stay far away.”

“I agree. That’s why I asked.”

“So, while you’re here, I wanted to know if you knew anybody that went to school with y’all named Alvin?”

She frowned. “Alvin Sullivan?”

“Yeah, I believe that’s his name.”

“The Alvin Sullivan that I know is cray, cray.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning the nigga pulled his dick out in music class once just to show us what was there. And lisssten, that muthafucka had a third arm hanging down there. They say the retarded ones are always packing.”

“I know better.” I slightly grinned. “Retarded, girl?”

“Sus, I didn’t mean it like that, but he ain’t that bright. He’s fine, but definitely not that bright.”

I grinned. “He’s fine, though?”

“Hell yeah, and his crazy ass is actually handsome, too. But that’s beside the point. A bitch might think she got herself one, but looks ain’t everything. Come to think about it, I believe he robbed a store and was sent to prison, but then last I heard he’d beat the system and had gotten out. Guess he wasn’t as slow as we thought he was.” She grinned. “Why are you asking about Alvin, anyway? I know that nigga ain’t tryna holla at you. He must not know who you talk to.”

“That’s Keisha’s man.”

“Keisha who?”

“Keisha Henry.”

Apple scrunched her nose. “Say what now? Keisha is talking to Alvin? How you know?”

“Because she’s back and she stopped by Dodge’s house this morning to tell him that she had moved on. Apparently, it’s with this Alvin guy, because Dodge didn’t like it one bit. He even mentioned that he knocked the nigga out once.”

“Wow, I forgot I’d heard that. I believe Alvin was tryna rob them or something.”

“Yeah, said that, too.”

“I know Dodge ain’t happy ‘bout that shit. I don’t understand what Keisha’s motives are. She can’t be in love with him.”

“She claims she is.”

“It’s just a show.”

“Well, that part I believe, but why?”

“Who knows? It’s Keisha we’re talkin’ ‘bout.”

“You’re right. I don’t have the energy to put no more thought into this. I gotta get myself together,” I said as I started to walk out the room, but then stopped. “Is Meech coming?”

“I believe so.”

“Okaaaay. As long as nobody gets outta pocket then we’re good.”

“Exactly. I’m on stand-by just in case I have to drop kick a bitch.”

I laughed. “I know right.”

As I walked in my bedroom, Dodge called me. “Wassup love?”

“You made it home yet?”

“Yeah, I just got here.”

“How is everything looking at the venue?”

“It’s beautiful. I believe she’s going to love it.”

“That’s good.”

“Where’s Dolce?” I pondered.

“In his car seat.”

“You’re heading over to Mr. Henry’s now?”

“Yeah, I may as well get this shit over with. I’m still not convinced about this dude, but I have no choice but to give Keisha a chance to spend time with Dolce.”

“I agree, but I don’t like it.”

“Me either, and I have my lawyer waiting just in case it’s some bullshit. I will fight her ass for custody. She can play if she wants to.”

“That’s right, and I’m standing beside you.”

Dodge grinned. “That’s why I love you.”

“I love you too, shorty,” I teased.

“Call me when you get ready. I’ll pick you up. We’ll ride together.”

I smiled. I loved when he wanted to be with me. “Okay, but call me back if you need me to whoop Keisha’s ass.”

He laughed. “Nawl, it’ll be okay.”

“Okay, I’m just sayin’.”

“See ya in a lil’ bit.”

“Okay bae,” I responded, and then ended the call. I fell across my bed. The first thing I needed to do was get my mind right. Regardless of the mess that Keisha had brought forth during her homecoming ruins, I was determined that we were going to have a great day. One thing I knew to be true was that she was going to get dealt with by any means necessary. So, it was in her best interest to get it right, because ain’t no way I was standing by to let her wrong that baby. There was no way, and I meant that on everything I loved.

KINSLEY SIMMONS

I sat in my throne chair feeling like a Queen, as I inspected each corner of the room, delighted to see the pink, white, and gold décor. It was a beautiful ambience of love in the air, as my guests continued to arrive, while others were already stuffing their faces and getting their drink on. The gift table was already covered with presents, big and small, even stacked on the floor around it. The snack table had the matching color treats and a stunning pink, white, and gold five-layer cake with a brown-skinned baby girl, bright eyes, big smile, and wearing a pink pamper posted on the side of it, giving off 3-D vibes. I couldn't have asked for a better baby shower than this one.

"How you feeling over here?" Auntie asked, dressed in soft pink, one-piece jumpsuit. "Your gown is beautiful. You look like a modern-day Cinderella."

"Thank you. I feel great. So happy to see how this place has turned out. You and Yomi did a bang-up job with explaining our vision of what we wanted."

"Yomi had her butt here earlier helping the decorators. You know she's like a perfectionist. That's that Virgo shit."

I grinned. "I already know how she is."

"I didn't expect this many guests. Hell, I didn't think you were that liked."

"Auntieeee!"

"I'm just kidding," she teased, as we laughed. "Look, your father made it."

“I thought that was him walking in.” My dad and I didn’t have the closest relationship. He was really in and out of my life, so that part of him I’d accepted a long time ago. I was just happy to see him here. “I don’t suspect you talked to Glenda.”

“I talked to her about two weeks ago. I mentioned your shower, but you know Glenda. She’s not coming to something like this. She’s not easily open to people seeing her during troubled times, and well, she definitely looked troubled the last time we spoke.”

I slick rolled my eyes. “It be the drinking and the drugs for me.”

“I know right. She claims, as she always does, that she’s not doing drugs anymore, but she sure as hell smelled like a liquor still.”

I scrunched up my nose. “I can only imagine,” I responded, just as Meech and the fellas entered the doors.

“Well, looka there. It’s your baby daddy.”

“Or not,” I shot back. “We’re cool, but Meech has shown me a whole nother side of him.”

“We all have those sides; it’s just how you present ‘em,” Auntie explained, and to me that made a lot of sense. Too bad his showed uglier than I would’ve liked. Regardless, I was shaking off that bad energy as we talked. I didn’t want nothing or nobody to ruin me and my princess’s day.

I saw my dad making his way over, which was Auntie’s cue to bounce. “I’ll be back. Enjoy yourself.”

“Okay.” I smiled. “Hey Daddy,” I spoke, as he walked over and hugged me.

“Hey daughter. This is a beautiful event.”

“I’m glad you could make it.”

“I’m glad to be here. I got you a gift. I put it over by the gift table.”

“I saw that big gift bag you were carrying. What’s in it?”

He grinned. “You’ll have to wait till you open it. It’s from me and Connie.”

Connie was his fourth wife and since they’d been married longer than fifteen years, then that one might be his forever.

“How is she? Why didn’t she come with you?”

“She’s outside changing her shoes. Her strap popped on her heels when we were walking in.”

“Okay, good. I haven’t seen her in years. Matter fact, since y’all moved way up north, I haven’t seen you in a long time either.”

“I know. I was just telling Connie that I need to do better. I know we talk here and there on the phone, but you’re having my granddaughter now. I need to be more present.”

“That would be nice.” I smiled, as he reached over and wrapped his arms around me.

“I’m really proud of you.”

“Thanks Dad.”

“Hey Louis,” Kiyomi said, as she walked over.

“Hey Kiyomi. You’ve gotten grown on me.”

“Yeah, that’s what happens when you’re not around.” She smirked. Yomi always had a way with words, and the only thing I could do was laugh to myself.

With an uncomfortable grin, Dad glanced around the place. “Well, let me go check on Connie. I’ll make sure she comes over to speak.”

“Okay,” I responded, as he walked off. “Sus, your ass is crazy.”

Yomi laughed. “Girl, I was just sayin’.”

“It’s all good. He deserved it.” I grinned, just as I looked over to see Meech and Dodge talking.

“What’s Meech talkin’ ‘bout?”

“Nothing really, only clowning with Dodge that his first child was destined to be a boy not a girl.”

I frowned. “So, what is he tryna say?”

