



Juice

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Category: Romance, Adult

Description: Julius “Juice” Jones, a rising rapper, believed his life had reached its peak after securing his dream record deal. Driven by a single-minded focus, he embarks on a headfirst journey into the music industry, resolute in his mission to amass wealth and provide for his loved ones. His unwavering dedication leaves no room for any distractions or unnecessary pursuits. However, his carefully crafted plans take an unexpected turn when he encounters the mesmerizing Nariah.

Nariah was no stranger to adversity. Determined to improve her circumstances, she applied for a position as a bottle girl at a prominent nightclub. Her strategy was to maintain a low profile, accumulate wealth, and leverage the nightlife to her advantage, at least until she discovered an alternative means of earning a living. A chance encounter with Juice, however, sent her life into a downward spiral.

When you come from humble beginnings, it’s challenging to maintain your composure once you find yourself in the limelight. Can Juice and Nariah withstand the pressures of the entertainment industry, or will Juice succumb to the temptations that surround him?

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juice

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“How you feeling Juice?” My manager, Tito asked, snapping me out of my head. The two of us were seated in the lobby of Majik Musik waiting for someone to come and get us. Rolling my eyes over to where Tito was planted, I hunched my shoulders. Honestly, I didn’t know how I felt. Excited, nervous, shit really—I was kind of in shock.

For the last two years I had been on the grind. Hustling my ass off to get this music shit to pop off. I’m talking ‘bout selling cd’s out the trunk of my car, performing at small clubs, streaming my music, anything to get my name out there, I was doing it.

One night I was in my homeboy studio when Tito hit me up telling me that he’d booked me to perform at the AU for homecoming. At first, I was nervous as fuck ‘cause that was going to be my biggest show to date. I tried to think of a million reasons why I wasn’t ready for that type of crowd, but Tito kept pushing for me to do it.

After giving in, I got my set list together and said fuck it. Much of that night was a blur. All I could remember was hitting that stage, standing in front of that crowd, and just spittingshit that was on my heart. I gave that performance everything I fucking had and next thing I know I was getting a call from A&R at Majik.

Tito and I sat with them on a few occasions about my future in the entertainment industry and what I wanted for myself. Majik Musik was a big deal in Atlanta.

Everybody hot on the charts was signed to them and for some reason they had taken an interest in me.

We went back and forth with their team and realized we was out of our league when they presented a contract. I didn't think they was fucking me over or no shit like that, but all of that contract mumbo jumbo was making my head hurt. Me and Tito was two niggas from the hood with nothing more than a high school education. We ain't know nothing 'bout nothing. All we knew was we was hungry, and this was what we had been working so hard at.

Tito ended up reaching out to a lawyer that he knew and after he reviewed the contract, he told me I would be a fool not to sign. Now I was sitting here minutes away from being a signed artist with a label behind me and I was damn near shitting bricks 'cause my nerves was so bad.

"Mike said the contract was good. All you gotta do is sign." Tito let me know.

"I know." I sighed and slouched down in the seat. Running my hand over my head I looked off. "I really can't believe this shit is happening."

"This the shit we been working on Juice. I ain't tryna hype you up or no shit like that but you better than half the niggas that's hot right now. You can actually rap my nigga. These niggas out here be trying hard to catch the beat and can't rap for shit."

"Them niggas got deals though."

"And you 'bout to have one too. This shit really for you man. We 'bout to go up." He boasted, lightweight putting my nerves at ease.

I think the thing that I was most nervous 'bout was failing. I done seen plenty of niggas get a deal and end up being a one hit wonder. I ain't never want that to be my

story. Especially not when I needed this shit.

I didn't come from money, in fact I ain't come from shit. Growing up in the hood we had one or two options. Sell drugs or play sports and go pro. I couldn't stay out the streets long enough to take that school shit serious, so I dabbled in street pharmaceuticals.

The shit worked well enough for me to be able to pay for studio time and keep my appearance up for shows. But it was never something I wanted to do long term. I been rapping since I was ten, that's what I wanted to do. This shit was embedded deep in my heart to the point where it's all I've ever seen for myself. So, to be sitting here right now had me deep off in my head.

"Julius Jones." Someone called out, pulling me even further up out of my head.

"Here." I said and held my hand up. I had to pause and drop my head once I realized what I'd done. "I mean I'm right here." I said and slid up from the chair.

"Right this way." She instructed.

"Here we go." Tito sang from behind me.

Following her down the hall I took a minute to admire the building. The office space had floor to ceiling glass walls, and every office that I got a good glimpse at looked fancy. Different than the shit I was used to seeing. The label had plaques of accolades from their artist plastered all throughout the building. Hopefully one day I'll make it up on these very same walls.

"Have a seat. Someone will be with you in a moment." After seeing the two of us in the room she left out, making sure to close the door behind her.

Sitting down at the conference room table I pulled my phone out of my pocket and dropped it on the table in front of me. Before me or Tito could say anything, the door was pushed open. When the CEO, head of A&R, and Noble Stockley, one of their star producers entered the room my heart sank to the pit of my stomach. It was officially go time.

“Juice my man. I heard you were ready to sign with Majik Musik.” The CEO, Majik said as he took a seat across from me.

“Yeah.” I nodded. “I’m ready.”

“That’s the type of shit I like to hear.” He smiled and slid the folder over to me. “Every part that requires a signature has been marked with an X. We can get down to business as soon as you sign.” Sitting the pen on top of the folder he sat back and waited for me to do my thing.

Grabbing the pen in my hand, I held it and flipped the folder over. My eyes danced around the paper a few seconds before I sealed my fate. Once I signed the last page I closed the folder and slid it back to him.

“Listen, many have been in that same seat. I’ve seen some use the opportunity to make nothing out of something while some have fucked it off. Know that at this company if you’re willing to put in the work we got you. I can make you go from a local celebrity to an overnight rap sensation. How far you go in your career is solely up to you.”

“I understand.” I told him.

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Ushering his assistant over Majik handed her the folder. “Welcome to Majik Musik.”

“Thank you, man. This really has been a dream of mine. I’m so grateful for y’all even taking the chance on me.”

“Well here at Majik dreams do come true.” I watched him stand from his seat and amble over to the clear ice chest that sat in the corner. After grabbing the bottle of champagne up he made his way back to where we were seated. “Today we celebrate, tomorrow we get down to business. You want to do the honors?” He asked and held the bottle out to me.

Taking it from him I shook it up and popped the cork, letting the champagne flow from the bottle. Cheers erupted inside the room as well as outside. While everybody was busy congratulating me, Tito was standing there snapping pictures of this monumental moment. We had made it. Years of grinding and busting our asses had just landed us our first record deal. We had a reason to turn shit up.

Passing him the bottle I said. “Thank you for riding through the struggle with me my nigga. I know I been your biggest headache but my nigga, we here.” Pulling him into a hug I palmed his head. “We fucking made it!”

Pulling back Tito stared at me like a proud father. “We made it.”

“Yes, the fuck we did.” I cheesed.

The celebration went on for another thirty minutes before we were walked out of the conference room. They ended up giving us a tour of the building and introducing me

to some key players. I was presented with my official double M chain that all artists got when they were signed.

The highlight of my fucking day was when I got to sit in the studio and chop it up with Noble. He let me know that he had a beat that he'd been working on and knew I could do something with it. After he finished showing me the ropes and scheduling studio time, Tito and I left the building happier than what we were when we entered.

Sliding my double M chain around my neck I checked myself out in the mirror. I had celebrated with the label earlier and now it was time for me to celebrate with my niggas. Tito had called ahead and booked us a section at Stax, a local night club in the city. Tonight, would be the first night I was stepping out as a signed artist, and I planned on going the fuck up.

"You ready?" My homeboy Lucas asked as he entered my bedroom.

"Hell yeah I'm ready."

"Damn." He exaggerated. "Chain cost a couple mil. Shining all bright and shit." He teased.

"Hell yeah." I chuckled and ran my finger over the charm. "I'mma get all my niggas one as soon as that advance drop."

"Nawl." He waved me off. "You ain't gotta do all that."

"Y'all niggas been in the gutta with me. Gots to know I'mma take care of y'all."

"Niggas ain't kicking it with you for no handout, Juice. At least I'm not." He clarified. "We boys, we came up together. One of us win we all do but everybody grown as fuck. You ain't gotta feel obligated to take care of nobody but you and Mrs."

Norma.”

“Oh, Ma Dukes a guarantee but I got y’all.” I said and meant every fucking word. I ain’t have no big ass group of friends but the ones I did have I respected. Them niggas was right beside me when I ain’t have a dime to my name. They gots to know that I’m rewarding their loyalty.

Niggas could’ve been switched up, but they didn’t. When the block was hot, and I was low on funds it was them niggas that was paying for studio time. I had them for whatever.

“I’m just happy one of us got a shot.” He added.

“This is only the beginning.” I acknowledged. After hitting the lights, the two of us walked to the front where everybody else was.

“We loading up?” Tito asked.

“Yep. Let’s get it.” Once I made sure the crib was secured, me, Tito, Lucas, and our other homeboy Byron hit the door.

When we made it to the club Tito parked his Denali on the side of the building. The four of us walked toward the front of the building where security was. The nigga made sure to pat everybody down before he let us through the door.

But once we was in that bitch we were walked to our section and informed that our hostess would be with us. Tito had preordered bottles, so they were sitting on the table in the clear bucket just waiting on us to partake.

Tito scooped one up from the bucket and held it out. “To Juice. I applaud you for grinding it out and making your dreams come true. We ‘bout to take Majik by

fucking storm, them niggas ain't gone know what the fuck hit them.”

“To Juice.” The rest of my niggas yelled out. Once Tito popped that first bottle the night ensued.

I was standing against the railing in the section with my shades on and my arms folded across my chest staring out into the crowd. Collectively me and my niggas had probably hit ‘bout five blunts. That with the bottle of Ace that I had been drinking on had my ass in a zone. When I felt myself getting out of body I decided to slow it down and just take in everything around me.

Low key I was feeling like this would be the last time that I was gone be able to move around freely. I knew next week my life was ‘bout to change and while I was ready for the shit, part of me was wondering if I would miss being known locally.

I was people watching when DJ Amp cut the music, making everybody groan. “Real quick, real quick.” He laughed. “Wanted to say congratulations to Juice. My nigga just signed his firstdeal with Majik Musik. You niggas from the SWATS ‘bout to take over the music scene. Stax show ya boy some love.” He yelled into the mic.

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I couldn't stop the smile that spread across my face if I wanted too. Raising my hand up I saluted Amp and started vibing to my track that he dropped. When I started to hear people spitting my rhymes, I had to pull my shades up to make sure I wasn't fucking tripping. Standing there watching muthafuckas rap my shit hit different.

A few bottles girls stepped into the section carrying a sign that said, "congratulations" and some sparklers attached to a few bottles of Dom Perigon.

"Courtesy of Chucky." A thick dark-skinned chick said as she stepped over to me wearing a smile that lit the whole fucking club up. Momentarily I was rendered speechless. I mean she was fucking beautiful. Her hair was up in a bushy ponytail and two strategically placed ringlets were hanging by her ears.

Finally finding my voice I said a quick thank you. I was about to say something to her when Tito rushed over to us and shoved his phone in my face. I was trying to see what he was showing me without taking my eyes off her. But he was so determined to show me what was on the screen.

I quickly read the article that Majik had dropped 'bout their newest artist. Nodding, I said "that's what's up." My eyes did a quick scan around the section for baby girl, but she had dipped.

Grabbing one of the few lingering bottles girls by the elbow I asked. "Aye, where lil mama go with the ponytail?"

"Ponytail?" She repeated quizzingly like she ain't have a clue who I was talking bout. "Oh, you talking about Nari, the new girl. Umm." She looked off. "I don't know."

“When you see her again can you bring her back over here?”

“Why?” She asked with a lil too much attitude tucking her arms under her breast.

“You tryna holla?”

“Not yo business lil baby. Just please do me that solid.”

“Sorry.” She fake smiled. “I can’t. It’s against Chucky’s rules.”

“Oh aight.” I said, knowing good and fucking well that I ain’t give two shits ‘bout no damn rules. Walking away from her I went over to Tito. “Chucky the owner?”

“His pops the owner, he run it though.”

“Cool.” I nodded and rubbed my chin. “Think you can get him over here for a quick second.”

“Yeah, but what’s up?” Tito quizzed.

“Need to get some information up out of him.” I gave him a vague response.

Tito stared at me a few seconds before nodding his head. Without taking his eyes off me he tapped the same broad I was just talking too. “Go get Chucky for me lil mama.”

“Ugh.” She groaned and stomped off.

“What you got going on Juice?”

“All I’m tryna do is talk with the man.” Plopping down on the couch I propped my feet up on the table and waited for Chucky.

I had a lil situation that wasn't that serious. I mean we had fucked off a few times, but we weren't together. I actually met her that night I did the homecoming show. She was a good girl but the kind of life I lived I knew her folks wouldn't want her with a nigga like me, so I played it cool with her.

I didn't have room for nothing serious, so I hit a few times and that's as far as it went. Baby girl who I just saw could get me out of everything I fucking owned. The first thing I noticed about her was that infectious ass smile. I wanted her. Real bad.

"Juice, this Chucky."

Chucky held his hand out for me to shake. "Juice, congratulations."

Meeting him halfway I slapped hands with him. "I ain't tryna take up too much of your time. But one of your bottle girls that you sent over?— "

Before I could finish my statement, he blurted out. "Which one was it and what did she do?"

"Nawl, nawl, nawl." I shook my head. "Nothing like that. I think she said her name was Nari."

"Nariah." He corrected me. "Tonight is her first night working the weekends. Excuse her I'm still trying to show her the ropes."

Nariah... That shit fit her.

"She ain't did shit." I chuckled. "I want you to send her over."