“Calm down. He was only joking.”

“Yeah, but because of my situation, that’s nothing to joke about. He could’ve kept his fat head ass home.”

“Sus, chill out. This is great day. Rejoice, eat good, open your gifts, and relish in the moment.”

“Yeah, I’m trying, but I don’t like when I feel toyed with.”

“Promise, he didn’t mean it that way.”

“So you say,” I uttered.

“You want something to eat? I think that’s your problem.”

“You might be right. Fix me a lil’ bit of everything,” I told her.

“Will do.”

An hour later, after all the games were played and our bellies were full, I was still seated on my throne but feeling more like a bloated peasant now. Meech acknowledged me, but briefly. I don’t know if it was me getting closer to having this baby or him just full of doubt now, but his actions were

off. I could tell by whispers here and there that people were gossiping about my situation. I really wanted to shut this shit down, but Auntie would lose it. And just when I thought it couldn't get no worse, in walked Glenda.

"What the fuck?!" I mumbled with surprised eyes.

"Helloooo everybody! It's my muthafuckin' grandbaby's birthday celebration!"

"Wheett?! The fuck she mean birthday celebration?!" Omg, clearly Glenda was eighty sheets in the wind. Who the fuck brought her here? The minute I could get those thoughts out, in walked that scary ass boyfriend of hers.

"Auntie, get ya sister!" I called out, as Glenda attempted to make it over my way with a big cheese grin on her face, but Auntie grabbed her by the arm.

"Glenda, you're not welcome here. Look at you."

"The fuck you mean I'm not welcome here, but this leather neck ass nigga here!" she yelled, pointing at Daddy. Daddy's eyes stretched open like he'd seen a ghost. I knew in that moment he was embarrassed as hell with this crazy shit going on in front of Connie. I'm sure she wanted to know what the hell he saw in Glenda.

"Y'all looking good in here. All this damn pink. It must be a girl!" she slurred. "She gon' look just like her grandma."

"No, the fuck she ain't! Glenda, leeeavvee!" I demanded in a loud tone. "Auntieeee!"

"Oh, hey Mama! Daddy you cute!" she laughed, hitting the Forest Gump wave like a child. My grandparents instantly got up and left the building. When I say they didn't stick around for the nonsense, they hauled ass like they were never there.

Just as I stood up to go handle Glenda myself, Auntie socked her right in the jaw.

"Ooooooh," some of my guests let out. Glenda tried swinging back but was immediately swept off her feet by Meech. He carried her out the venue, kicking and cussing. The dumb ass boyfriend was right behind them. I couldn't believe what I'd just witnessed. That lady had the nerves to show up here in one of her drunken states actin' a fool. I was so fuckin' shame and my guests were just as shocked as me. Apple rushed over.

"Bestie, you good?"

"No," I responded, now in tears.

“Unt-unt, come on here.” Apple pulled me by my hand, walking me in one of the back rooms. “Dry your tears. This is a happy occasion. Don’t let Glenda ruin it.”

“It’s too late. I’m ashamed of her. She has embarrassed me to the core in front of my friends and family. Did you see how Grandma and Grandpa looked? Hell, they were so embarrassed they got the hell on.”

“Yeah, I peeped that.”

“And Meech! Why would he even come if he was only going to come over for a second and then stay away like I was the plague or something? I know people noticed that. It’s bad enough that they’ve already heard about my situation—”

“Nobody knows that.”

“Yeah, right. All it took was for one of them raggedy ass hoes to know and I’m sure it spread like wildfire. Hell, even Thomasina knew because she threw it up in my face, and you already know how she found out.”

“That’s fucked up though. I just never imagined Meech to be that guy.”

“Hell, me either. It was a reason why I got out of that relationship, and I don’t regret it. I hope his big head ass left with Glenda.” I pouted, just as tears started to run down my face. “I just wanna leave already. I don’t wanna go back out there and have them looking at me like I’m crazy or feeling sorry for me. I don’t want their pity.”

“I know, sus. Just calm down first. You sitting here in your gown looking like a queen. For the most part, the day was beautiful. Think about that and don’t let nothing else ruin it,” she said, just as a light knock was heard at the door.

“Who is it?” Apple called out.

“It’s me,” Yomi answered.

“Unlock it.”

Apple opened the door and Yomi walked in with a look on her face that made me say, “What, bitch?!”

“Girl, I don’t know what’s going on, but it’s chaos outside.”

My eyes stretched. “What you mean chaos? Glenda still acting a fool?”

“First off, Meech done laid out Glenda’s boyfriend for trying to tell him to put her down. He is on the ground snoring. Then some fine ass nigga done pulled up in a black Benz.”

Instantly my heart dropped.

“What happened?” Apple asked.

“Meech and that nigga outside ‘bout to go at it. Now, he should’ve known better than bringing that drama ‘round here. Dodge and Rosco are trying to talk to Meech, but I don’t know what’s happening now because I ran back in here to find you.”

“Who is the guy?” Apple asked, as I jumped to my feet and took off running. I had to get outside and see what was going on. Apple and Yomi were right on my heels. Just as I reached the door and bust through it, all I saw were guests scurrying and Glenda bent down over her man, hollering for him to get the fuck up! I mean, literally, she wanted that man to fight Meech like she hadn’t just seen what he did to him.

I looked over to see Dodge holding Meech back, but why? Then—

“Who the hell is that?” Apple asked again. I’m sure we were looking in the same direction, because for a minute I was stuck like chuck. Then we locked eyes. It was like the world paused for a few minutes. The butterflies took over my gut and as I stood still as a statue, his fine ass cautiously headed over my way. “Oh, my fuckin’ Go—”

“Don’t do that, sus,” Yomi cut in, as she shook her head at Apple. “Don’t play with the Lord ni.”

I couldn’t even laugh from just wanting to explode with excitement.

“Omg, that’s—”

“Gianni,” I completed Apple’s sentence. It was indeed him. Like my knight in shining armor, he walked over, gently wiping my tears with his hand.

“Hey beautiful.”

Whew, I squirmed inside. “Hey you.”

“How you feeling?”

“Not so good,” I softly responded, just as Meech showed up.

“Turn me loose. I ain’t gon’ do nothing to this nigga,” he growled, snatching away from Rosco.

Gianni just glanced back at him. It was clear he didn’t come to play when I noticed his Glock tucked in the front of his pants. With all of Meech’s boys standing around, Gianni didn’t seem to have a scared spirit in his soul. He was just as cool, calm, and collected.

“Meech, it’s time for us to go,” Dodge told him. “Let her have this moment.”

“Nah, whatever he gotta say, he can say it while I’m here.”

“Playtime’s over, playboy,” Gianna coolly assured him.

“She ain’t yo’ girl. That ain’t yo’ baby. Why you here? You can’t have her!” Meech protested.

I was startled by his approach. I mean, he hadn’t done shit as of lately to try and make me his lady, so what was all this macho shit about?

“Meech, stop it!” I spat.

“What you telling me to stop it for?! What the fuck?! This nigga reappears out of nowhere and you siding with him, Kinsley?! You can’t be serious right now.”

“Somebody call the ambulamb people!” Glenda yelled out of nowhere.

“Ambulamb?” I heard Yomi’s crazy ass repeat. “The fuck is an ambulamb?”

I shot her the side-eye. Now was not the time to be following up Glenda’s retarded, drunk ass.

“Yo, back up,” Gianni said, gently pushing me back, then instantly turning to face Meech. Anybody that was standing around at that moment, disappeared like it was about to be some smoke in the city.

Dodge intervened, standing between the two. “Nah, hold up. We ain’t doing this. Not now, not ever. We have a pregnant woman here. Her family is here, and this is what y’all wanna do?”

“I come in peace,” Gianni acknowledged. “It’s ya boy acting all Billy bad ass.”

I could tell Meech wanted to take his best shot, but Dodge was clearly not going to let him do it.

“Since you want to be a part of this conversation,” Gianni continued, “how was it that you were in on the plans that I’d made for Kinsley a couple of weeks back?”