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“Send her over?” He repeated.

“That’s what I said. Tell her to come holla at me.”

“Uh...” He hesitated and rubbed the back of his neck. “It’s kind of against club rules for the girls to mingle with the patrons.”

“Well then what time she get off?”

“She uh...she kind of got a lil situation.”

Getting up from the couch I towered over his ass. “Nigga did I ask you that? The fuck.” I frowned. The way he was acting was like she was his and that nigga was old as fuck. Baby girl couldn’t be no more than twenty.

He tossed his hands up. “My bad, Juice. I’ll send her over.”

“Thought so.” Taking my place back on the couch I watched him turn and walk out of the section. I hoped the nigga kept his word and sent her over. Cause if he didn’t, I had no problems going to find her for myself.

“Fuck that was about?” Lucas asked.

“I asked him to do me a solid and the nigga talking ‘bout she got a situation.”

“Nigga yo ass stay starting some shit.”

“I ain’t start a muthafucking thing. I asked him one simple question that nigga the one acting like it’s a problem.” I didn’t appreciate him trying to speak for her. I understood the whole not mingling shit which is why I asked what time she got off.

If the nigga ain’t feel comfortable giving me that information he could’ve said that. I would’ve respected it and figured out another way to get at her. He said she was new and the last thing I was trying to do was cause an issue at her job. He threw me off with that ‘she got a situation’ shit like I asked him. That brief encounter had left my ass wanting to get to know her. Hopefully she didn’t have a situation, and if she did, I hoped she knew it was ‘bout to be a wrap on all of that.

nariah

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Slouchingdown behind the bar I popped open my bottle of water and took a sip. For tonight to be my first time working on the weekend I had made more than what I anticipated. From the way the other girls kicked it I thought I would leave with a couple of hundred.

It was almost two in the morning and so far, I was up a few thousand. The club didn’t close for another two hours so if this was all I walked away with I would be content.

“How’s it going out there?” Shunta, the girl Chucky had stuck me with for the night asked.

Rising from the floor I sat on the stool with my back against the bar and yawned.
“Good.”

“Tonight is a slow night, tomorrow will be better.” She smiled.

“Tonight, has been kind of good actually.”

“How much did you get from that section?”

“Like four hundred.” I lied. Shunta was cool and all, but I wasn’t a dummy by far. I was taught to never let your right hand know what your left hand was doing. It wasn’t her business what I had made.

“Cheap ass niggas.” She frowned. “I thought they would have tipped more than that.”

“It’s cool. I didn’t really do anything.”

“If you say so.” She laughed. “Still cheap as fuck.”

“Nariah.” The manager called out, scaring the shit out of me.

I hopped up from the stool so fast it ended up falling to the ground. Leaning to pick it up I asked. “Huh?”

“Section three wants to see you.”

“Me?” I asked for clarification.

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“Yeah you. Go see what he wants and come find me when you’re done.” He retorted snidely.

Even Shunta was confused, prompting her to ask. “What’s his issue?”

“I don’t know.” I shrugged. Plucking my shorts out my butt I stepped around her. “I’ll be back.”

Ambling from behind the bar I hit the main floor and walked up the few stairs until I was standing at the entrance of the roped off section. “I was summoned.” I said to some light skinned nigga that was standing there like he was guarding the section.

Instead of saying anything he kind of stepped to the side and waved his hand for me to enter. Narrowing my eyes into slits I cocked my head to the side. “Look I don’t have time for games. Who asked for me?”

“I did.” A deep and gruff voice boomed from behind him. When I realized where it came from, I chuckled under my breath. Now I knew what had put Chucky in a foul mood. I was getting ready to walk over to see what he wanted when the nigga patted the seat beside him.

“I’ll pass.” I gave him a fake smile and turned to walk away.

“Nariah, wait up.”

Huffing, I halted my stride and turned to face him. “How you know my name?”

“Chucky told me.” He shared once he was standing directly in front of me.

“Figures.” I rolled my eyes and slammed my hands on my hips. “What’s up?”

Chuckling, he stroked his chin. “I ain’t want nothing. Just trying to see what’s up with you.”

Looking him up and down I quickly deduced that he wasn’t my type. He was handsome no doubt, but the nigga was wearing shades in the club. If that wasn’t the corniest shit ever. Then he had on one of those big ass chains that rappers wore. Which had me remembering that Amp said he had just signed a record deal.

Deciding to dead the conversation before he got any ideas I voiced. “I have a boyfriend.”

A smirk formed on his face. “You want a husband?” He challenged and stroked his tongue across his teeth.

“Cute...real cute, but I don’t do rappers.”

“Who said I’m a rapper?”

“Seriously?”

“I’m just saying.” He held his hand out. “Juice.”

“Nariah.” I placed my hand in his. “But you already knew that.”

“I did.” Removing his eyes from my face he looked over my head. “That’s you?”

Turning in the direction he was looking I quickly spotted Chucky standing in the cut

eyeing the hell out of us. “Chucky. Fuck no.” I don’t know if it was the look of disgust on my face or the tone in which I said it that caused him to laugh but Juice tossed his head back and chuckled.

“I ain’t think so. Nigga was trying to throw salt in the mix.”

“How?”

“Don’t matter how. But for real.” He rubbed his hands together. “I know you said you don’t do rappers and shit but uh...think I can get ya number?”

“Why you want my number Juice?” I mused.

“Cause I’m tryna see what’s up with you. Ya know...get to know you a lil bit.”

“Awww. That’s so cute.”

“Cute. The fuck.” He based, making me laugh.

Getting serious I added. “No seriously, outside of the fact that I don’t fuck with rappers and me having a situation I’m flattered but I can’t.”

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He tossed his chin up and requested. “Why not?”

“You’re cute and all but I’m too focused on school right now.”

“I ain’t tryna distract you lil mama. A nigga ain’t tryna do nothing but be in your world.”

“I hear you, but my answer is still no. Congratulations on your deal. I wish you much success in the future.” I winked before walking away.

Juice was cute, intriguing even. But I’d seen this story play out a time or two and wanted no parts. All I wanted to do was make my little money and get through school. I had goals and dealing with a rapper would deter me from those.

Pushing my way through the crowd of people I walked to the back of the club where Chucky’s office was. When I made it to the door, it was wide open and he was sitting at his desk.

“Have fun?” He questioned, without taking his eyes off his phone.

“You wanted me to come holla at you.” I implied, getting right down to business.

“What that nigga want?”

“Nothing.” I lied. “Just making conversation.”

Putting his phone down Chucky gave me his undivided attention. “I like you Nariah,

so much so that I took a chance and gave you a job.”

“And I appreciate it.”

“Right...you do know it’s against club rules?—”

Holding my hand up I cut him off. “Let me stop you right there. I’ve read the rule book from front to back. I know what’s against the policy and what isn’t. I’m guessing it applies to everyone but you.” I specified, calling his bluff.

It was no secret that Chucky gave me this job cause he thought he could talk me out of my thong. The nigga had been pushing up on me since I applied. Shunta had already warned me that he would try it and when he did, I shot his ass down.

Chucky thought because he’d put me on the weekends where I could make more money that it would make me wanna give into his advances. He was fucking wrong. He was no more closer to getting between my legs today than he was a month ago.

“That’s not what I’m saying.” He lied. “I’m trying to look out for you. I done seen plenty of niggas blow through here and make promises to my girls that they have no intentions on keeping. Juice ain’t no different.”

“Well lucky for both of y’all I’m not in the market for anything. Can I go?”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah.” He stuttered.

Giving his fat funky ass a fake smile I turned and walked off. First night on the weekend and already some stupid shit. When Chucky hired me, he claimed I ain’t have enough sass to work the weekend shift, so he stuck me on middays.

The money at Stax was good but I knew I could make more. I begged him for a

chance to work the weekends cause I saw the type of bread those girls were making, and I wanted in. Like I said I wanted to stack as much money as I could, get my degree, and get the fuck away from Atlanta. The plan was to get out before I got sucked in to the bullshit and so far, I was doing a good job at avoiding it. Hopefully Juice got the hint that I wasn't beat for the bullshit and moved around.

When I made it back to the main bar Shunta was there waiting. "What did them niggas want?"

"Juice was trying to holla, and Chucky was trying to assert his power."

"I can't stand his fat ass."

"Me either." I laughed.

"You gone hook up with Juice?" Her nosey ass asked.

"Nope." I popped. "Not my speed."

"Mind if I try that? I mean I ain't tryna step on your toes or nothing."

"Go for it my girl. He ain't my nigga."

"Bet." She smirked and hopped off the stool. Landing a balling ass nigga was more of Shunta's speed than mine. She was the type of bitch that wanted a nigga to choose her. Her only ambition in life was getting pregnant by a rich nigga so she could be taken care of. I didn't know nothing about that life. If she hollered at the nigga and he went for it, kudos to them. Better her than me.

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“Nari!” My mama yelled, jarring me from my dream.

Sitting up in bed I pulled my sleep mask off. “Huh?”

“Yo ass about to be late for work!”

Swiping my phone off the nightstand I checked the time and groaned. “Shit.” Pushing the covers back I stood from the bed and popped my back. I didn’t leave the club until six. After shutting down for the night, I counted my tips, cashed out, and helped clean the club before hopping in my car and coming home.

I didn’t have to be at the club until one, so I didn’t mind sticking around this morning. Judging by how drowsy I felt I was starting to regret that shit. Meandering into my bathroom I cut the shower on before standing at the sink to wash my face and brush my teeth.

After securing my shower cap over my ponytail, I hopped in the shower and let the steamy water pelt down my back.

“You working all night tonight?” My mama asked after barging into my bathroom.

“I’m working until five for one of the girls then I get a break and don’t have to be back until nine.”

“Oh okay.”

“Why? What’s up?”

“Lariah gone need a way from work and I won’t be back in enough time to get her.”

Lariah was my little sister. When school started back, she got a part time job at the sneaker store in the mall. She was a sophomore in high school and wanted to make her own money. I felt exactly where she was coming from. We weren’t rich by far but my mama never let us go without.

Now that I was in college, I didn’t want her having to overexert herself trying to pay for stuff for me, she’d done enough. I went to school on a full ride, so tuition wasn’t a concern of mine. I was old enough to be able to buy my necessities so that’s how I ended up at Stax.

“What time she get off?”

“Three.”

“Shit.” I groused. “Chucky not gone let me leave early since I picked this shift up. If she can camp out until I get off, I’ll go grab her.”

“I’mma text her and let her know.”

“Okay.”

“How was last night?”

“It was cool. A different vibe than the day shift.”

“Better money?”

“Much better.” I laughed.

“Good. As long as you keep them grades up you won’t hear my mouth.”

“Thank you, mommy.” I sang.

“Ummhmm. Don’t forget your sister.”

“I won’t.”

After telling me she loved me and how proud she was of me, my mama left out the bathroom, leaving me to finish getting dressed. When I finished with my shower I slipped on some tights and a t-shirt and stuffed my uniform in my duffle bag.

Tonight, was going to be another busy night and if shit went how last night did then I was expecting to go home with a few thousand. By the time I was leaving my mama had already dipped out. So once I’d locked up the house, I hopped in my car headed to the club to get my first shift over.

“Nariah, what you doing here?” Shunta asked as soon as I stepped into the back.

“Remember I was telling you I picked up a shift for Chantelle.”

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“Oh, girl I had forgot all about that shit.”

“I bet you did.” I laughed.

Tossing my duffle bag down I sat on the bench, kicked off my shoes, and pulled tonight’s uniform out of the bag.

“I gotta tell you about my night.” Shunta beamed.

“You ended up hooking up with ole boy?”

“Something like that.” She muttered.

“What that mean?”

“Well...I tried to get at him, but he wasn’t interested. I ended up linking with his manager.”

“Oh.”

“The nigga caked up too. He took me to the Westin and blew my back out.”

“Sounds like fun.” I teased.

“Girl it was.” She huffed. “Anyway, so I rode with him to drop Juice off at his house and he uh...he was asking about you.”

“Not interested, Shunta.”

“I know.” She twiddled with her fingers. “But I kind of told him I would give you his number and bring you with me to the studio.”

I knew it was ‘bout to be some bullshit when she opened her mouth. “Now why you lie to that boy like that?”

“Oh, come on Nariah. All the man wanna do is get to know you.”

“I hear ya, but I promise I’m not interested.”

“He cool and not like the rest of them.”

Standing up I shed my tights and shimmied into the cheeky black shorts. “And you know that how?”

“We talked duh.” She stated, making me roll my eyes at her.

“Juice wants some ass, and I don’t have none to give him.”

“Girl.” She looked me up and down. “You got more than enough ass.”

The two of us fell out laughing ‘cause she was right. I had a nice sized natural ass. The kind that you could see from the front. Thanks to my mama the body was giving. All those years of playing basketball kept me in shape.

“On the real Nariah, he on you bad.”

“What nigga ain’t?” I tossed out. I wasn’t trying to sound cocky or nothing, but it was the truth. Juice wasn’t the only nigga that I’d ran into that was checking for me. Just

like I wasn't interested in them I wasn't interested in him.

My lack of interest had nothing to do with me being scorned from a previous relationship or nothing like that. I genuinely wasn't interested in anything but my money and my education. Unlike a lot of the girls, I worked with I had goals. I was in school taking classes so that I could get into Mercer's accelerated pharmacy program.

The entire program would take seven years to complete but when I finished, I would graduate with a Bachelor of Science in health science, as well as my PharmD. The course load was heavy as hell, but this was something that I wanted more than anything and I had no plans on slowing down until I was walking across that stage.

"All I'm saying is Juice is on the come up. You could benefit from being connected to a nigga like him."

"I'll pass. I got my sights on something greater than being known as a rapper's girlfriend."