I scowled with a scrunched nose. “Huh? What are you talkin’ ‘bout?” I asked with confused eyes.

“You wanna tell her or do you want me to tell her?”

Meech was dumbfounded.

“See, I sent you some rainbow-colored roses with a note that had instructions on where to meet me. The location was The Four Seasons.”

I couldn’t help but notice the weird look on Dodge’s face as he looked at Meech and then over at Yomi.

“I also sent over an outfit, boots, and the matching purse that I’d personally picked out for you, not even knowing that you were pregnant.”

Meech threw his hands in the air. “Man, I ain’t got time for this. Let’s go,” he told the guys.

“Nah, why don’t you stay,” I said. “Tell me what happened.”

“I ain’t sticking around for this shit,” Meech concluded, but Gianni was determined to finish.

“While I was sitting at the bar inside The Four Seasons, I noticed you walking in a couple hours early. The second I got up to say something, this nigga approached you with a vase of roses. I was confused because you had on the whole outfit and was carrying the purse I’d bought and sent to your house. Next thing I know, you’re laughing and talking with him, and then y’all walk out.

“Why you ain’t stop her?” Yomi asked, like they were tuned into a juicy soap opera where I was the star of today’s episode.

“Honestly, I was shocked to see that she was pregnant. I didn’t know what to think, so I let her go.”

“And why are you here now?” I softly asked.

“Because I promised myself that if I ever had another chance to see you, I wasn’t letting you go,” he bluntly confessed. “I don’t know if you and him are together—”

“They’re not,” Apple blurted, as Rosco shot her the side-eye. “I was just sayin’, babe.”

“Stay outta this,” he told her.

“I’m gone,” Meech said. “This probably ain’t my baby anyway.” With anger and shame in his eyes, clearly he wasn’t trying to stick around to hear no more than he had to. I wanted to stop him and ask why he lied about that evening. I mean, I felt it started out so beautiful, but instead, I was glad when he walked off and got in his car. He wasted no time peeling out of there, spinning wheels and all.

Gianni grabbed me by my face and kissed me on the lips. “I missed you.”

“Pinch me,” I told him, as he grinned. “I can’t believe you’re really here.”

“Let’s go. I’m sorry, do y’all mind if we leave?” he asked to no one in particular.

“Auntie?”

“Girl, go. Call me when you get settled. By the way, he and I met earlier when he stopped by the house looking for you.”

“You knew?” My eyes stretched.

“Absolutely.” She smiled.

“That’s why you were late getting here.” I cheesed.

Gianni grabbed me by the hand, as we made it to his car. I looked back only to say, “Get my gifts home safely! Thanks for today! Love y’all!”

They all were speaking at once. I couldn’t tell much except for hearing the love you’s back. I got in the car, as Gianni closed my door and walked around to the driver side. The second his door closed, we were lip locked like nobody’s business.

“What took you so long to come back?”

“I’ll explain in a lil’ bit. Just sit back and enjoy the ride.”



“This room is as beautiful as the view out there,” I said, standing in front of the floor-to-ceiling windows inside one of the presidential suites at The Four Seasons.

“I figured you would love it.” Gianni smiled, while fixing himself a drink. “You want something?”

“Some apple juice please.” I glanced back at him and just stared for as long as I could. This shit really felt like a dream come true. For months, I wanted to be near him. I wanted to hug him, kiss him, love on him, and now all of that was coming true. “I still can’t believe you’re here,” I admitted, as he walked over, handing me the drink. He caressed me from the back as we stared out at the city’s skyline. It was mesmerizing with its delicate colors of baby blue, soft orange, and a hint of pink among the fluffy, textured, dense white clouds.

“I’m sorry it took so long for me to come back. I had to deal with a lot. Things that I dared not bring into your space. I had to shake my demons and understand the things I couldn’t change but be grateful for the things I could. I missed you every single day.”

I smiled, holding his hand as he gently stroked my stomach. “I missed you more.”

“How far along are you?”

“Seven months, going on eight in about two weeks.”

“Damn, I missed so much. I hated knowing that you’ve been going through this alone. Your aunt told me about you and Meech. When I saw you with him, I figured you were pregnant by him. That’s the main reason why I fell back, but something in me wouldn’t allow me to completely let go.”

“You know what’s so weird? I felt you that day when I walked in this place. I got this warm, cozy sensation that took over my senses. But as Meech walked up it disappeared. That was you.”

“Oddly enough, when I was at the bar, I got that same feeling, so when I turned around it was you.”

“Wow, it’s like fate keeps bringing us together.”

He kissed me softly on the neck. “Same thing I was thinking. I just want to say that whether this baby is mine or not, I would love to be a big part of her life.”

“I feel so bad about this, especially now.”

“Don’t, shit happens. I know that.”

“I never meant for this to happen though. I slept with you that night and it was beautiful. Then in being very vulnerable and heavy in my feelings, I slept with Meech the next day. A month later, I found out I was pregnant.”

“So, you only slept with him once since then?”

“Yes,” I answered. “Only once.”

He kissed me again. “It’s no one’s fault that happened, especially not yours. You had gone through a scary situation.”

“But I was never scared of you. You made me feel comfortable and protected. I appreciated that.”

“And I’ll always protect you and the princess from now on.”

“So, if the baby is Meech’s, then what?”

“Then we’ll cordially co-parent with him. I have nothing against the man. I don’t even know him. I’m sure we’ll never be friends, but we can be adults and do what’s right by the baby.”

“I just don’t know if Meech will play fair.”

“Look at me,” he said, turning me to face him. “I don’t know what his bank account consists of, but his money is not longer than mine. His muscle ain’t stronger either,” he added. “So, we will cordially co-parent or else we’ll have full custody,” he vowed. “Simple as that.”

“So, what now? I mean, are we just going to stay here, or do you have a plan? I mean, I can’t just up and move away from my family. We’re very

close. Well, except for me and my mama.”

“I’m moving here. I need a break from my own family, with good graces from my uncle.”

“So, you talked to him already about this?”

“Yeah, some time ago. We have five houses that we’ll be looking at this week.”

“Stop it!” I shrieked.

“I’m serious.” He laughed. “Whatever you choose, we’ll get.”

“Wow, pinch me.”

He grinned. “I’ll kiss you instead.”

“That’s even better.” I gleamed inside.

I didn’t know what the future held with this man, but there was a future and that’s all I cared about. It was fate that brought us together and nothing was going to tear us apart. He came back for me. I mean, damn, he really came back for me, and soon we were going to have our own lil’ family. However, with the paternity of my baby still unknown, I just hoped that if she belonged to Meech he’d put his pride to the side and do what’s right. Because if he didn’t, I would go through hell and high waters ‘bout mine. He had better understand that.

LOYAL “DISLOYAL” COLOMBO

“How do you feel about us setting out to explore the world again?”
“I guess I’m ready,” Ayesha responded.

“You sure?”

“Yes, why you keep asking me that?”

“Because you haven’t been yourself since we lost the baby.”

“Yeah, well, things happen for a reason. I’m learning to cope with it.”

“You’re not alone though,” I told her, twirling my fingers in her soft, curly hair. Truth was that I wasn’t expecting her to even get pregnant. She’d been taking the pill since before me and her even started dating, let alone having sex.

“You weren’t ready for a baby.”

“You weren’t either,” I expressed. “We have our whole lives ahead of us. We can have babies anytime.”

“Yeah, but for some reason when I learned I was pregnant, I instantly wanted it. I know my parents were against it, but your mom, to my surprise, was excited.”

“My mom never ceases to amaze me. She’s the one I thought would’ve been having a hissy fit.”

Ayesha grinned. “She likes me.”

“That’s something to be praised, because she don’t like nobody.”

“She didn’t like your ex, either.”

I nodded. “She didn’t.”

“How did you really feel about that?”

I shrugged. "I didn't know how to feel. For almost three years I just went against the grain. I didn't care how she felt, as long as I was happy."

"So, you must've really loved her. Three years is a good bit of time to be with somebody, especially if your mom was against it."

"You're right. I did love her," I answered, as Ki's beautiful presence appeared in my thoughts.

"You still love her?"

I looked at Ayesha with a slight frown. She had one of the cutest, most innocent faces around. She was sweet and only fucked with me because of our parents. Other than that, I believe we both would've gone the other way. She was too good for me and well, I was too bad for her.

"Well, do you still love her?"

"No, not like I used to. She's moved on and I respect that. Plus, I'm with you now."

"Yeah, but we both know why you're with me."

"I could say the same thing about you, too."

"I've fallen for you though. I've just been waiting for you to catch me."

"I thought I did," I expressed, not knowing where she was going with this.

"You can't catch me if you're too busy fucking other women."

I frowned. "What you mean?"

"Don't be sarcastic. I know about you fuckin' that Rosalyn chick. She even messaged your phone one day."

"You went through my phone?"

"No, the message shows on your screen before it disappears, and just know that I saw enough there."

"It's not what you think."

"Well, it might not be what I think, but it's definitely something there to be thought about."

I shook my head. "Nah, trust me."

"It's hard to do that."

"You know what I mean. Our dealings were about six months ago. I haven't even seen her. It's like she dropped off the map."

"Well, she messaged you and said she missed you and that y'all needed to talk."

"I remember that message. It was over a month ago. I ain't gon' lie, I called her back to see what she wanted, but she didn't answer. She didn't

even call me back, so I didn't worry about it."

"So, but you admit fucking around with her?"

"Yeah, I admit it. It started around the beginning of the year."

"And when did it end?"

"Around March or April, I think. She got mad because I told her you were pregnant. After that, she didn't wanna fool with me no more. It's crazy, though, because we only had an arrangement. It was never supposed to be serious. Don't ask, please don't ask. I never cared for her like that. I never was into her like that."

"Why? She's a beautiful girl."

"She is, but that doesn't mean she's my type of my girl."

"Am I?"

"Yeah, you are," I assured her with the sincerest stare I could muster up. Honestly, at first she wasn't, but she'd grown on me, that was for sure.

"I guess I believe you, since it's been over a year and I'm still here."

"You better believe me," I teased.

"The only reason I love going out of the country with you is because I know you don't know anybody where we go. It's not likely that you'll screw a stranger. Plus, you be so stuck up my ass I don't believe you'd know when and where to find the time," she joked but was definitely very serious.

I grinned. "You should love me being stuck up your ass."

"I love when your tongue is stuck up there."

I laughed out loud. "Oh, you trippin' today."

She chuckled. "That wasn't a joke though."

"I bet it wasn't," I clowned, climbing out of bed. "I'm hungry."

"Yeah, go see what your mom is cooking. I'm ready to eat, too."

I left out my bedroom and headed down the stairs. It was sure as hell smelling good, had my stomach growling, whatever Mom was cooking. I entered the kitchen to see her sipping on a glass of red wine while stirring something in a skillet.

"What you in here cooking?"

"Chicken alfredo and garlic bread. Something light," she responded.

"You finally came downstairs, I see."

"Yeah, me and Ayesha got hungry."

"How is she? I know she's been struggling with the loss of the baby."

“She’s okay. She don’t really like to talk about it, but it’s for the best. I’m so ready to catch a flight and get back out there in the real world.”

“As you should be. It’s a lot to learn and see. Travel is good. It gets you from around here. I love to see you broaden your horizons. You know my feelings were hurt when Ayesha lost the baby, too. But a baby would’ve held y’all back from doing a lot of things.”

“That’s the same thing I was just telling her. I’m not ready for kids anyway. I’d rather be in my early thirties.”

“Why then?”

I shrugged. “Because I just would.”

“Okaaaay,” Mom uttered.

“I like the Christmas decorations out front. You always go all out. Too bad I won’t be here this year to open gifts with y’all. We’ll be on a flight heading to Italy.”

“I know.” She smiled. “Just don’t go off making no more babies,” she said, just as my cell phone began to ring. I glanced down at the caller ID display to see that it said unknown. Without hesitation, I sent it straight to voice mail. The person called right back. This time I answered.

“Wassup, who dis?”

“Hey Loyal.” My heart dropped at just the sultry sound of this very familiar voice. “Are you busy?”

I looked over at Mom, clearing my throat, and then walked out of the kitchen for a lil’ more privacy. “Nah, I ain’t busy. Wassup? I haven’t heard this voice in damn near a year.”

“It ain’t been that long, I don’t think.”

“Damn near.”

“Yeah, you might be right. It does seem like forever.”

“I know right. You good?”

“Yep, so don’t get any ideas.”

I grinned. “I’m not. You made it very clear the last time we talked that it was over.”

“And I meant what I said.”

“I know you did. So, what’s this call about? It better not be to invite me to you and that nigga’s wedding.”

Ki laughed. “You wish. I wouldn’t dare want you at my wedding.”

I laughed. “I know you don’t. I would definitely oppose and speak out about it.”

“I believe you too. So, how’s the family? You have a baby now, right?”

“Oh nah, she lost the baby a few months ago,” I told her but was very confused as to what this call was about. She didn’t sound hostile or like she hated me no more. I guess time healed those wounds. She actually sounded pretty chill, and that was good compared to how she treated me during our last conversation.

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“It’s cool, but I appreciate it. We’re getting through it.”

“That’s good,” she said, but now this unexpected call was making me anxious.

“So, wassup? I know you ain’t called me just to talk. Plus, you called with your number restricted, which means that you don’t want me calling you back.”

“Glad you peeped that.” She grinned. “But seriously, I don’t wanna hold you up. I only called to give you some news.”

“What kind of news?”

“Well—um, uh—you have son.”

My eyes stretched wider than the sea. “I have a what? Now Ki, you know damn well we ain’t fucked in forever. I mean, I wouldn’t mind, but stop playing with me. If you want me to play daddy to your baby I will, but ___”

“Boy hush,” she quickly said, cutting me off. “This baby is by Roz.”

“Ki, stop playing with me. I haven’t talked to Roz since probably around March, April sometime.”

“I know, but since you haven’t been around, she was pregnant with your baby. She just had him this morning.”

“On Christmas Eve?”

“Yeah,” she answered, as I swallowed hard.

“I’m confused. Why didn’t Roz just tell me that?”

“Because she felt like you were having your own lil’ family and she didn’t want to intrude.”

“Damn,” I let out.

“Are you coming here to see them?”

“I—um, I leave in the morning.”

“Well, maybe you should try to come before you leave. She’s at St. Joseph, room number 304.”

I was quiet as fuck trying to process this shit without fainting. I couldn't believe Roz had kept something as big as this from me.

"Loyal, you still there?"

"Yeah, I'm here. I was just thinking."

"Well, think about getting here. It would mean the world to her to know that you cared."

"Hell, she should've thought about me caring when she found out. She could've just called and told me that shit."

"I only made the call for her. Other than this, I'm out of it. You tell her how you feel."

"A'ight," I concluded in a dry tone. "Damn," was all I could get out just as Ki ended the call. I stood nervously in one spot. It was like I couldn't move. I was shocked to say the least. This girl had a whole baby, and I was just finding out about it. "What the fuck am I gonna do?"

"About what?" Ayesha asked, as she had just walked up behind me. I turned to face her with a worried expression. "About what, Loyal?"

"Well—um—you gon' have to sit down for this."

DODGE GAMBLE

It was crazy how fast time had gone by. It felt like Christmas Eve had snuck up on us, even though I'd been shopping since early November. I was just excited that this was Dolce's first Christmas. Despite the fact that he'd stayed all week with Keisha, he would be staying with us tonight to stay the next two weeks. The kid was only eight months old, crawling all over the place, and pulling up on things by himself. Kiyomi said he got his strength from me. I agreed. Granny said that he'd be walking by the time he turned nine months old, and I believed her. He was already heading in that direction.