"Okay well if not for him then me. Come to the studio and kick it with me. One night off your normal routine won't hurt you, Nariah."

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“You never know. It just might.”

“It won’t.” She chided. “If you do me this one solid, I promise I won’t ask for anything else.”

“Ugh.” I groaned. “What day you trying to go?”

“It don’t matter. Tito said we can pull up whenever.”

Halfway giving in to her begging I told her. “I’ll look at my schedule and let you know when.”

“You being for real or just saying that so I will leave you alone.”

“I’m being for real. I need to see what assignments I got coming up this week before I tell you what day.”

“Well, we’re both off on Wednesday so...”

“How you know when I’m off?”

“Bitch, cause I’m nosey.” She laughed and plopped down beside me. Bumping me with her shoulder she batted her eyes. “I can tell him we gone swing through then.”

“Girl okay. I’ll go but I’m definitely driving my own shit. You not ‘bout to get me there and dip off on me for some dick.”

Placing her hand over her heart she feigned hurt. “I wouldn’t dare.”

“I don’t know. You just might.”

Before Shunta could offer a rebuttal, the door swung open and in stepped Chucky funky ass. “Nariah, ain’t you on the clock.”

“Ummhmm.”

“Then get on the floor.” He barked before slamming the door.

I looked at Shunta. “Who the fuck pissed him off?”

“Honestly, it’s no telling with him. But you better get out there before he comes back.”

“I’m going.” Getting up from the bench I pulled my shorts out of my ass and checked myself out in the mirror. After making sure my edges were slicked back I put on my apron and left the back room.

Locating Chucky’s assistant standing in front of the bar I trekked over to her so she could let me know what sections I had. Once I had what I needed I sauntered off to introduce myself to my first table. As soon as I got them squared away, I was going to slip off so I could check on my sister. I had to make sure I was out on time because I didn’t want her sitting at the mall longer than she had too.

juice

...

Tapping on the soundboard I told Trell, the engineer. “Run that back for me.”

Closing my eyes I listened to the music and tried to catch a vibe. Earlier this week I'd linked with Noble and did my thing over the beat he had given me. Majik hit me up saying he wanted me to lay down a verse on my label mate Sahdiah song she was working on. So, I showed up early enough to be able to do my part before my session later on with Noble.

Not gone lie I felt honored like hell to even be given that opportunity. Sahdiah had been signed to the label for a lil minute and was working on her fourth album. The song he wanted me to hop on was about a girl chasing a past love.

"Right there." I told Trell. "Go back to that run and let me hear it again." The track stopped and started a second or two before Sahdiah's sultry voice hit one of those old school runs. "That shit sounds good as hell."

"Sahdiah got a voice like no other." Trell praised.

"Hell yeah." I agreed. After having him start that section over a few more times I hopped in the booth and did my thing.

Sahdiah was singing about her past while I rapped about my future. Since that night at Stax, Nariah had been on my mind heavy. There was something tantalizing about her that I couldn't quite put my finger on.

I was trying so hard not to watch her ass when she walked off but the way her hips swayed, I couldn't peel my eyes from her. Me being lost for words or even checking for a female was a rarity, so that right there let me know lil mama was something special.

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I was hoping lil mama that Tito linked with ain't let me down. I told her if she got Nariah to come through, I'd toss her a few dollars.

Letting my thoughts spew through my words I professed my interest in the mysterious woman whose presence I was determined to be in. Once I finished cutting my rhyme, I slid my headphones off and left the booth. Sitting back at the sound board I waited for Trell to do his part before requesting him to play the song from the beginning.

The studio door opened causing me to toss my head back to see who had entered the room.

"You just did that?" Noble asked, stepping over to where I was seated with Kamp trailing behind him.

"Yeah. Majik hit me up about it."

"That's what's up." He leaned in and dapped me up. "Wanted the two of you to meet." He pointed at Kamp. "Got some shit I'm cooking up for your album and want Kamp's input." He let me know.

"What's up Kamp."

"Can't call it brother. Welcome to the label."

"Thank you, man."

Turning to Trell, Noble patted him on the back. “Trell, give us the room for a second.”

When Trell got up Noble sat in his seat and turned to me. “The four tracks we laid down last night went up this morning. Collectively it was decided that War would be your debut song. Everyone agreed with how raw and gritty the lyrics are and think we should lead with that. It’s real and authentic and we’re not trying to launch you as some gimmick rapper.”

“I had a feeling it would be that one.”

War was the song I worked on with Noble so I already had a feeling that it would be the preferred one. Tito thought they would go with Jehovah because of the story behind it but I kind of figured they wouldn’t roll that one out first.

“Now that we’ve gotten that figured out it’s time to put that final spin on it so we can get it out there. The quicker we can get a buzz going the quicker we can get you on stage.”

“That makes me happy man.”

“That’s what I like to hear. Is Tito in the building? I got some things I need to go over with him.”

“No but he will be later. My session doesn’t start for another three hours. I just came to do this for Majik first.”

“Bet. Well, we gone get out of here and let you do your thing. When Tito get here the two of you stop by my office and we can talk business.”

“Will do.”

“You got your money?”

“I did.” I smirked. “It’s sitting handsomely in the bank.” The label had given me a million dollars for signing and the money had cleared but I hadn’t spent shit. To be honest I was scared to touch it. The deal was solid so I wasn’t worried about going broke or owing nobody in the long run because the way my contract was set up the label would recoup theirs on the back end, but still. I had never seen that much money ever in my fucking life. I was in the beginning stages of living out my dream and still couldn’t believe the shit.

“Spend some money, you earned that fair and square. Treat your fam to something nice. If you keep working the way you are there’s more where that came from.” Noble let me know.

“Preciate ya man.”

“Ain’t nothing. We up though. Fuck with me later. I’mma send Trell back in.”

“Aight.”

When Trell made it back into the room I sat with him while he mixed the track and as soon as it was done, he sent it over to A&R for approval. Since I ain’t have nothing to do I decided to go grab Ma Dukes and treat her to a quick lunch before my next session.

Leaning back in my chair I glanced around the menu trying to decide on what I wanted to eat. “What you gone order?”

“Hell, I don’t know. You got me at this fancy restaurant knowing I’m not used to nothing on this menu.”

“Paschal’s ain’t fancy Ma Dukes.” I chuckled.

“Too fancy for me. I would’ve been okay with Ted’s.” Sitting the menu down on the table she folded her hands together. “How’s everything going down at your label?”

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“Good...better than I thought. They decided on my first single.”

“Is that right?”

“Ummhmm.”

“Well, when they gone drop it?”

“Soon. And as soon as those streaming checks start pouring in I’mma buy you a house.” With the money the label had already given me I could buy her a house, but Ma Dukes told me I should wait until the money was pouring in consistently. I understand her reasoning so I ain’t fight her ‘bout it. “Where you wanna stay?” I asked and took a sip out of my water.

“I don’t wanna be too far from the city.”

“Come on Ma.” I groaned. “I’m tryna move you out the hood.”

“And I’m okay with that. But I still don’t want to be too far out. Douglasville got some nice houses out there.”

“Douglasville huh. I’ll have Tito start looking so we can narrow down some areas.”

“Good. Now Julius.” I knew she was getting ready to be all motherly just by her calling me by my first name. “You ‘bout to start making some different kind of money now. You know I let you do your thing and keep my opinions to myself. But with this type of money and fame it’s easy to get caught up.

You talking about moving me out of the hood, but you need to be getting up out of there yourself. Them boys out there know you're about to start getting paid and will come after you. You got to watch them and the ones you hang with. The same homeboy that you'll break your neck for will be the same one walking around with hate in his heart 'cause he ain't you.

Them streets don't love you baby boy. Get you a new spot out there where them white folks don't play games and don't let too many know where you at. Keep them green niggas out of your face and them groupies out yo pockets."

"Ain't no females checking for me Ma Dukes. At least not the one I'm tryna get with. And you know yo baby boy stay strapped and keep his head on a swivel."

"And just like I know—so do they. Don't get comfortable is all I'm saying."

Ma Dukes was spilling some real shit. I knew plenty of niggas who got killed by one of the niggas they ran with. It's the reason I minimized my circle when my music started to pop off.

The only niggas that could get anything out of me was Tito, Lucas, and Byron, the three of them were the only ones I fucked with like that. I could lightweight kick it with a nigga and notfuck with him too tough. I still planned on taking heed to her warning though.

"You know what Ma Dukes, you right. I'mma make sure I watch my back."

"That's all I'm asking for. You my only child I want you to bury me and not the other way around."

"I hear ya. Now let's order so I can get you back to the crib and myself back to the studio."

“Okay.” She smiled.

As soon as I entered the packed club, I spotted my target standing in the middle of a section with her arms folded across her chest and her head tilted to the side. Her stance was reminiscent to the one she gave me when I tried to push up on her. It looked like the nigga she was standing over was spitting game and good thing she ain’t look interested cause I was gone show my ass.

“Why I gotta chase you around town just to see that smile on your face.”

“What the fuck?” She shrieked and turned around. When she realized it was me who just whispered in her hear her tense face relaxed. “Not you again.”

“Yeah, me again. What’s up wifey.” I smirked and stood with my feet shoulder width apart. “I thought you was coming to the studio with your girl.”

“I never said I was coming.”

“That ain’t what she said.”

“Well, she lied.” She shrugged and turned back to her customer. “I’ll be right back with your drinks.”

Grabbing her by the elbow I stopped her before she could walk off. “Put me up in your section.”

She stared at me a few seconds like she was thinking about it before pushing out.

“Mine are all booked.”

“Well tell that fat nigga to make room for me.”

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“That’s gone cost you.”

“Ooh you must think I’m one of them other niggas.” I chuckled. Pulling a knot from the pocket of my jeans I held it out to her. “Which section you want me in?”

Rolling her eyes she snatched the wad of bills from me and stuffed them in her apron. “Come on.” Nariah pushed past me and walked away. Like a trained dog in heat, I followed behind her with my bottom lip tucked between my teeth.

“What you drinking on?” She probed once she’d seated me in the empty section.

“I’m not drinking tonight but if that nigga gone trip then bring whatever out.”

“He’s definitely going to trip.” She mumbled lowly but I heard her real good.

“He be on y’all like that.”

“No.” She huffed. “Just me.”

“Ooooh...” I drawled. “Nigga must was trying to holla.”

“And was.” She giggled. “But I turned him down and he be fucking with me on the cool.”

Adjusting my fitted on my head I declared. “I’ll beat that nigga ass if you want me to.”

“Uh no.” She turned her face up. “I can handle Chucky. You want some wings or something?”

“Nawl. Go handle your tables I’mma sit here and wait on you to come back.”

“Who said I was coming back?”

“Go on Nariah. I’ll be right here.”

“I don’t like you.” She swore before stomping off. I didn’t give a damn ‘bout her saying she didn’t like me. Her lil cute ass didn’t turn me down like she did the last time.

It had been damn near two hours by the time Nariah stopped trying to avoid my ass. I guess she thought I was gone give up and dip out but I ain’t have nothing better to do than fuck with her, so my ass stayed planted.

Sitting down on the couch beside me she rested her head back. “Don’t you got some studio you need to hit up.”

“Nope. I handled my business before I pulled up on you.”

“Ummhmm.” She effused. “I know your girlfriend probably sitting by the phone waiting on you to call.”

“Nawl. I told her I was kicking it with my wife tonight.”

“Boyyyyy.” She sang. “I am not your wife.”

“Not yet but you will be.” I avowed. “How much longer you got left?”

“I just clocked out.”

“Ohh so you came to kick it with me huh.”

“Nope.” She raised her head. “Came to tell you thank you for the money and I’ll see you around.”

Leaning over I popped her on the thigh. “Why you giving me a hard time Nariah?”

“Why are you pestering me?” She countered. “I mean I’ve already told you I’m not interested.”

“What you not being interested got to do with me?” I retorted casually.

“I’m just saying. It’s clear you think you can change my mind.”

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“Again, I’ on give a damn ‘bout changing your mind. I’m tryna change ya heart.”

“Julius.” She bleated.

“Damn.... You must really be falling for a nigga if you calling me by my first name and shit.”

“Somebody must’ve dropped you on your head as a baby.”

“I’mma tell my mama you talking shit ‘bout her.” I joked.

“Julius!” She shrieked and pinched my side. “I didn’t say anything about your mama.”

“I’m fucking with ya. On the real though. All I’m tryna do is take you out to eat Nariah. Hopefully I can change your perception ofniggaslike me.” I chuckled.

Nariah nibbled on the bottom of her lip and stared off. “If I agree to one date, will you let me be.”

“I ain’t gon’ promise that. Cause I’m tryna get at you on the real.”

“You don’t know me enough to wanna get at me.”

I tossed my arms up and huffed. “That’s the reason I’m tryna take you out.”

Sighing dejectedly, she turned toward me. “Where you tryna take me Julius?”

“Wherever you wanna go.”

“Plan the date, Julius.”

“You gone come for real?”

“Yes.”

“You gone give me your number?”

“Hand me your phone.”

Pulling it out of my pocket I placed it in the palm of her hand. “And don’t give me no fake shit.”

“Shut up.” She laughed. Typing her number in she saved it and passed the phone back to me.

I looked down at the screen and saw she’d put her number in under Nari with a star beside it. “Nari huh?”

“Yep.” She sassed and stood up. “I guess I’ll see you around Julius.”

“You getting ready to leave now?”

“Yeah. I gotta go get my stuff from the back but after that I’m leaving.”

“I’mma walk you out.”

“You don’t have to do that.”

“Nawl, I do. Its late and anybody could be hiding in the cut waiting to catch a lick.”

“You right.” She shrugged. “Give me a minute.”

“I’ll be by the door.” I specified before following her out of the section. When I made it by the door I stood with my back against the wall and my eyes on the door I saw Nariah enter. I ain’t wanna miss her coming out.