I heard the front door open, as a smile crept across my face. It felt good having Kiyomi come home to me most nights. The only time she stayed to her house was when her mom asked her to. I guess those were during nights when Unc worked graveyard shift. With Kinsley now living with Gianni in a big ass house of their own, I could see where she'd get lonely sometimes.

"Bae!" Kiyomi called out.

"I'm in here," I told her. "I called myself wrapping gifts. Wassup shorty?"

"Nothing much, my love." She grinned, walking over and kissing me softly on the lips. "I see you're still at it."

"I'm trying, but I'm 'bout to give up and just give everybody their gift in a plastic bag."

She bust out laughing. "Boy, no you ain't. I'll wrap those gifts for you."

"That's why I love you."

"I know," she teased. "Those candles got it smelling so good in here."

“I believe you’ve turned my whole house into The Spiritual Tea Company.”

She laughed. “Why you say that?”

“Because you be round here saging the place, lighting candles, washing with that shit I can’t resist. Got me loving that damn Unicorn Kisses.”

“Bae.”

“I’m just sayin’. You be smelling so good I just wanna eat you up.”

“And you do.”

I laughed. “Hell, you even got me washing with some of the products they make for men now.”

“Yeah, and have me wanting to suck it off you.”

“And you do,” I mocked with laughter.

“You so nasty,” she said, kissing me.

“You love it.”

“And I do.” We laughed.

“So, what time are you picking up Dolce? I miss him.”

“Me too.”

“I can’t wait to see his lil’ cute face tomorrow morning when he crawls in here and sees all this stuff.”

“My boy gon’ be so excited. I already know it. We’ve taken damn near everything off the bottom of the Christmas tree because his lil’ ass can’t stay off it.”

“I knooow,” Kiyomi laughed. “He’s such a busy body. Who would’ve thought that we’d be spending Christmas together with a little one?”

“I know right. I think about it daily.”

“He’s gotten so chunky. All he do is eat, especially since we started giving him table food here and there. Reminds me of GiGi,” she said, pulling out her phone. “Look at these pictures I took right before I left from over there.”

I looked at the pictures with an elated smile on my face. “Her lil’ pretty butt looks just like her daddy. Hell, they didn’t need to do a blood test for her,” I teased.

“I tell Kinsley that all the time. It’s like Gianni spit her out.”

“Yeah, he did that. I just can’t believe she’s pregnant again.”

“Me neither. Talk about having ‘em back-to-back. They had to be fuckin’ before her six-week check-up.”

I laughed. “I know right.”

“GiGi is only four months old. They’ll have two babies in pampers. I don’t believe I could do it.”

“Well, you’re a working woman now. You have your own business. Speaking of your business, how do you like your new location?”

“Oh, I love it. Ain’t nothing like having a man that’s in real estate.”

“I just like buying property that’ll turn out prosperous, and everybody knows that *Yum Yum’s Beauty Bar* is the high-end, sophisticated place for all things beauty.”

“I’m hiring someone that does waxes next week, hopefully.”

I frowned. “Waxes like—”

“Bikini waxes, eyebrows—”

“Booty-holes.”

She laughed out loud. “Baaeee.”

“I love your waxed lil’ dooty-hole. Can’t keep my face out the place.”

“Don’t I know it.” She shyly grinned. “The main thing I like about having my own business is being able to bring Dolce to work with me sometimes. Since hiring more help to run the front counter, that has freed up my time to do other things around the place. That also includes going in my nice, lavish office and spending QT with my favorite guy.”

I shot her that look.

“My other favorite guy.” She grinned.

“That’s better.”

With a slick smirk on her face, she asked, “Jelly much?”

“Very much,” I responded with a wink.

As she took some of the gifts from me to wrap them, she looked over with a serious expression. “So, what’s up with Keisha and her man? Apple told me that he got in a fight with some niggas the other day. Seems he’s back up to his old ways.”

“I honestly don’t believe he ever stopped. He just had her dumb ass fooled. At first he acted all cool and shit, like we were good. But now, he’s been acting like he got a problem with me when I come around to pick up Dolce. I don’t even go to her house. You know we meet at Mr. Henry’s house. That’s our mediating location. It keeps her from coming here and me from going to her place. Not that I wanna go there, anyway,” I expressed. “Now, he’s with her every time she shows up. I just told her to text me when she drops him off, and then I’ll be on my way to pick him up. That way I don’t even see them.”

“Yeah, ‘cause at this point, it’s probably best if y’all don’t cross paths. I can see things going left real fast, real soon.”

“You’re right, because I really be wanting to knock his punk ass out. My patience is running thin. I seriously don’t want that nigga round my boy no more. The last time he was with her, Dolce was doing everything he could to get away from her ass. I hope that nigga ain’t doing no funny shit. I’ll break his fuckin’ neck.”

“Me neither. He gives me creep vibes by the way he be looking.”

“Next time I see him, I might just put ‘em in his pocket.”

“Put what in his pocket?!” Kiyomi shrieked with laughter.

“His fuckin’ eyes. Let me find out he been watching you.”

“I’m just sayin’ in general, bae.” She playfully popped her lips. “I believe he knows to keep them eyes off me.”

“He better fuckin’ know.”

“Let’s move off that subject. Talking about him makes our blood pressure rise.”

“So let’s move on,” I agreed.

“I know Granny and Sha are happy to have D home for the holidays. He rarely comes to visit since he moved away to be with that girl.”

“Granny got a house full too. That’s why we’re staying here tonight. We’ll go over there tomorrow.”

“So, the lady brought her kids too?”

“All seven of ‘em.”

“Damn, D jumped right in relationship with a pre-made family.” She laughed.

“He definitely did that,” I said, just as my cell phone rang. I answered, and the first thing I heard was a woman screaming in the background. “Yooo!” I called out, now noticing that the number was Kay’s. “Kay! What’s going on?”

In between heavy breathing, she yelled. “Dodge! Come to Daddy’s house! Please! Right now.”

“Huh?” I pondered, looking over at Kiyomi with puzzled eyes.

“What?! What bae?”

“Kay, slow down. What happened?”

“This nigga done put his hands on my sister!” At that time, she screamed out again.

“I’m on the way!” I got out, ending the call. Quickly, I jumped up.

“What’s going on?”

“That nigga over at Mr. Henry’s house acting a fool.”

“What?”

“That was Kay,” I said, putting on my shoes. “She said he put his hands on Keisha. I ain’t got nothing to do with that, but Keisha has Dolce and if anything—”

“I’m coming too,” Kiyomi responded, as she grabbed the keys. “Hold up, bae.”

“What?”

“You might need this,” she said, pulling out the drawer and grabbing my Glock.

“That’s why I love you.”

“I know. Now let’s go handle this nigga.”

“Damn right,” I stated. Together we rushed out the house, as I headed straight to Mr. Henry’s house.

On the way there, I looked over at Kiyomi. “We were just talkin’ ‘bout this disrespectful ass nigga.”

“I know. Like, what could’ve happened for him to be laying paws on Keisha?”

“No damn telling.”

“Bae, don’t jump out going crazy off top. Just see what’s going on first. You know I’m gon’ be right beside you. I’m with the shits, so if he try to jump froggy, we beatin’ his ass.”

I grinned. If I ain’t know nothing else, I knew I had a down ass rider in Kiyomi. I couldn’t have chosen a better woman to be with.

“Bae...” I looked over at her. “Don’t you get yo’ ass out acting crazy. I’ll hate to have to slap this nigga’s lights out, ‘cause if he touch you, he’s dying tonight.”

“Oh, but if he touch you, he’s dying tonight. So, um, either way, it looks like he’s dying tonight.”

I laughed. “Well, not if he doesn’t touch either of us, and that includes Dolce.”

“Damn right. Now he really fuckin’ up if he touch my baby,” she seethed with anger.

Just the thought of her feeling like Dolce was hers melted my heart. I knew without a doubt that she’d go to war for us, and I would do the same for them.