With the wad of cash, I had given her and what I assume she made tonight she ain’t need to be walking outside by herself with all of that on her. Ain’t no telling who saw me hand that shit to her.

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As soon as she exited the room her eyes did a quick scan around the crowd before settling on me. She gave me a faint smile before starting in my direction. Out of nowhere Garfield fat ass stepped in front of her blocking off her path. I'on know what he was saying but she didn't look happy.

Shuffling over to the pair I stepped in front of fatty and glared down at Nariah. "You good?"

"Yes." She breathed.

"You sure? Cause it ain't nothing for me to handle that."

"I'm good Julius." The smile that spread across her face was the very reason my ass was on some simp shit now. I don't know what the nigga was saying but I grabbed her by the hand and ushered her away from him.

I didn't let her go until we was out of the building and across the street nearing the parking lot. "Where yo ride?"

"Over there." She pointed at the black Toyota Camry.

"Bet."

"You just insist on making that man hate me."

"He can hate you all he wants but the nigga better not fuck with you or I'mma bounce his big ass all around his establishment." I promised, meaning every fucking word.

“Chucky is harmless. The most he will do is fuck with my hours, but I don’t need you ruffling his feathers on account of me.” She retorted before reaching in her purse for her car keys.

“If he cut your hours I’ll pay you for your loss wages.”

“I don’t need you to do that Julius.” Opening her back door, she tossed her duffle bag on the back seat. “You got the number. When you got the date planned hit me up.”

“I’mma hit you up alright.” I leaned in and opened her driver side door. “Get home safely. I’mma text you so you can have my number. Hit me up when you get in the crib.”

“I probably won’t so don’t stay up waiting.”

“You heard what I said.”

Instead of responding to that she replied. “Goodnight Julius.”

“Goodnight Nariah.” After shutting her door, I stood there until she had pulled away from the club. I can guarantee you Nariah had no clue what she’d signed herself up for. This date was going to be the first of many. Just like I was determined to get a record deal, I was equally determined to make her mine. I had no plans on letting up until she agreed.

nariah

. . .

What you inhere getting all dolled up for?” My mama asked.

“I got a date tonight.”

“With who girl? I didn’t know you were dating.”

“That’s because I’m not.” I giggled.

“Then who is this date with?” She wondered.

Dropping the beauty blender, I turned around in my seat. “Some guy I met at the club.”

“At the club!” She yelped.

“It’s nothing like that.” I held my hand out cause she was about to get real dramatic. I had told her all about Chucky and how he kept hitting on me, so she was probably thinking it was him. I wouldn’t be caught at the 7-Eleven with Chucky greasy ass. “His name is Julius. He’s a rapper.”

“Oh okay.” She sang. “Does he have money? Cause we don’t do struggling artist over here.” She joked.

“He got a lil bit.”

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“Well, good. Where are the two of you going?”

“TWO Urban Licks.” I knew Julius was persistent, but I did not expect him to text me hours after I’d left him at the club with a dinner reservation. How he was even able to secure one at that time of the night was puzzling to me. But he had and therefore tonight he and I were going out.

“I love their salt and pepper calamari.”

“So do I.”

“Back to this little date. How’d he get you to agree?”

I’m glad my mama knew me well enough to know that I didn’t give niggas the time of day. Again, it wasn’t because of a bad relationship I just didn’t have the time.

“He’s persistent.” I giggled. “Him being handsome didn’t hurt.”

“You got a picture?”

“I can find one.” Swiping my cellphone, I unplugged it and searched for the internet for a picture of him. Selecting a good one I held the phone out.

“He is cute Nariah.”

“I know. Charming as hell too.”

“Most of them are.” Getting up from the bed she passed the phone back. “Is he

coming to pick you up?”

“No ma’am. I don’t know that boy to be giving out my address. I’m going to meet him.”

“Mama taught you well. I hope you kids have a good time.”

“We better cause this is the only time I’m going to go out with him.”

“As cute as that boy is I doubt that.” She winked her eye and left the room.

Going back to what I was doing I finished my makeup and pulled the rollers out of my hair. I didn’t want to look like I was going all out for the date, so I decided to keep it simple by throwing on a pair of light denim jeans with the rips at the knee, a plain white baby tee, and my pink Giuseppe Zanotti Cruel Summer heels. After grabbing my denim jacket out of the closet I hit the lights, said bye to my mama, and left the house. The restaurant was twenty minutes away from my house so forty-fivewith traffic and I wasn’t a late person, so I was leaving an hour early.

Right as I was pulling up to the restaurant my phone started to ring. When I glanced down at it, I smiled. “I didn’t stand you up.” I clarified once the call connected.

“I wasn’t worried ‘bout that shit. I saw you pulling in. Bring your car to the valet stand.”

I glanced around trying to see if I could spot Julius, but he looked to be nowhere in sight. “Where are you?”

“You’ll see me when you pull your ass up over here.”

“Ugh bye.” I ended the call and drove to the front of the restaurant. Before I had the

chance to open my door Julius was pulling it open.

“Hand me your keys.” He demanded.”

“Excuse you.”

“Hey Nariah.” He smirked and leaned in to snatch my keys out of the ignition.

After passing them off to somebody behind him he held his hand out. I looked at it a few seconds before letting him assist me with getting out. As soon as I was upright, he placed his hand in the small of my back and ushered me inside of the restaurant.

“Julius.” I stammered, having noticed the bouquet of roses sitting on the table beside a green gift bag.

“Have a seat.” He emitted after pulling my chair out.

Swiping my tongue across my lip I placed my bag down in the chair next to me and sat down.

Julius walked around the table and sat directly in front of me. “Ma Dukes told me not to show up empty handed so I hope you like what I picked up.”

“You didn’t have to get me anything but I’m appreciative. I’m more curious as to how you pulled this off in such little time?” Not only did Julius get us a reservation but we also had a private room. Not gone lie I was impressed.

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“My manager knows the owner.”

“Impressive.”

“Impressed enough to give me another date.”

“Boy please.” I tittered.

The server assigned to us came over to the table to take our drink orders and since I wasn't of legal drinking age I ordered water and my appetizer. Julius ordered a shot of Hennessy.

“So.” I brought my hands together and sat them on the table. “Why are you interested in me?”

“Keeping it a stack Nariah, I can't even tell you cause yo lil ass ain't did shit but give me yo ass to kiss since I first met you.”

I pointed at my chest. “I gave you my ass to kiss?”

“Hell yeah. Like you wasn't feeling a nigga.”

“I'm not. I think you're handsome, but Julius I am young.”

“How young? What you like twenty or something?”

“Uh try eighteen.”

“Got damn Nariah.” He howled. “Ain’t no way you eighteen, Nariah.”

“I am. I can show you my driver’s license.”

“How the fuck you get on at Stax? Yo ass not supposed to be handling liquor and shit.”

“Chucky breaks a lot of rules.” I shrugged. “That’s part of the reason I kind of don’t say shit to him ‘cause I’m really not supposed to be there.”

“That’s fucked up yo.”

“What is?”

“That nigga got you in there in grown niggas faces with ya body and shit on display.”

“Julius, I’m shapely. Niggas stare at my body even when I’m fully clothed.”

“That don’t mean a fucking thing. Yeah, you gone have to quit that shit when we get serious.”

Tossing my head back I laughed. Clearly, I was frustrating him cause his brows had pitched a tent in the middle of his forehead. “Fuck you laughing for?”

“We are not getting serious.”

“You thought we wasn’t.”

“Anyways, how old are you.”

“How old do I look?”

“To be honest we look around the same age”

“Cap! I’m twenty-two.”

“Too old for me.”

“Fuck out of here.” He waved me off. “What you do besides work at Stax?”

“I’m in college?”

“You go to school?” He asked perplexedly.

Our drinks and the appetizer being lowered to the table put a temporary halt in our conversation. Once the server walked away, I asked. “You thought I was a dummy? Or did you think I was like the rest of the hoes at the club?”

“What you mean by that?”

“You thought I was working there so I can get chose or something?”

“Nawl never that.” He refuted. “I ain’t know what to think to be honest.”

“So why me? Out of all the girls that stepped into your section that night why you seek me out?”

Julius leaned back in his chair and stared at me. At first, I was giving him direct eye contact but when he didn’t blink, I started feeling like this was too much. Shifting in my seat I cleared my throat. “Julius.”

“Honestly, it was your smile.”

“That’s corny as hell.” I joked. Really it was kind of cute, but I wouldn’t dare tell him that.

He held his hands up palm side out. “I’m being honest. When you smiled at me, I

swear that shit lit up the fucking room. It was something alluring about the way your eyes were damn near hidden behind your cheeks.”

I didn’t want to but I blushed, so hard to the point where I had no choice but to drop my head to keep him from noticing it.

“I know that shit may seem corny to you but wasn’t nothing corny ‘bout the way your smile made me feel.”

“Julius.” I breathed. “You just signed your first record deal. When your first album drops, hell the first song, you are going to blow up. Where you’re headed in life is not a place that I want to be in.

Me working at Stax is a means to an end for me. Once I finish school and get my degree, I plan on moving away. I don’t think I’m equipped to live the fast life.”

“How you know what you’re equipped to do until you give it a shot?” He probed. “People see the front side of this lifestyle not realizing the things it takes in the background to maintain it.”

“I hear you but still.”

“Ain’t no but still, Nariah.”

“I’m telling you what comes along with your job isn’t for me. The girls, the late nights, the partying, the flying here to there. I don’t want that for myself. Moreover, I don’t want to get myself tangled up in everything that you have going on and lose sight of who I am and what my purpose is.”

“Who says I’ll let you?”

“It’s not a matter of you letting me do anything. It’s inevitable. If I say okay to being with you, you mean to tell me you’ll be okay with me not being able to jump up and travel to where you are— or hell go with you?”

“If I know you got other obligations, Nariah then of course I’ll be okay.”

“You won’t.” I shook my head. Slamming my eyes shut I sucked in a deep breath and pushed it out. “You say that now until the time comes.”

“I ain’t talking just to hear myself talk though, Nariah.” He said, trying to convince me that I was wrong. I knew I wasn’t, that’s why I didn’t date anybody in the industry. Rappers, athletes, all of them were pretty much the same.

Julius wasn’t the first “celebrity” that had tried to holla at me. I’d been approached by a few of them. Atlanta was small so I ran into a famous person every single day. By saying that, I’m saying regardless of what type of celebrity he was the end results would be the same.

“And I’on like how you tryna make it seem like I’m equal to the rest of these niggas out here. I ain’t tryna deter you from your dreams Nariah. All a nigga tryna do is be in your mix and prove to you that I ain’t how you think I am.”

“I hear ya.” I would like to believe him when he said that shit, but I just didn’t see it the way he saw it.

“Hear me enough to wanna give me an honest shot.”

“I didn’t say all of that.” Looking down at the gifts I added. “You do know you can’t buy me don’t you?”

“Girl ain’t nobody tryna buy your ass. I told you Ma Dukes said not to show up

empty handed.”

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“I hear ya talking. Let’s just get through this first date and let that determine whether or not you get another one.”

“I can rock with that.”

Julius and I sat at the table and talked until the damn restaurant closed. He was easy to talk to and I really enjoyed getting to know more about him. Before we parted ways, he asked for permission to call me, and I gave in. I hated to admit it, but he was slowly bringing my guard down. Not enough for me to take him serious as far as a relationship goes but I didn’t have a problem with us being friends.

“We just got off the phone. Why are you calling me back?” I fussed, when I answered the call.

“Nigga.” He rasped. “I’m tryna make sure yo dark ass got through the gate.”

“Yesssss.” I snorted. “I’m pulling up now.”

“I’m on my way down.” He voiced before ending the call.

It had been two weeks since Julius and my first date. Outside of us texting here and there and one or two phone calls a day, both of us had been too busy to get together. At least we were but that changed today.

Class ended early for me, and I wanted to go to lunch and didn’t have anyone to go with, so I texted him to see if he was free. After confirming that he was, he wanted me to pull up at his condo so I could ride with him to the restaurant.

Whipping my car into the parking lot beside his Range Rover, I threw it in park and hopped out right as he was coming out of the building with his gym shorts hanging halfway down his ass. Julius was fine as hell, and I knew for a fact the girls was going to be all over him.

Hell, since he'd been signed to Majik Musik his lil name had picked up even more traction and was now in every girl's mouth, and within reason. Julius was a few shades darker than hot caramel and his body was littered with tats. He stood about six feet even and had a gorgeous brown pair of bedroom eyes that would have any girl dropping her thong for him on que. His low-cut Caesar added to his sex appeal.

"Why you ain't wait on me to get out here?" He fussed while walking over to my car.

"You said you was on the way."

"Don't do that again." Wrapping his tatted arm around my back he pulled me into his chest. "What's up beautiful? How was class?"

God, he smells amazing. "It was cool."

"That's what's up. I still need to hop in the shower."

"Julius." I whined and stomped my feet. "You said you would have that done before I got here."

"I know I know—in my defense though, I would've if my producer hadn't hit me up."

"You only get a pass 'cause it's work."

Holding the door open for me he deduced. "I was gone get a pass even if it wasn't my

producer.”

“Whatever.”

When we made it back to his unit I sat down on the sofa while he went to go wash his ass. By the time he was done I was starving and had an attitude out of this world.

“I’m ‘bout to feed yo ass, Nariah.” Julius laughed as he whipped his truck in the parking lot of La Parilla. Grabbing my arms he untucked them and kissed my cheek. “That was my bad for real.”

“I hope you know I’m never going out on another date with you.”

“Yes, you are.”

“No, I’m not.”

“I bet you will.” Getting out of the truck he came around to my side. Instead of letting me get out he stood in between the door. “I heard everything you said Nariah and I’m trying to respect it. But I’m feeling you more than I want to and right now I should be focused on my music, but I can’t cause I’m trying my hardest to change your perception of shit.

All I’m asking is just one shot, Nariah. And if shit start going left, I’ll let you walk away with no issues. But you gotta be willing to give it an honest chance. That’s really all I’m looking for.”

Against my better judgement I relented. “One shot Julius and if you fuck up I’m done with you. You want a chance so I’mma give you that. I beg of you please, pretty please don’t prove me right.”

“I’m not.” He swore.

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And while a part of me wanted to believe he wouldn't, I knew Julius was promising me some shit that he couldn't guarantee. The question was. How long was I willing to stay down for the ride?

nariah

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A Few Years Later

Grabbing Lox by the hand I hopped up on the couch and peered out into the crowd. Stax was packed wall to wall thanks to me. Chucky fat ass had booked me for a hosting, and I wanted to say no but the money he was putting down made me change my mind.

"It's a whole lot of niggas in here." My lil sister Lariah sang from beside me.

"Too fucking many." I frowned. "I plan on dipping out after I get my bread."

"We know." Her and her best friend Kiara heckled.

It had been a minute since I had blessed Stax with my presence. Shit to be honest I was banned from this piece of shit for like two years after Julius ran down on Chucky for disrespecting me.

I remember that day like it was yesterday. Julius and I had been together for over a year and with the way his rap career had taken off, he felt like it was no longer safe

for me to continue working here. I lightweight didn't disagree with him because with him being who he was naturally I became popular. Julius was real big on showing off his "wifey" which caused people to be intrigued with our relationship. When my name started to buzz and folks started paying me to come to their club, Chucky decided to I guess you can say, make me the face of Stax.

Julius had mentioned me quitting a few times, because he couldn't always be here to make sure nothing happened to me, and I wasn't trying to walk around with security. Chucky promised him he would make sure nobody bothered me while I was at the club and the nigga did everything but that. Things were cool for a lil minute until niggas started to get handsy. Julius pressed Chucky 'bout it and he said something along the lines of me being half naked on my social media pages so I should've known it would happen. Julius beat his ass in the middle of his club which led to Chucky trespassing both of us. I didn't give a fuck 'cause I no longer felt safe after that incident so me quitting was inevitable.

"Y'all act like I'm not graduating in a few hours."

"Girl, everybody know you 'bout to graduate." Lariah retorted. "We tryna party before you fly out with Juice. Ain't no telling the next time I'mma get the chance to come home."

When Lariah graduated high school, she ended up moving out of state so she could attend Howard University. She had her own shit going on and didn't get the chance to come home often. So since they had come down for my graduation I was trying to show them a good time, but my ass didn't plan on being here long.

Julius kept his word and didn't let what he had going on interfere with me finishing school. Anytime he was booked for a show out of town, and I couldn't come because of school shit he never got mad about it because anytime I was on break, I traveled with him.

Both of us had demanding schedules so we made sure to prioritize each other any chance we got. Two years into our relationship I found out Julius had stepped out on me which resulted in me leaving. No lie three months after I left his ass, I found out I was pregnant. He apologized and promised not to do it again and to prove how serious he was, he bought me a house.

Did I think that was the only time he'd been unfaithful? Nawl, I didn't but without solid proof what could I do. Either the nigga was good at hiding the shit or he really was being faithful. I wanted to believe the latter, but niggas lied a lot and Julius was no exception. In the event that he was fucking off, the nigga was better off hiding it. If I found out he was out here dogging me out I was packing up my shit and leaving him.

Leaning over Lariah pointed. "Here come ya boy."

Rolling my eyes over to where she was pointing, I frowned my face up. It had been a minute since I'd seen Chucky but clearly nothing had changed. He was still fat as fuck and the way he was casually running his hands over his head, the nigga still thought he was God's gift.

Trailing behind him was a few bottle girls carrying a sign that said Congratulations Nariah. The nigga was looking up at me smiling but I didn't see nothing in his hands. Propping my hands on my hip I waited for him to step into the section.

The bottle girls did their lil routine and when they were done, they sat the bottles on the table and dipped. Chucky fat funky ass was still standing there like this was a reunion or something.

Before he could even open his mouth, I was asking. "Where the fuck the rest of my money at?" Normally when anyone booked me for a hosting, they had to give me twenty percent up front and I got the rest after I fulfilled my contractual obligations.

Chucky ass ain't get the same privileges, I made him give me half of my money before I even posted the club flyer on my page.

"Calm down I got your bread." He smiled, making my skin crawl. Holding his hand out he cheesed. "It's been a minute."

"Not enough." Holding my hand out I flexed my fingers. "Ain't no talking until I get the rest of my money."

"I got you. I was coming to chop it up with you 'bout hosting my sons twenty-first birthday party."

"I guess you not hearing what I'm saying. Ain't no business without my money. Bring me that and I'll have my agency reach out to you."

"Aight Nariah." He huffed before turning to walk off.

"I can't stand that creep."

"Me either." Grabbing the bottle of 1942 out of the bucket, I popped it open and took a shot. I planned on turning up with my sister for a few hours before sliding out. I didn't want to be too fucked up in the morning 'cause I didn't want to hear Julius's mouth. My family as well as his were staying at the house tonight because he was throwing me a party tomorrow after graduation.

I was standing in the middle of my section twerking when the DJ started playing Julius's newest single. It seemed like everybody in the club was rapping that shit to the top of their lungs. Seeing them turning up to my man's music just felt different. I knew Julius was destined for greatness but the way his fans sold out his shows date after date made me proud. My man was living his dream, and I was happy that he'd gotten everything he wanted.

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The spotlights in the club started to flash sparking the crowd to start cheering. I was peering around trying to see what all the commotion was until I spotted Julius trekking through the club with roses in his hands and his crew following closely behind him.

My coochie did that lil thing she did anytime my man was near. Julius looked damn good in the blue and white One Million Clothing short set he had on.

“He play so much.” I beamed. One of the contingencies in my contract with Chucky was he had to let Julius come to my hosting, his ass was so eager to book me that he was willing to do whatever I asked. Julius claimed he couldn’t come tonight because he had a session at the studio, which is why he sent Lox with me as security.

It took a few minutes for them to make it through the club but when they did the gang of niggas he brought with him filled my empty section up.

“Congratulations baby.” He smirked as he neared me. Holding the flowers out he tucked his bottom lip between his teeth. “You out here looking good as fuck.” He flirted.

Glancing down at the white Diesel jersey top and cut up denim shorts I whined. “Stop Julius.” My outfit of choice for the night was basic compared to the stuff I usually wore when I had a booking. Taking the flowers out of his hand, I sat them on the couch and threw myself into his arms.

“Having fun?”

“Fuck no.” I laughed.

Leaning back, he stared into my eyes. “Why not?”

“Chucky fat ass ain’t brought me my money yet.”

“Bet.” He nodded before calling for Tito.

“Please don’t get started Julius. We don’t need the negative press right now.”

“Ain’t shit. Say Tito go get that bag from Chucky and make sure you tell that nigga next time we gone need it up front.”

“Say less.” Tito chuckled before ambling out of the section.

Burying my head in his chest I shook it. “That man gone trespass our ass again.”

“I’on give a fuck. I ain’t want you back in this bitch to begin with. You the one tryna let bygones be bygones. Fuck his big ass. And you talking ‘bout don’t get started like you wasn’t gone call me anyway.”

“I’m glad you know.” I laughed and glanced up at him. “I’m happy you came.”

“You know I wasn’t ‘bout to let you come here by yourself.”

“But you sent Lox.”

“Yeah, just until I was able to get out of the studio.”

Standing on my tippy toes I pecked his lips. “Thank you for showing up.”

“T’mma always push up on you. Believe that.” Grabbing a handful of my ass he shook it. “You niggas order a bottle or something. My girl ‘bout to graduate in a few hours. It’s time to party.”

My initial plan was to leave after a few hours but after Tito came back with the rest of my money, Julius hopped on the mic and blessed the crowd with a little performance. His presence was exactly what I needed to let my hair down and have fun.

Sitting on the floor waiting for my row to be called up had me damn near in tears. I wanted to say it had been easy going to school full time while juggling being a mom, the girlfriend to a successful rapper, and an influencer but there was nothing easy about it.

There had been plenty of times where I would have to leave class and hop on a flight so that I could go to a hosting. Wake up hungover and have to fly back home so that I could jump into mommy mode.

Honestly if it wasn’t for my mama as well as Julius’s mom keeping our four-year-old son Jude while we were away on business, I probably would’ve dropped out. Anytime Julius would be booked close to home he would let Jude travel with him. Everybody pitched in because they knew how important it was for me to finish my degree. Hell, anytime I mentioned taking a semester off Julius was on my ass.

In the beginning me finishing was for myself but after having Jude I was doing it for him. Yes, his father was a successful rapper, but I wanted my son to know how important it was to have an education. I didn’t want to be one of those parents who preached about stuff without having done it myself. I refused to be a hypocrite.

When one of the people directing the graduates motioned for us to stand, I glanced around the auditorium trying to see if I could spot my family. Lariah must’ve known I was looking for them because she stood up and waved. Stepping out of line I rushed

over to the stands and held my arms out. “Pass me my baby.” I said to no one in particular.

Julius swooped him up from the bleacher and held him over the railing. Once I had him in my arms I kissed his cheek. “Hey baby.”

“Hey mommy.” He smiled. Letting him down to the ground I grabbed his hand and took my place back in line.

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When it was my turn to walk across Jude and I stepped up the stairs and made our way to the front where the deans were standing. Once my degree books were placed in my hand a wide smile broke out across my face. After taking a quick picture the two of us left the podium.

Instead of going back to my seat I meandered back over to the stands and walked Jude up to where my family was.

“We sliding?” Julius asked as he picked Jude up and sat him on the side of him.

“Nawl, I’mma wait until they dismiss us.”

“Bet.”

Leaning down I pecked him on the lips before turning and going back to my place. At this point graduation was over with for me but I wanted to stick around so that I could get some pictures with my classmates. We’d been through some tryingtimes during this program and life was getting ready to separate us.

Unlike myself, the majority of them had already landed their full-time jobs in our field. My last hospital rotation was at the children’s hospital so as soon as I got cleared for graduation I applied for a PRN position there.

I had secured the degree but let’s keep it real, there wasn’t a job out there that was going to pay me what I made hosting. So, while I had no plans on using my degree full-time, I still planned to work here and there.

On top of that I had a swimwear line that was dropping in a few weeks that would keep me busy. Since being with Julius my plans of moving out of the state had changed for sure. With me being attached to him I'd been able to make enough money to take care of my whole family.

As soon as the ceremony commenced, I took pictures with my school friends and said my goodbyes. Before we parted, we made plans to link one last time before everyone left the city.

Julius had gotten a sprinter for everyone to ride in so once I was done, we left the auditorium and went back to the house for the party.

As soon as we made it home, I changed clothes, put Jude on his swim trunks, and started celebrating. Julius had invited a shit load of people so there were folks running in and out of the house. I'd been in and out of the pool playing with Jude for a minute and I was getting tired. I decided to leave him out there with Julius while I took a break.

Locating my mama and my granny in the living room I ambled their way and plopped down on the couch.

"Congratulations, Riah." My granny, Mariah beamed.

Leaning down I wrapped my arms around her and kissed her on the cheek. "Thank you, granny."

"Now what kind of doctor are you? Cause you ain't been in school that long and this the only graduation of yours I done been too."

"Mama, Nariah got her bachelor's and her PharmD at the same time." My mama spoke up.

“Umph. How she do that?”

“It’s the program I went through granny.” I laughed.

“Oh, that must be nice.” She shrugged.

“Granny confused as hell.” My sister whispered.

“She is.” Sliding down I rested my legs on the coffee table. “Mama y’all taking Jude back home with y’all?”

“If I can pull his ass out of that pool I will. When y’all leaving again?”

“I think we fly out at like six. I gotta ask Julius to be sure.”

“How long you gon’ be gone sister?”

“Just the weekend. Hopefully you’re still here when I make it back.”

“I don’t know.” Lariah pouted.

Julius had gotten booked to perform in Miami, so we were flying down to spend the weekend there. Initially I wasn’t going to go but the event he was performing at was huge and I wanted to wear my swimsuit so the buzz about it could start.

What started out as a simple idea had morphed into a whole line. I remember asking Julius if he thought I should take it serious, and he said he did. There had been plenty of times where people would inbox me inquiring about what I had on. So when I saw how much of an impact I had, I decided I might as well put that money in my own pocket.

My lineJurniwas very precious to me. Julius and I had flown to Korea a few times so that I could meet with the designer. I had a feeling the first drop was going to go crazy, and I couldn't wait.

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“Nariah, where you at?” Julius asked.

“We’re in the living room.”

“Come out here real quick. I wanna show you something.”

Hopping off the couch I strolled to the front door. “What?” I queried as I neared him.

Julius wrapped his tatted arm around my waist and pulled me into him. “Congratulations baby. I’m so proud of you.” He smirked before kissing me on the lips.

I eyed him suspiciously. “Thank you.”

Grabbing a set of keys out of his pocket he held them up. “Here.”

“Julius.” I gasped. “You bought me a car?”

“Go check it out.” He tilted his head toward the door.

Stepping past him I walked out of the house and sure enough parked in the front was a white Lamborghini Urus with a pink bow sitting on the hood. I could hear clapping behind me, but I was laser focused on my new truck. Hitting the locks I opened the door and hopped in. The interior had been custom done up in pink and black.

When it came to gifts Julius didn’t half ass shit, so I wasn’t surprised in the least. He’d already gifted me two Van Cleef bracelets when we first got here so I thought

that was it. I already had three cars all purchased by him, so I definitely wasn't expecting a fourth.

Standing in between the door he asked. "You like it?"