After going back and forth about putting Alvin in an early grave, in no time we were pulling up to Mr. Henry's house. It seemed quiet from the outside, so I really didn't know what was going on.

"Keisha and Kay's car is here."

"Yeah, Mr. Henry's is probably parked in his garage," I added.

"I hope we don't have to rock this nigga's tater," Kiyomi let out, with a cute menacing stare.

I grinned. "Bae, I'm supposed to be walkin' in here like a thug, not laughing at yo' silly ass."

"I knooow. My bad, bae. I'm just tryna lighten the situation, 'cause if we both pop off somebody gettin' shot tonight. We ain't going to jail on Christmas Eve, though."

"You know what to say."

We walked up to the door, and before I could knock, Kay opened it. She looked like she'd been fighting. Better yet, more like she'd just gotten her ass beat. "Where's Dolce?" I quickly asked. I wasn't really stun they asses.

"He's in the back with Keisha."

"Keisha!" I called out. "Bring my boy here!"

"What happened?" Kiyomi asked. Clearly, it had been some furniture moving.

I looked around. "Where's Mr. Henry?"

"Daddy ain't made it back yet. I called his phone, but he left it here."

"What happened?!" Kiyomi asked again in a sterner tone.

"Bitch, don't raise yo' voice at me!"

"Kay, if you don't pipe the fuck down. You already got tracks hanging out ya head."

I glanced over at Kiyomi with a shake of the head. "Bae, no," I diffused as calm as I could. "Where that nigga at?"

"He left," Keisha replied, walking out the back. She looked worse than Kay.

Dolce cried out, as I rushed over to get him. "Is he okay? Did that pussy ass nigga touch my boy?"

"No," Keisha answered, but Kay intervened.

"But he has—"

"Hush Kay."

I frowned. "What the fuck that mean?"

“Keisha knew this nigga was crazy. He ain’t been nothing but showing his ass lately. That’s why I moved in with Daddy a few weeks ago.”

“Keisha.” I angrily stared in her muthafuckin’ face. “Did he put his hands on my son?”

“No.”

“Keisha, stop with the bullshit! He hit him so hard last month that he left a bruise on his thigh. Keisha claimed she was going to tell you, but I knew better.”

“Kay!”

“Don’t fuckin’ Kay me! I’m sick of you being so stupid over a man! She don’t even like him like that. She only fucked with him thinking you’d switch up, so no other nigga would be around Dolce.”

“Wow,” Kiyomi uttered, as I stood there trying my best not to fuckin’ pop off on this bitch.

“Last month, she begged you to let her keep him for another week, and that’s why. She knew if she sent Dolce back with a bruise like that you’d go ape shit.”

I still stood quietly rocking my son. I had to process this shit.

“Is that the only time he touched him?” Kiyomi asked.

“That I know of. Tonight, he just barged in here acting a fool. Dolce was in the room though. He jumped on Keisha, and I jumped on him. He literally fought us both. Then he pulled a gun out and put it to Keisha’s head. But, when I called you, he ran outta here.”

“Keisha, is that the only time this nigga touched my boy?” I irritably asked.

“Dodge, I’m sorry. I never meant for none of this to happen,” she expressed, but before I could react, Kiyomi was on her like white on rice, attacking her ass like a Pitbull. She was the one that went ape shit crazy. Keisha didn’t stand a chance. I knew it was coming, I was just on stand-by waiting for it. Kay didn’t even move to jump in it. She stood back watching, as I handed Dolce to her. He was crying so loud. I’m sure it traumatized him a little, but Kiyomi was only thinking about making Keisha pay for letting that nigga touch our boy. After I felt like it was enough, I pulled my lady off her.

“Bitch! If you ever let another nigga touch my baby, I’ll kill you!”

“Calm down, bae. Calm down.”

Keisha sat on the floor crying. I don't think she had a fighting spirit left at this point. It was over. She was done for. Not only had she gotten her ass beat again, but I could tell she knew the entire battle was lost.

"Take him. Take him with you," she cried out. "I'm so sorry."

"Not as sorry as that nigga gon' be when I see him," I told her.

Kiyomi grabbed Dolce. "Come on, baby. I'm sorry you had to see that," she said in his ear. As she held him close to her, he stopped crying.

"Let's go, bae," I told her. She walked out ahead of me, as I glanced back over my shoulder. "If you know where that nigga at, you better tell me or you'll regret it."

The only thing Keisha could do was nod her head. She knew that shit had gotten real, and I wasn't stopping until Alvin's bitch ass was dead. I put that on er' thang.



The next morning, we woke up to Dolce living his best life. He was having a ball, like nothing happened last night. A part of me was relieved that he was this young, because hopefully he would never remember his mama putting him in harm's way. She was definitely one of a kind. I had never met anyone quite like her. To even think that I'd leave my lady to be with her just because I didn't want another man around him was insane. It was her duty to bring a decent nigga in his life that would never even think about doing no shit like Alvin did. Yet again, her dumb ass dropped the ball.

"He likes the wrapping paper more than he likes his toys." Kiyomi smiled, as she watched the lil' Tasmanian wild out.

I grinned. "Come here." I picked him up and sat him inside of his electric Dodge truck. It was just big enough for him. I controlled the remote, which made it move, and he loved it. I believe he thought he was driving for real.

"He's so smart. Look at him turning the wheel." We laughed. "I really hate that I had to jump on Keisha in front of him, but I couldn't help myself. I really tried to stay calm, but I couldn't believe she'd let a man put his hands on her baby like that. I mean, who raised that dizzy bitch?"

"I know. I've still been trying to process the shit. You know I'm hot as hell."

“Have you heard anything?”

“Nah, not yet. She claims she’ll call me if she hears anything. I don’t care where he’s at, he gotta go.”

“Bae, you gotta be careful though. I don’t want you sitting behind bars because of this nigga.”

“I have a feeling it’s gon’ be him or me, though. You know he’s not gon’ let me walk around here knowing what he did to our boy. He knows I’m a fool with it. He knows I’ll bash his fuckin’ head in. He knows I will do his ass and not think shit of it.”

“You’re right. I’m just scared. God knows I don’t want nothing to happen to you.”

“Oh, you ain’t gotta worry, baby. I’m not leaving your or Dolce. You’re stuck with me.”

She smiled. “I better be.”

We played with Dolce for a little while and then my cell phone rang. I looked at the caller ID, it was Keisha. I turned the phone toward Kiyomi so she could see the display screen.

“Answer it, bae.”

“Yeah,” I answered.

“He’s over on Rooster Avenue in the trap.”

“Say less,” I told her, ending the call.

“Bae, you really going over there?”

“Yeah,” I said, placing a call. “I’m ‘bout to come through. Be ready,” I told Meech and then ended the call. I placed another call. “You ready?”

“You know where he’s at?”

“Yeah, I’m on the way,” I told Rosco and then ended the call. I got up to get dressed, as Kiyomi followed me around the house until I was heading out the door.

“Meet me at Granny’s after you leave yo’ mama’s house,” I instructed while kissing Dolce on the head.

“Okay, bae. Love you.”

“Love you too,” I responded, kissing her softly on the lips.

“Bae, be careful.”

“I will,” I told her and just like Speedy Gonzales, I was outta there.



We parked across the street in an undercover tinted out Impala that Meech had just bought. Staked out like the feds, we were laying low on this nigga.

“Was Keisha sure he’s in there?”

I glanced over at Rosco and then back at the abandoned trap shack. “That’s what she said. She even text not long ago to say that he was still in there,” I responded.

Meech shook his head. “I can’t believe he did that shit to DG. Shit brought a tear to my eye when you told me about it last night. I ain’t like that shit one bit.”

“Me either.” Rosco nodded from the passenger side as he looked over at me. “You good, bro?”

“I will be once this shit is over. Y’all know I gotta be the one to dead this shit. I just need y’all on the lookout just in case he got some lil’ goons on guard.

“We know,” Meech responded. “I know this is not the time, but I saw Kinsley yesterday in the mall. She had the baby with her.”

I glanced back at him through the rearview mirror. Finding out the baby wasn’t his, changed him. I don’t know how or why, but he definitely seemed like a changed man and for the better. “Did you say something to her?”

“You know we ain’t talked since that day at her baby shower. She let you and Kiyomi play the mediator, so I could have the paternity test done. I appreciated that, but when I saw the baby for the first time, it was no denying it. She looks just like that nigga”

Rosco laughed. “He is a pretty boy.”

I nodded. “You ain’t never lied. Light-skin, good hair and shit,” I joked.

“Hell yeah,” Meech laughed. “Anyway, she spoke to me and afterward, I apologized to her. She shot me a forgiving smile and left out the store. Shit made me feel good inside. I’m glad to see that she’s happy and in a better space. Only thing threw me off, was seeing how big and pregnant she is again. That nigga beatin’ her guts in.” He laughed. “Can’t blame him though. She did have some good ass pussy.”

Me and Rosco laughed. “Nigga, you foolish,” Rosco joked, just as he nudged me on the arm. “Yo, speaking of a lil’ goon.” He pointed, as we looked over at the house. Lil’ nigga was standing by the corner of the house out back. He was definitely looking around like he was on day watch or something.

“Fuck that lil’ nigga. Today might be a bad day for him if he don’t get ghost,” I griped, just as Alvin walked out on the porch. He, too, was looking around like he knew I was out to fuck his whole life up. Just as I sat up, grabbing my Glock, Meech tapped me on the shoulder.

“Hold up. You can’t be making no quick moves like that.”

“Oh, I know. I’m just waiting. I need to get him while he’s in the house anyway, so he can look in my eyes as I snatch his soul.”

We watched patiently as Alvin lit his blunt, blowing the smoke so freely in the air without a care in the world. He thought he’d gotten away with some shit, but he was wrong. As I waited for the opportunity to pounce on that nigga, I paused with surprised eyes.

“Oh shit,” Rosco got out, just as the lil’ goon on watch tiptoed from behind the house and blasted this fool right in the back of his head.

“Yoo!!” I let out in the car, as the lil’ nigga took off running. Without hesitation, I started the engine and peeled out.

“What the fuck just happened?!” Meech asked.

I shrugged my shoulders. “I don’t know, but that nigga just got what was coming to him, and I ain’t even have shit to do with it. Guess he owed a lot more niggas his life.”

“Merry Christmas, muthafucka!” Meech yelled out. We cracked the fuck up, as I drove us back to our destination.

Once in my truck, I called Keisha. “Hello,” she answered on the first ring.

“Yo’ lover is a goner now. We literally just watched some lil’ nigga take him out in broad daylight. I don’t know who he was, but ya boyfriend had to have been real naughty this year,” I joked. I didn’t give a damn ‘bout her feelings. I was still pissed the fuck off with her stupid ass.

“Damn,” she whispered in the phone. It almost sounded like her crazy ass had started crying. “Dodge.”

“Yeah.”

“I’m sorry. I can’t say that enough. I never meant to put Dolce in any harm. I spoke with my auntie, daddy’s sister, and I’m moving to Florida. She’s helping me get settled. I just need a do over.”

“You ain’t taking my damn son to Florida. You must be out yo’ mind.”

“I know I’m not. I’ll sign over full custody to you. I let him down and I never wanna put him in that position again. He didn’t deserve that. So, he’s yours.”

“You serious?” I asked, now with a calmer tone.

“Yes. Kiss him for me. Let him know I love him, and I’ll visit as much as I can. No matter what, always let him know who his real mama is. Do that for me,” she said through a crackling tone. She was definitely crying.

“A’ight, I will,” I told her. She ended the call as I drove home to get dressed in my embroidered matching pajamas that Kiyomi had gotten us. I woke up this morning not expecting what the day held, but with God’s good grace, it certainly worked out in my favor. “Thank you, Most High. Thank you.”

KIYOMI SIMMONS

FOUR YEARS LATER

I woke up to a big vase of roses, a beautiful birthday card from my loves, and a sweet ass slice of red velvet cake that Dolce had just hand fed me himself. My birthday was already the best that I'd ever had. At least I found myself saying that each year before, because Dodge never disappointed. He was indeed the man I saw myself marrying one day. We kept things spicy, had monthly date-night rituals, went on lavish vacations, and still fucked each other like sex was brand new. He was my everything and I loved him with every fiber in me.

"Mommy," Dolce called out as he came back in the room where I was now getting dressed. "What you doing?"

"I'm putting my clothes on. We're heading out this evening. Daddy wants us to meet him at Pappadeaux's."

"That's our favorite restaurant."

I grinned. "It sure is," I responded. I swear this kid wasn't biologically mine, but he acted just like me. He loved everything I ate and did. He might've been his dad's mini-me, but he was my very own lil' human spirit twin. I just loved his lil' handsome butt.

"Go put ya shoes on, shorty. We don't wanna be late. I don't know where your auntie Kinsley is at, but she should've been here by now."

"Yes ma'am," he said, running out the room.

"Slow down before you fall and hurt yourself," I yelled.

"Yes ma'am," he called out.

As I looked for my black Saint Laurent heels that went great with my feather-trimmed, one-piece Saint Laurent fitted jumpsuit, the doorbell rang.

“Bout time,” I said, making my way to the door. The minute I opened it, Kinsley started with that motor mouth of hers going one hundred miles per hour.

“Sus, the girls couldn’t find their bows for me to do their hair,” she said, as GiGi and Miley walked in ahead of her.

“Mommy, Miley threw ‘em in the trash can.”

“GiGi, there was no bows in the trash can. I checked.”

“Not the one in Daddy’s office,” she said in the cutest lil’ tone ever.

“Daddy checked and they weren’t there. Miley, did you have the bows, girl?”

“No ma’am. GiGi had the bows.” She pointed.

I bust out laughing. Kinsley had her hands full. It was always a circus happening anytime we were around each other. “Where’s Lil’ G?”

“Home with Gianni, being that he was still wrapping up some work.”

“Now why you leave Lil’ G home, knowing Gianni had work to finish?”

“Sus, he might be a year old, but he’s already acting like a terrible two. He was having a full-blown tantrum when we were walking out the house, and Gianni told me to leave him. He’s the only one who can calm his bad ass down.”

I laughed. “You and your babies.”

“I know right.” She laughed. “They keep my ass on the go.”

“But hey, I must say, you got the best hubby in the world. He loves his family and I love to see it.”

“Yes, he is literally a dream come true.”

“Same thing I say about my beau.” I smiled, walking back in the room to finish getting myself ready.

“Dolce!” GiGi called out. She literally ran everybody, including us. She just had that bossy demeanor.

“He’s in his room putting on his shoes,” I told her.

“GiGi, I’m coming,” Dolce responded, as me and Kinsley looked at each other and bust out laughing again.

“These small people are like lil’ adults.”

“I know right. I tell Gianni that all the time. We just sit back and watch them. When I say they are hilarious. Sus, it’s always something,” she said, sitting in the recliner chair over by the window. Miley climbed in her lap. “And this one be stuck to my hip like glue.”

“Mommy.”

“Yes Miley.”

“GiGi put them bows under the bed.”

Kinsley frowned. “What bed?”

“In your room.”

“Under my bed?”

“Yes ma’am. On the side where Daddy sleeps.” Kinsley looked over at me and rolled her eyes. “Lil’ heffa always playing with me.”

I couldn’t help but laugh.

“Luckily, I had just bought them new bows, or they would’ve been rocking some mean fros.” She laughed.

“They got hair like Milan Marie on Instagram.”

“Love Milan Marie?” Miley asked.

Me and Kinsley looked at each other. “Sus, they follow that lil’ girl faithfully. GiGi even be ‘round the house singing like her. I believe that’s where they get them lil’ sassy attitudes from. She’s so adorable.”