Propping my foot up on the door I adjusted my body and leaned against the middle console. "I do. I wasn't expecting this at all."

"Tell yo nigga he did good." He smirked and bit down on his bottom lip.

Tucking my finger in the waistband of his Fendi swim trunks I pulled him closer. "You did good. Thank you, Julius."

"Ain't shit." He waved me off. "On the real I'm very proud of you Nariah. For somebody that don't slow down you really did that shit."

"Thanks to you."

"Nawl all I did was stay on yo ass. You did all of the hard work even on the days where yo ass was dog tired and begging me to let you skip. You still got up and did yo shit. I'm proud of you and I know Jude is too."

Him saying that made me drop my chin and blush. Like I said the shit was hard as hell, but he was right, I'd done it. "Thank you."

"We gone go up in Miami this weekend."

"Hell yeah." I sang. "Speaking of." I sat up. "I need to go pack Jude's bag so he can go to my mama house."

"You do that while I go get his lil ass out the pool."

“Who got him?” I asked and looked around.

“Tito.” He chuckled. “I promise he good.”

“He better be.” Julius’s friends played too rough with Jude, and I didn’t like that. He knew I would’ve lost my shit had he said he left him with Lucas or somebody.

Julius pecked me on the lips one final time before going to the back yard. After shutting the door and locking my truck up I linked arms with my sister and strolled back inside. The quicker I could get Jude packed and everybody out of the house—the quicker I could give my man a proper thank you for my new baby.

juice

. . .

“Nari like her truck?” Tito quizzed when I stepped into the back yard.

“You know she did.” Sitting down on the side of the pool I pulled my phone out and checked my text messages. “Everything good for tomorrow?” I asked.

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“Yeah. Byron got everything finalized before we left for the graduation.”

“Bet. Let’s hope everybody keep it playa.”

“You mean you hope Tamia keep it P.” Tito whispered.

“Man fuck yeah.” I groaned.

Some oil tycoon had booked me for his birthday party. At first, I was skeptical with it being the weekend of Nari graduation, but the nigga was willing to pay two million for my inconvenience. Before I knew the details of the party, I had invited my girl to travel down with me. After getting the full run down I ain’t have heart to tell her I ain’t want her to come.

The party was on this massive ass yacht and from what I’d learned everybody in the industry was going to be there. Everybody including this lil junt that I casually fucked off on Nari with.

Tamia was an industry chick who had caught me at a vulnerable time. I only planned to hit her once, but her ass stayed in my inbox. One thing led to another and the two of us had been fucking on the low for like two years. The crew she ran with had a reputation of being on that bullshit, so I wasn’t trying to subject my girl to no shit like that. More importantly my ass wasn’t trying to get left. Cause that’s exactly what the fuck Nari was gone do when she found out.

“Watch me daddy.” Jude yelled as Lucas picked him up and threw him in the water.

“That’s why Nari be chomping yo ass off right there.” I joked. Everybody but Tito had a habit of rough housing with Jude and my girl ain’t like that shit not one bit. I kept trying to tell her Jude was a boy and a lil rough play wouldn’t hurt him, but Nari thought differently.

“You did good buddy.” I said once he came out of the water.

“She act like it be us. That lil nigga the one who be wanting to play.” Byron said, telling me some shit I already knew.

“Just don’t let her ass see it.”

The day my girl pushed his lil ass out I knew he was gone be fucking trouble. Lil nigga acted like a saint around his mama and grandmas but was a whole ass thug when he was around me and my niggas.

Jude ass stayed trying to be like me so any time I copped me something nice I made sure to get him something as well. Lil nigga was walking around here with an iced-out Rolex. Nari cursed my ass out when I brought it home. We both agreed that he could only wear it when he was with one of us.

Taking a quick glance around my back yard, I couldn’t do nothing but thank God for everything that he’d done for me and my family. Me and Nari were extremely blessed. I was on top with my music and Nari had just graduated college.

That night when I finally talked her into giving me a chance, I had no clue this was where we’d end up. But we did and I made sure to thank the big guy for her every single day. Nari had a lot going on but that never deterred her from school, nor did it stop her from being a damn good mother to my jit.

When I say she could get anything she wanted out of me, my girl could have it all. To

put up with me and my shit day in and day out and still keep a smile on her face. Yeah...Nari deserved the muthafucking world and I was gone make sure she got it.

Glancing down at my watch I stood and grabbed a towel from the chair. "Let me get him squared away so Nari folks can dip. Jude, come on we gotta get out so you can take a shower."

"But daddy." He whined.

"Ain't no butts. You been in the pool since we got home. You staying with granny and auntie Lariah tonight."

"Okay." He pouted.

"How long we supposed to be on the boat tomorrow?" Byron asked.

"Shit from what I was told it leaves around four and not supposed to dock until midnight. Juice only performing for like twenty minutes."

Turning to me Byron probed. "You aight with that?"

"Shit. For two mill I would've performed the whole night." I jested. "Nawl, but yeah, I'm good. As long as Nari enjoys her time, I'm cool."

"Aight bet. They gone set us up in a room so you can get your alone time."

"Like I said I'm with whatever my girl with."

"I hear ya." Tito patted me on the shoulder.

I had gotten wrapped up in a conversation with Byron and Tito 'bout this upcoming

performance that I had completely forgot that I was supposed to be getting Jude bad ass out of the pool. When his mama started yelling at both of us, I scooped his lil ass up and ran inside with him. Ambling into his room I noticed Nari had placed Jude's night clothes in the bathroom so all I had to do was make sure his lil ass took a bath.

Sitting on the closed toilet seat I handed him his bath towel. "You gotta wash up Juju or yo mama gone come in here fussing."

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“Why I gotta go with granny Riah?” He asked and folded his arms across his chest.

“Cause daddy gotta show.”

“My mommy going. Why can’t I?”

“It’s adults only big man.” Rubbing my hand over his now frazzled braids I smiled at my jit. “But if you’re good for your granny I’ll take you to the zoo when we get back.”

“I don’t wanna go to the zoo.” He mumbled.

“What you wanna do then?”

Down casting his eyes, he frowned. “I wanna go with you and mommy.”

“You can’t go with us Jude.” Nari’s voice sounded around the bathroom. Removing my eyes from Jude temporarily I tossed my head back and stared at my girl.

“He good. He just in his feelings.” Turning back to Jude I asked. “Ain’t that right Juju.”

His lil ass ain’t say shit he just sat there pouting. Nari ended up coming over to the tub and sitting down on the floor beside me. “How about we go to that indoor water park you like?”

“When?” He perked up.

“When we get back.”

“Can Mason come to?”

Nari looked up at me and rolled her eyes. Mason was the lil white boy that lived next door. Nari hated his mama ‘cause she swore that lady thought she was better than everybody. His pops was cool so I ain’t have a problem with Juju inviting him. My girl wanted to tell Juju no but that look on his face had her agreeing.

To help her out I offered. “How ‘bout I take you and Mason while ya mama stay here.”

“You promise?”

“I do.” I held my fist out to him.

Jude placed his against mine and beamed. “I’mma call Mason when I get out the bathtub.”

“Nawl, you can call him tomorrow. Ya granny downstairs waiting on you.” Getting up Nari pecked his forehead. “Let me know when y’all are finished. I’m about to go clean my kitchen back up.”

Before she could walk away, I grabbed her hand. “Nawl, the cleaning crew coming in the morning.” Looking her up and down I stroked my tongue across my bottom lip. “You go wait for me in the bed.”

“Yes sir.” She saluted, making me laugh.

When she left the bathroom, I sat there and talked to Juju about a bunch of nothing while he bathed. I didn’t mind it not one bit. I lived for moments like this with my jit.

Being on the road away from my kid got hard at times.

Nari and I wanted Juju to live just like any normal kid, so we tried to keep him on a routine. We signed up for this shit, but he didn't. We tried to preserve as much of his innocence as we could. After being away for weeks at a time my favorite thing to do was come home and spend my nights laid up with my jit. Wasn't shit better than that.

Once we'd gotten Juju together and saw everybody off, I double checked the bag that Nari had packed for me before hopping in the shower. We were leaving out early as hell 'cause I planned on taking my girl to the mall to shop before we boarded the yacht.

Picking Nari up from the bed, I carried her to the wall and placed her back against it while sliding her down onto me.

"Mmmmm." She moaned out when she hit the base of my dick. Her hips rolled over me every time I pushed into her.

"Damn Nari, you feel so fucking good." I groaned against her chest while stroking her slowly.

Bringing her back off the wall, Nari's hands gripped my arms as she held onto me. When I latched onto her nipple and started to suck, she let out a loud moan, causing heat to course through my body. Nari's pussy was so fucking wet, I could feel that shit lathering my thighs every time I hit her with a deep stroke.

Slamming her eyes shut, she circled her hips, giving into the pressure. Sinking my fingers into her ass, I started impaling her up and down on my dick, causing her titties to bounce wildly in the air.

Dropping my head down, I sucked my bottom lip into my mouth. "Look down Nari.

Look at how wet yo shit is. Soaking the fuck out of my legs.” I groaned.

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“I can’t.” She panted. “Ssssss. I’m about to cum.” She whined.

Clutching her ass in my hand I fucked her faster. Trying my hardest to hit the bottom of her pussy with every pump. “Gon’ cum for me Nari. You right there. I can feel it.”

“Julius!” She yelled.

I felt her pussy pulsating around my dick. The way she was feeling had my ass on the verge of nutting. Instead, I bit down on my bottom lip to keep from moaning. I was fucking the shit out of Nari against the wall and with the way her ass was hollering and shit I knew I wasn’t gone be able to hold out much longer.

“Ju... Julius!” She shrieked. “I’m about too...”

“Cum baby.” I ordered before sucking her bottom lip into my mouth. Stroking my tongue against hers I pumped in and out of her feverishly. Nariah sank her nails deep into my skin as her body shuddered against mine.

“Oh, fuck.” I groaned when my balls started tingling. Jutting my hips forward I thrashed in and out of her until I was spraying my nut all up in her shit. Once we’d calmed down, we hopped up for a quick shower before getting back into bed. We only had a few hours to sleep before we had to be up.

Stepping onto the private jet Nariah pointed her finger at my niggas and ordered. “Don’t say shit to me.”

“We ain’t even did shit.” Lucas laughed.

Nariah was grouchy as fuck and within reason. We were equally running off a few hours of sleep. I swear neither one of us wanted to get out of bed when the alarm went off.

“Y’all know how she is.” I chuckled and plopped down beside her. “You good?”

Rolling her eyes she shook her head. “No, Julius I’m not.” I watched in silence while she went into her makeup bag and pulled out her eye patches. After placing them under her eyes she slid her shades down over her eyes. “Don’t wake me up until we’re landing in Miami.”

“Yes ma’am.” The flight attendant let everybody know that we had been cleared for take-off and would be pushing back in a few minutes.

While Nari got herself situated, I went and sat by Tito. Ain’t gone hold you, but my ass was nervous as fuck ‘bout tonight. Too many industry people in the same vicinity had my ass on edge. “I hope don’t shit pop off.” When I woke up this morning, I had a message from Tamia telling me how she was excited to see me. That shit had the pit of my stomach in knots.

Looking down the aisle where Nari was reclined, he whispered. “If it does I’on even wanna hear it. Cause I told yo ass.”

“I know.” Rubbing my hands down my face I sighed. “I’mma get it together.”

“You ain’t. At least not until Nariah dip out on your ass.”

“Tuh.” I huffed. “That shit will never fucking happen.”

“You think it won’t. That’s why yo ass be running around here on that bullshit. You don’t think she gone leave. Nariah a good ass woman Juice. You be playing too many

games out here.”

“You ain’t gotta tell me. I’m already knowing.” Tito stayed preaching to me ‘bout the shit I did when I was away from my girl. I listened majority of the time but there were a few times that I slipped up.

The last time Nari had caught me fucking off was before Jude. And for a minute there I hadn’t fucked a bitch since. Tamia ass really did slip through the fucking cracks. Majority of the time when I was out on the road, I stayed to myself, there had been a few instances where I’d gotten my dick sucked but I ain’t stuck dick in nobody but Tamia.

The only reason her ass got blessed with it was ‘cause I had been wanting to hit her for a minute. I met her one night at a party my label was throwing for another artist. She pushed up on me and I shot her down. Don’t mean I ain’t look. Tamia had a manufactured body, but she stayed in the gym so the shit ain’t look sloppy.

I had a thing for me a chocolate girl and baby girl fit the bill. Any time we saw each other out we kept it cordial for the most part. One night my ass had hit the club after a show and got drunk as fuck. Tamia just so happen to be in town. One thing led to another and the next thing I know I had her ankles up by her ears, fucking the dog shit out of her.

Now, the bitch was certified and thought she meant more to me than what she really was. Tamia knew I had a girl back at the crib and didn’t give a fuck. As long as I tossed her a few stacks here and there she kept her mouth closed.

I had caught her a few times throwing shade on social media, but she never put a name on it. I told her to keep that shit cute cause if word got back to my girl, it was over for her ass, and I meant that. I knew I was wrong for fucking around with her, but my ass was in too deep and couldn’t stop. I’d done a good job keeping the two of

them separate, but this weekend wasn't avoidable.

"Yo ass better hope Nariah don't sense anything."

"She gone beat my ass, Tito." I chuckled. I was laughing but Nari had them hands. I done felt em a few times. My girl ain't play no fucking games. Ain't no telling what she was gone do if she found out.

"I'm glad you know it."

Leaning back in my seat I propped my hands up behind my head and closed my eyes. The flight to Miami wouldn't take long so I decided to catch a lil quick nap. I knew we would be on the go as soon as we touched down.

As soon as the jet landed me, Nari, Byron, and Lucas hopped into a black truck and headed to the mall. Tito went in a separate truck since he had to go meet up with my DJ.