“Yes, she is,” I agreed.

“Daddy say we got hair like her too.”

Kinsley laughed with a shake of the head. “Miley, go in the room with ya cousin and ya sister. Give Mommy a break.”

Miley pouted.

“Dolce got blow pops,” I said. Her lil’ tail wasted no time climbing down and hauling ass down the hall. Me and Kinsley cracked up.

“I heard y’all got floor seats to see Hendrix play in the finals this weekend. Guess who’s coming too?”

“Nooo, you coming with us?!” I excitedly pondered.

“Yeah, sus. We’re double dating.”

“Yaaaay,” I danced, as Kinsley joined in with a twerk session.

“I think this is his year. He’s getting that championship ring.”

“I agree. They’re already 3 and 0. They got this.” I smiled. I was really proud of Hendrix. He hit the court and never looked back. Good for him.

“So, you ‘bout ready for this evening?”

“Yeah, I’m excited because I have no clue what Dodge got me besides roses and a beautiful card this morning. You know he usually goes all out.”

“Yeah, like a week stay in Dubai a couple of years ago. And, last year —”

“Girrrrl, I was shocked as hell when he bought me that Jeep Wrangler.”

“Sus, not just some Jeep Wrangler. He got you the Rubicon 392. That’s a bad ass. Hell, are we ridin’ in that this evening? I love that bitch.”

I laughed. “We can,” I said, as my cell phone alerted me of a text. It was from Dodge.

Has Kinsley made it there yet? DODGE

Yeah, she’s here now. YOMI

Y’all need to be leaving. Like now. DODGE

Otw shorty. YOMI

By the way, whatever you have up your sleeve this evening, just know that I’m very appreciative. Thanks in advance. YOMI

LOVE YOU. DODGE

I smiled. “We gotta go, bitch. You know it’s gon’ take at least twenty minutes to get them Rugsrats in their car seats.”

“I know. Let’s go! This the first year I get to have fun with you. I promise it feels like I’m pregnant every year.”

I laughed. “You got your son now, so y’all should be good.”

“I think I want about two more. Maybe three.”

“Girl, help yourself. I do want three total, but that’s about it.” I laughed, as a quick thought came to mind. “I don’t know who’s having babies faster, you or Thomasina.” I teased.

Kinsley laughed. “Honey, she’s on her third one too now, right?”

“Yeah, I guess that’s her way of locking Meech in but chile he still be doing his thing.”

“Some niggas will never change.”

“You got that right, but at least he’s a good father.”

“I knew he would be and honestly, it didn’t surprise me that she’d be the one that ended up on his arm.”

“Yeah, she loves that nigga.” I nodded with a smirk. “Their kids are a mixture of him and her.”

“That’s funny, and nan one of mine looks like me.” She clowned.

“You’re right. They’re all your hubby.” We laughed.

Between small talk about my birthday party and what else Dodge could’ve gotten me, we were finally out the door. It literally did take about twenty minutes to get the chaps situated. Everybody wanted to talk at once.

“So, I need you to stop by my house first,” Kinsley said.

“Kin, are you fuckin’ serious?”

“Auntie, you said a bad word,” Miley sassed.

GiGi popped her lips. “Miley, leave my auntie alone.”

“But she said a bad word.”

“Y’all two are fuuunny. Ain’t it Mommy?” Dolce blurted out.

We couldn’t help but laugh.

“Come on, sus. Gianni just text. He need me to get Lil’ G. Apparently, he’s running real late.”

“Damn. Okay.”

“Bad word, Auntie.”

“Okaaaay, Miley.” I grinned with a shake of the head. “Let me hurry up and get y’all home. I’m puttin’ y’all aa—uh—butts out.”

Kinsley laughed. “Oh, that Miley gon’ straighten you every time. She don’t give her daddy a break.”

“I can only imagine.” I grinned.

About fifteen minutes later, I was entering the gated community that Kinsley and her family lived in. It was a nice ass suburban neighborhood. The houses were beautiful. Kinsley lived on two acres of land, with a pool in the back, and surrounded by neatly trimmed bushes that made her spot way more lowkey than the others. It was the perfect family home.

“Sus, pull up right here,” she said.

“Where? ‘Cause you don’t live here. You live there.” I pointed next door. “Unless you moved, bitch.”

“Auntiiiiiee.”

“Miiiiley,” I playfully groaned. Sus wasn’t kidding. This lil’ diva didn’t miss a beat.

“Just pull up right here,” she insisted.

At that moment my heart dropped. “Kinsley, don’t play with me,” I said as I pulled in the driveway.

“We moved.”

“Stop lying!”

“Mommy, we didn’t—”

Kinsley’s neck jerked, as she looked in the back seat. “Miley, can you chill for once?”

“Okaaaay,” she grumbled in that tiny voice of hers.

Once parked, I eased out the Jeep. I couldn’t even talk. I didn’t see no other cars, but my gut was telling me everything I needed to know. Kinsley started getting the kids out of their car seats, as I stood outside of my driver

door, still stuck while admiring the big ass house. Suddenly, Dolce grabbed my hand, almost startling me, then the garage let up.

“Surprise!” everybody yelled out, as Dodge stood there looking like a million dollars.

Lowkey, I flinched from the excitement. “Mommy, Daddy is here.”

“I see him, son.” I smiled, picking him up and walking toward the garage. I fought back the tears, as I glanced over my shoulder at Kinsley. “You one slick ass heffa. Sorry Miley,” I quickly said.

“Hey neighbor,” she whispered with a genuine smile. The second I walked up to Dodge, he wrapped his arms around me and Dolce.

“Welcome home,” he said.

“Omg! You can’t be serious!”

“But I am,” he assured me, as tears of joy started to flood down my face.

I looked around to see Mama and Sammy watching with loving eyes. Granny was already wiping tears. Sha was cheeing like no other. My bestie Roz was there with lil’ Lathan Colombo, as she wiped her tears while smiling. Loyal couldn’t deny his son and ironically, he was really a good dad. Deana showed up with her new man and the rest of her crew. To see her and Sammy get along now and co-exist at times like this was beautiful. The fellas were there, all of ‘em. Gianni was even there with Lil’ G in his arms. I was surprised that him and Meech could be in the same space without coming to blows, but I guess time not only healed wounds, but beefs too. Apple was there with Rosco, that wasn’t a surprise. They stayed glued to each other. It was magnificent. Love was definitely in the air.

“Baeeee, you always go all out.”

“I know, so don’t expect nothing next year,” he teased.

We all laughed, but then he got on one knee, pulling out a black velvet box.

“Noooooo, this can’t be real!” I shrieked as everybody screamed with joy.

With the sincerest of eyes, as I looked at his handsome face, he pleaded his love for me.

“Bae, you’ve been everything to me. You helped me when I needed it the most. You’ve stood by me through thick and thin. When I got custody of Dolce, you didn’t hesitate to take on that responsibility too. I know we’ve been busy building our empires and I didn’t want to rush the process of us

coming together, but I need to make sure that we're growing old together. You're my rock, my queen, my everything, and I cannot imagine my life without you. Will you marry me?"

"Yesssss! Yes! Yes bae!" I screamed, then kissed him passionately on the lips. "I love you so much."

This man had made me the happiest woman on earth. Fairytales and dreams did come true. No matter the age, or the heartaches and pain, if you just manifest and believe in love, you won't have to find it, it'll find you.

THE END...

Side bar: Oh, Keisha was now living in Florida, leaving Kay the hair salon to herself. She visited every six months or so, not entirely forgetting about Dolce. However, she focused more on her new husband and her two handsome toddler sons by him. I guess she found love after all. But to me, she was still a bitch, and in my heart of hearts, would always be that bitch.

Signed, Sealed, and Delivered...

Yours Truly, **Kee-Yo-Mee**

UP NEXT:

THUG ME GOOD AND LIE TO ME pt 2, It's the **FINALE!** So, catch up if you haven't. It's definitely a **MUST** read.

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