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Brickell was packed as usual and normally my ass wouldn't be caught out here without security, but I had my niggas with me and more importantly this wasn't 'bout me. I was trying to show Nari a good time.

"How much longer we gotta be here?" Lucas's ass asked. Nigga was acting like we had been here all day.

Looking over at the nigga I cocked my head to the side. "Why? You got something else you tryna do?"

"Nawl but if yo girl ask me one more time how something look I'mma body slam her ass." He joked.

"Nari got them guns. I'on think you wanna fuck with her." Byron retorted.

"Yeah, cause of his strong ass." Lucas pointed at me. "Nari ass 'bout bench press five hundred pounds." He heckled, making me and Byron laugh.

"Yo ass capping but she really be hitting that shit." Nari ass be in the gym going harder than my ass. My niggas stayed fucking with her calling her strong and shit. She had them gains but everything else 'bout her was soft as cotton. "Nigga just nod and say yeah. Eventually she will stop fucking with you. Why you think I'm all the way over on this side." I chuckled.

I knew how my girl got anytime we hit the mall which is why I stayed in the cut and out of her way. I let the sales associate deal with her indecisive ass and just handed her the bread for whatever she bought.

“She don’t fuck with you but she be having our ass trying on shades and scarfs and shit.” Byron fussed. “Nari be hoeing our ass while you sitting here unbothered.”

I shrugged my shoulders. “Perks of being her nigga.”

“Yeah aight.” He huffed. “You ‘bout to be mad ‘cause her ass ain’t found shit in here she want.” He rasped before sliding out of his seat.

Nari wanted to hit Chanel before we went anywhere else. I was hoping she found everything she was looking for ‘cause I was trying to grab something to eat before we went anywhere else.

Nari must’ve read my mind ‘cause minutes later I heard her calling my name. “Julius.”

“Man got damn.” I groaned. “What’s up baby?”

“I’m ready.”

“Thank God.” I hopped up so fast so I could pay for her shit. Walking up behind her at the register I peeped the total on the screen. “You must really ain’t find shit.” I grabbed my card out of my pocket and handed it to her.

“Just a swimsuit and a scarf. I want to go to Louis Vuitton.”

“Come on Nariah.” I groaned.

“Don’t be groaning like I’m inconveniencing you. If memory serves me correctly said we could go anywhere I wanted to go.”

“That was before.” I started but stopped when she turned around with her eyes

narrowed into slits. “You got it Nari.” I held my hands up and took a step back. “Byron, let the driver know he can pull around. Nari wanna head to Louis.”

“Weak ass.” He mumbled before shaking his head and walking off.

When Nari cashed out, she tried to hand me back my card, but I told her to keep it. Shit she was gone need that muthafucka in a few minutes so she might as well keep it. After grabbing her bags from the cashier, we left the mall.

Nari just ain’t know I was gone let her run wild in Louis Vuitton while I found something to eat. I wasn’t ‘bout to deal with her ass and them shitty ass mood swings. I had to perform tonight and needed to have a clear mind in order to do so.

nariah

...

“How much timewe got before we need to leave?” I asked Julius.

“You got like three hours. Do yo shit twin.” He retorted without pulling his eyes away from his phone.

Grabbing my make-up and toiletry bag up from the bed I strolled into the bathroom. Before getting started I plugged my phone up and turned on Pandora. When we landed in Miami Julius took me shopping and out to lunch. After we finished, we met Tito back at the hotel where I was able to take a quick nap. I barely got any sleep last night and that lil hour cat nap on the jet didn’t do shit for me.

Shedding the tights and t-shirt I had on I turned the shower water on and waited for it to get hot. As soon as I put my shower cap on, I got in and let the water pelt down onto my body. Between my hosting, graduation, the party, and now traveling I was

tired as hell. Julius told me we wouldn't make it back to the hotel until after midnight, so I knew my chances of getting any rest was null and void.

Tomorrow we would be spending the day at the hotel pool, so I had Tito book me at the spa downstairs first thing in the morning. Grabbing up my exfoliating glove I squirted some shower gel on it and started washing up. I had to do my hair and makeup so I couldn't spend too much time in here. After my shower I stood at the sink and brushed my teeth before doing my skin care routine.

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“Julius, you can come on.” I announced as I stepped back into the room.

He got up from the bed and ambled in my direction with his phone held out. “Here.”

“Hey baby.” I sang when I noticed Jude’s little handsome face on the screen.

“Hey mommy.”

“Hey my baby. You being good for granny?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Good. What you do today?”

“We went to granny Mariah house. I got to play with Tuna.”

“Oh Lord.” I snorted.

“His ass prolly beat the shit out of Tuna.” Julius muttered, making me nod my head in agreeance. Tuna was my granny’s fat ass senior cat. Jude terrorized his ass so much to the point where he tried to hide anytime he was over.

“I love you, Jude. Mommy gotta finish getting ready.”

“Love you too.”

Passing Julius back the phone I tightened the belt on my robe. “Tell my mama to

make sure she gives him his medicine before bed.”

“Aight.”

Sitting on the bed I scooted until my back was against the headboard. Had I thought about it I would’ve scheduled to have somebody come over to do my makeup, but I hated trying to book a service in a different city. I had gotten a sew in for graduation so all I planned on doing was wrapping the Chanelscarf around it. Once I finished my face, I shed the robe so I could get dressed.

Leaning against the door frame Julius crossed his arms. “That’s what you’re wearing?”

“Ummhmm.” I hummed while adjusting the top over my breast.

“That shit don’t look like a bathing suit to me.” Julius fussed.

“That’s because it’s not.” I giggled. The silver interlocking G crystal top was actually a bra. We were going to be in the middle of the ocean, I wasn’t getting wet, so I saw no need to wear a swimsuit. Instead, I paired it with a black thong, a pair of black mesh crystal Gucci tights, and my silver Tom Ford pad lock heels.

The way Julius was standing there eyeing me I knew I looked good. I held the black and white scarf out to him. “With or without the scarf?”

“I say without but bring it with you just in case.”

“Cool.” Folding it up I tucked it into my bag.

“You looking good Nari. I’m ‘bout to say fuck this party and lay up with yo fine ass.”

“Julius please.” I waved him off.

“Dead ass.” Pushing away from the door Julius swaggered in my direction. “You smell good too.”

“I know. You look good too.” I complimented. Julius had on a white button up that he’d purposely left undone and a pair of white skinny jeans that were ripped at the thigh. On his feet were a solid white pair of Alexander McQueen sneakers. His neck, ears, and wrist were shining due to all of the jewelry he had on.

Wrapping his hand around my waist he pulled me into his chest. “We ain’t gotta go. I can tell them fuck that money and lay up.”

“Boy stop.” I giggled. I loved when Julius flirted with me. It made me feel all sexy and what not. Leaning to the side I grabbed my tennis bracelet and necklace. “Can you put these on for me?”

Taking them out of my hand he instructed me to turn around. I grabbed my hair up and held it out of the way. When my necklace was secured on my neck Julius ran his hand down my chest. “Fine shit.” He moaned against my neck, causing chills to spread across my body. Cupping my titty in his hand he traced the side of my neck with his tongue.

“Julius.” I breathed and stepped to the side. I had to move away before I got horny, and we really ended up cancelling his show.

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“My bad.” He lied. “Almost got carried away.”

“Ummhmm. You did.” I held my arm out so he could put my bracelet on.

“You ready?” He probed once he was done.

“Yep.” Giving myself a once over in the mirror I sprayed some Creed Wind Flowers perfume all over my body and tossed my phone in my bag.

Hand in hand Julius and I walked out of our suite and met up with everyone else downstairs in the lobby. Once we hopped in the black truck it took no time for us to make it to the harbor where the boat was docked.

“This it?” I asked while peering out of the window at the large yacht. Julius and I had been on plenty of luxury boats but never nothing this large. I knew whoever owned this had dropped some serious ass money for it.

“Yep.” Tito confirmed. “Muthafucka is nice as hell on the inside.”

“I bet it is. This is nice.”

“This the type of money I’m tryna have before I stop rapping.” Julius shared.

Turning around to face him I chided. “Julius please. You got money.”

“I do, but nothing like this.” He tilted his head toward the boat.

When the truck rolled to a stop the driver got out and opened the back door. Julius slid out first and held his hand out for me to grab. I got out and adjusted my top before linking my fingers through his. Tito led the way to the boat with the rest of us trailing behind him.

The vibes were there for sure. Tito ushered us to the red carpet that led straight to the boat. There was a photographer standing near the entrance taking pictures of the party goers. Julius and I posed for a few shots before being rushed onto the boat.

Instead of going on the deck where the party was going on at, a worker walked us inside to the main level of the yacht. Where we were then introduced to the owner, the guy who had booked Julius to perform.

While the men talked, I excused myself and sat down at the table. Plucking a grape off the vine I popped it into my mouth and bobbed my head to the music playing on the outside. A server walked by carrying of tray of champagne and offered one to me. I needed something stronger, so I declined it and sauntered over to the bar.

“Can I get a shot of Don Julio please?”

“Sure thing.” The bartender smiled.

With my glass in my hand, I resumed my spot at the table and tucked my leg under my butt. Pulling my phone out of my purse I shot a text off to my sister.

Me: I wished yo ass would’ve come with me

Lariah: Bored already

Lariah:??

Me: I'm just sitting here while they talk business

Lariah: I'm sure somebody you know will be there

Me: You know I'on fuck with these folks like this

And that was the truth. I learned early on that these industry folks were full of shit. I was a solid ass bitch and didn't play around. I had seen too much to even deal with these folks outside of business. In the beginning I used to link with other rapper girlfriends, but I quickly deduced they wasn't my crowd.

Lariah: Lame ass... Get off the phone and enjoy yourself

Them hoes loved to throw shade at me 'cause they didn't understand why I wouldn't sit around and let Julius take care of me. I had to tell them having Julius pay all the bills was cool and everything, but it was essential for me to have my own bag. Me and that nigga could end tomorrow, and all of the financial responsibility would be on me.

Did I think Julius would stop paying the bills if we split? No, I didn't. But I also knew if he and I weren't together, he would think that gave him the okay to clock my moves. Yeah—Not happening in this lifetime or the next.

When it was close to the time for Julius to perform, we went outside to join the party. His label mate Sahdiah ended up being on the boat with us, so while Julius was on stage I ended up kicking it with her and her group of friends.

Julius was doing his thing up on stage rapping his song. A few times he'd notice me over by the corner and would either wink or point at me.

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“How do you deal with that?” One of Sahdiah’s friends asked.

She was gesturing to the crowd of women standing in front of the stage yelling Julius’s name to the top of their lungs. “Girl they’re fans. It comes with the spotlight.”

“You a strong one for real.” She tittered. “I’m too insecure for that.”

“Can’t be insecure when you’re dating somebody like that.” Sahdiah spoke up. Sahdiah herself was in a high-profile relationship. Her dude wasn’t a rapper, but he was a well-known producer.

He and Julius had worked together a few times that’s how she and I became cordial.

“Exactly.” I proffered. “All you can do is trust that yo nigga won’t do you dirty behind your back.” Doing a quick perusal of the crowd I drew my eyes back to the stage. “On top of that my man look damn good.” I teased and stuck my tongue out.

I learned early on that you gotta have thick skin dealing with somebody in the industry. My man had sex appeal out of this world. Hoes were throwing themselves at him left and right. Like I told her you gotta kind of accept it when dealing with somebody of his caliber. Shit either that or be ready to scrap with every bitch that looked at him. I had too much to lose so I wasn’t ‘bout to be out here fighting no hoe behind Julius. I’d let his ass go before I lost my dignity.

The minute Julius's set ended he quickly grabbed me up and drug me downstairs to the room they had set up for him. Hewanted to change out of his clothes before rejoining the party. After facing a blunt and grabbing him something to eat he was ready to join the masses. Tito had secured the funds and now we could really turn up.

Sitting down in one of the chairs Julius pulled me down into his lap and secured his arms around my waist. I tugged on my scarf to make sure it was still in place. Being out on this water in this heat had my leave out frizzy as hell and with as many cameras flashing around us I wouldn't be caught slacking.

Blowing out a cloud of smoke Julius placed his cheek against mine and asked. "You having fun?"

"It's cool."

"Where Sahdiah and her girls go?"

"They went to the bar."

"You didn't want to go with them?"

"Nawl. They ran into some girl they knew and I ain't like the way she was staring at me." I was minding my own business, but I peeped how this chick kept eyeballing the fuck out of me. I almost asked that hoe if she had something she wanted to get off her chest but for the sake of not ruining this man party I kept it cute.

"What girl?"

"I'on know." I shrugged. "Some dark-skinned chick." I kept my response vague. Julius swear I be reaching but a bitch knows when somebody be ice grilling them.

“Oh aight.” He shrugged and sat back.

“Right Now,” by Megan Thee Stallion started playing and just about every female on the boat started to twerk. Twirling my hips to the beat I rapped along to the lyrics. “A nigga can’t boss me up. When we met, I was already bossy.”

“Yo ass capping down.” Julius chuckled. “I bossed yo ass right up lil baby.”

“Nigga please. With or without you I’mma boss bitch.” I bragged, making him suck his teeth.

“Tell him sis.” Tito called out. We fell out laughing when Julius flipped him the bird.

Tito was getting ready to say something else when Sahdiah and her crew walked in front of us.

Leaning down she hugged Julius. “What’s up brother?”

Any other time that brother shit would’ve pissed me off, but Sahdiah got a pass ‘cause her and Julius were close.

“Can’t call it. You and yo girls having a good time?”

“Yep.” She popped. “Wish my man had come.” She pouted.

“Kamp had a show tonight huh.”

“Yeah, they’re in D.C.”

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“Thought so. If y’all need anything let Tito know.” Julius was looking around for somebody when he asked her “Where yo security at?”

“I sent him off.” She laughed. “He was cramping my style.”

I noticed that while the two of them were talking the dark-skinned chick I had just told him about was eyeing the hell out of Julius. Adjusting myself in his lap I stared at her. Cause hoe fuck is you looking at? When she realized I was grilling her she gave me a faint smile before looking off.

It was something weird ‘bout that hoe that I couldn’t put my finger on. I was gone bring it up to Julius as soon as they walked off.

“I’mma come kick it with y’all later we ‘bout to go smoke.” Sahdiah kissed me on the cheek before sauntering away.

“You know that hoe right there?” I glared at Julius.

“What fucking hoe Nariah?” he huffed.

“That one.” I pointed at ole girl who was just eye fucking him. “The one in the white swimsuit.”

“Nawl.” He spit out a lil too quick.

Narrowing my eyes at him I nodded. “Yeah aight. She look like a bitch you’ll fuck.”

“Bruh we not ‘bout to do this.” He retorted.

“We not.” I agreed. “Not gone do it at all. Yo ass just better make sure you don’t know her. Cause the next time I catch her staring I’mma ask that hoe if she got a problem.” I let him know and meant every word. Julius was trying to tell me how I was probably reading too much into it, but I tuned his ass out. I had to give credit where it was due, lil mama was bad as hell. Not Nariah bad but she was cute, and my nigga had a thing for dark skinned females. Like I told him she looked like something he would go after.

We hadn’t had any issues since before I had Jude. I would hate for us to be where we are today for it all to end. I was just preaching ‘bout trusting yo nigga and now I was side-eyeing the fuck out of mine. When I asked ‘bout that hoe his response wasn’t reassuring enough.

For the remainder of the night, I ain’t say shit. Tito tried to get me to perk up, but I wasn’t in the mood. As soon as the truck pulled back up to the hotel I hopped out and went to my room. By the time Julius decided to bring his black ass in there I had already showered, took me a gummy, and was buried under the cover.

When my alarm went off this morning, I woke up in a better mood than what I had went to bed in. I purposely set my alarm an hour before my massage appointment because I wanted to get on the phone with my vendor so I could check on the progress of my order.

The vendor had sent over some samples for me to approve and now all I was waiting on was the final product to be shipped to me. When I rolled over Julius’s side was empty. I kind of figured he would be up before me. Sliding out of bed I leaned backwards and popped my back before going into the bathroom to handle my hygiene.

Before I left out of the room, I texted him and told him I was going downstairs to the spa. He hit me back saying he was with Lucas and would be in the room waiting for me when I got back. We were supposed to go back to the mall before spending the rest of the day at the pool.

When I finished my massage and made it back to the room Julius was laid up in the bed doing something on his phone. The massage I got at the spa had my ass so relaxed, but Julius wanted to play around. We ended up fucking and when we finished, I begged him to let me take a quick nap before we went out for the day. He agreed to letting me sleep for a couple of hours and that was all I needed to hear before sliding under the covers.

Sitting up in a haste I snatched the sleep mask off and glanced around the room. My ass had done overslept and now I was gone have to hear Julius's mouth. Ambling out of the bedroom, I walked through the suite in search of Julius. The hotel room was empty. Knowing Julius, his ass was somewhere fucking off with Lucas and Byron. Going back into the room I swiped my phone up from the counter and dialed his number.

When I got the voicemail, I tried calling again only to receive the same thing. Something was telling me to search his location, so that's what I did. When I pulled up the Find My app, I couldn't do shit but chuckle. The nigga must've turned his location off 'cause an hour ago his last known location was the hotel. Everything in me was telling me that Julius was on some bullshit, but I just couldn't bring myself to believe that.

I know like hell this nigga hadn't left me in the room to go do no bullshit. I called Lucas, got the voice mail. Called Byron and got his as well. Instead of calling they ass again I dialed Tito's number.

"Good evening, Nariah." Tito rasped into the call.

“Good evening.” I sighed. “Have you talked to Julius? I done called his ass twice and his phone going straight to voicemail.”

“Not since we got back from breakfast this morning. You checked his location?”

“Yep. I think his ass turned it off.”

” What the fuck?” Tito sounded just as confused as I was. “Give me a second Nari. Let me call them other niggas.”

“Okay.” Hanging up the phone, I tossed it on the bed and tongued my cheek. I don’t know what the fuck them niggas had going on, but Julius had better call me before I turn Miami the fuck out.

I was sitting there waiting on Tito to call me back when I decided to just say fuck it. Instead of getting dressed for the beach I threw on this lil casual set I’d gotten from Alo, ordered me a black truck, and booked me a flight back home. If that nigga wanted to do his own thing, he could’ve just said that. I would’ve stayed at home with my baby. Instead, his stupid ass had left me in the hotel while he was out with Ren and Stimpny doing God knows what.

juice

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Swiping my thumb across the screen I answered it and cradled it between my cheek and shoulder. “What’s up?”

“Nigga where the fuck you at?”

Pulling the phone down I stared at the screen. “I’m around the way.”

“Nariah looking for you. She said she called y’all and nobody answered for her.”

“Shit.” Checking the time on my watch I chuckled under my breath. “I’m ‘bout to call her.”

“Do that.” He ordered before banging on my ass.

When Nariah got back from the spa, we were supposed to hit the streets. Her ass wanted to take a nap after we fucked. I was laid up in bed with her when Tamia hit me up asking if I could come see her real quick.

Anybody that knew Nariah knew anytime she said she was going to take a nap it really meant she was ‘bout to get a good four to five hours’ worth of sleep. Tamia was right down the street from us at the Fountain Bleu so I figured I could dip out and kick with her and be back by the time Nariah woke up.

What I wasn’t expecting was for Tamia to jump my ass as soon as I got to her room. I ain’t fuck ‘cause I had put Nari to bed before I slid through, so I let Tamia top me off. I knew I shouldn’t have brought my ass over here, but the pussy pic Tamia sent had my ass doing some shit I’d never done before. Nobody and I meant fucking nobody

came before Nariah. I was cooked for sure.

Dialing Nari number I prayed she picked up. When the phone went to voice mail I dropped my head. “Fuck!” I hissed.

“What’s wrong Juice?” Tamia quizzed and stepped out of the bathroom wearing nothing but a robe. Low key her ass had been snappy ever since I told her I wasn’t gone fuck her.

Getting up from the bed I hiked my jeans up and reached for my shirt. “I’m ‘bout to slide.”

“Oh.” She giggled lowly. “Yo girl must be up?”

“What I done told you ‘bout mentioning Nariah?”

Rolling her eyes Tamia stomped over to the bed and sat down. “I just asked if she was up.”

“Don’t ask me shit ‘bout her. That’s my last time telling yo ass that.”

“What the fuck ever Juice.” She spat.

“And don’t think I ain’t peep the way you were eyeballing her last night. Don’t do that shit again Tamia. I fucks with you but I’ll cut you off behind that one.” I ‘bout choked on my tongue last night when Nari asked if I knew who Tamia was. When she first mentioned somebody looking at her funny, I wasn’t thinking that’s who she was talking ‘bout.

Especially since Tamia knew Nariah was first lady. I expected her homegirls to be on some slick shit but never expected it to be her ass. When she walked up with Sahdiah

my fucking eyes almost popped out of my head. I tried to play that shit cool by chopping it up with Sahdiah, but I felt Tamia's eyes on me the whole time.

I meant to check her 'bout it when I first got here but shit slipped my mind when she hit that head.

"Juice, really I'm starting to not even give a fuck."

"Glad you don't." Ambling out of the room I dialed Byron up.

"You leaving?"

"Yeah man." I hit the button for the elevator and once it opened I stepped in. Scrubbing my hand down my face I sighed. "Nari done called our ass."

"Fuck. Aye Luke we gotta ride out. Aye Juice we gone catch an Uber."

"Bet. Meet me at the hotel. I'mma wait for you niggas to pull up before I get out."

"We on the way."

When I hit Lucas up earlier and told him I was 'bout to pull up on Tamia him and Byron decided they was gone go fishing at the beach. And by fishing, I mean for some girls. Tamia's hotel sat on the beach, so they weren't too far away from me.

"Aight." Hanging up the phone I slid it in my pocket. As soon as the elevator dinged and the doors opened, I rushed out the front with my head down. God forbid if paparazzi caught my ass coming out of the hotel.

Once I was in the back seat of my black truck, I used the driver's phone to dial Nariah. She must've turned it off 'cause it was going straight to voicemail. "This girl

dog.” I groaned.

Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:05 am

The whole six-minute drive I prayed that Nariah wasn't too upset. There was a studio around the way I could lie and say I was there. She knew anytime I hit the studio up I zoned out cause I needed to focus. I didn't turn my phone off, but I never answered it. If it was an emergency and anybody needed to get in contact with me, they would hit one of my niggas up.

I spotted Lucas and Byron standing on the curb as soon as we pulled up. Thanking the driver I hopped out. "Man. Nari 'bout to nut the fuck up on my ass."

"I told yo ass to think twice bruh. Now you 'bout to have her at all our necks." Lucas fussed.

I wasn't trying to hear that shit. My only focus was getting to Nariah so I could smooth this shit over and fast. Hopping on the elevator I counted down the seconds until we reached the penthouse suite. As soon as the doors opened my heart started thumping in my muthafucking chest.

I had played some games in the past but the shit I pulled today was downright disrespectful. I knew I should've stayed my ass home. If God got me out of this one, I promise I wouldn't pull no shit like this again. In fact, Tamia was getting cut off. We were too fucking comfortable with the shit we had going on.

"Say Nariah." I called out once I stepped into the suite. I ain't hear no response prompting me to check shit out. When I strolled into the bedroom I chuckled under my breath. This girl really got low on my ass. All of Nari's shit was missing. If I knew my girl like I thought I did, then her ass was on her way back to the crib.

The only thing I could do was damage control. Slipping my phone out of my back pocket I shot off a text message.

Me: My bad Nari I ain't know you was looking for me. I been at Criteria laying down a verse.

Me: I brought you back some of them chocolate chip cookies you like from there.

Me: I was gone wake you up when I got back.

Me: Wya

Me: Why you not hitting me back?

Me: Nariah??

Me: Aight bet

“Aye Nari say where she was going?” I asked after Tito picked up the phone.

“Nawl, I tried to call her again. She ain't pick up.”

“Yeah, she went home.” I snorted and ran my hand over the back of my neck. “So, listen, if she ask, I was at Criteria.”

“Nigga I done already told her I ain't know where the fuck you was.”

“I'm saying all you gotta do is tell her that's where you found me at. She gone believe you before she believe me.”

“No, what the fuck she gone do is leave yo stupid ass.” Tito paused for a beat before

adding. “Juice, y’all almost ten years in. You already know Nariah the one you wanna marry. Why you still playing games?”

“Nigga I’on know.” Tossing my body down in the chair I put the phone on speaker and propped my elbows on my knees. “On God I’m done fucking ‘round with Tamia.”

“I’m not tryna tell you what the fuck to do but Julius you in too deep. Ain’t no bitch out there bad enough for you to be leaving Nari up in the hotel to go fuck off. Fuck was yo head at?”

“Don’t know.” I mumbled somberly. “Clearly wasn’t thinking ‘cause had I, my ass would’ve ignored the fuck out of Tamia.”

“But you didn’t. And now Nari pissed and all them lies yo ass done told to cover up yo shit gone resurface.”

“I’m already knowing.” Closing my eyes I tossed my head back and groaned. If Nariah let my ass off the hook for this shit it was a wrap for me and Tamia. I fucked with her the long way but the only female I had feelings for was Nari. Like I said Tamia was convenient that’s why I fucked off with her but now at the point where I started slipping, I knew I needed to get my shit together.

“I’mma see if I can get you some time at the studio. If you gone use that as a lie might as well make the shit happen.”

“Yeah man. Just let me know.”

“Will do.”

After Tito banged on my ass, I shed my clothes and hopped in the shower. If he was

able to get me in the studio I needed to be up on my game. Since Nari had already dipped out on my ass, I was gon' hit the mall up before we left tomorrow so I wouldn't show back up to the crib empty handed. Hopefully her ass read my messages and hit me back when she landed.

Sitting in the back of the truck I rehearsed what I was gone say when Nariah got to the crib. Nariah never did respond to my messages, but I got confirmation that she had made it back to the crib when Juju Facetimed me from his room telling me that him and his mama was getting ready to go to Great Wolfe Lodge.

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It had been four days since I laid eyes on my girl and my ass was on some Keith Sweat begging type of shit. You can pretty much say that I had spent some serious money on Nariah over the past few days, not only had I dropped a few racks in Brickell shit—when I made it back to the A, I also hit our personal shopper up and had her pulling all kinds of shit for Nari.

While my family had been gone my ass had been held up in the house looking stupid. I only left today so that I could run by the label headquarters to sign off on some documents. I calculated the time and made sure I would be back before they pulled up.

My ass even hired this lil decorator to come over and do some shit at the crib. I had rose petals and shit trailing from the front door to the formal dining room where we would have dinner at. That lady and her team had big silver balloons hanging up that spelled out I love you. All of her gifts were strategically spread out in the living room. I wanted that to be the first thing she saw when she walked in.

To beat her to the punch I had reached out to Nari's mom, Ms. Sariah. I knew she had gone with them to LaGrange, so I hit her up saying I wanted her to keep Juju 'cause I was tryna surprise Nari with something. After she confirmed that she would keep him I set all of this shit in motion.

Me and Nariah had made a vow early on to keep our family out of our business, so I wasn't worried 'bout her telling her mama what happened in Miami. When the driver pulled up to crib my ass smiled. I had beat Nariah back home like I predicted. The only thing I had left to do was beg for her forgiveness. I had already hit up Tito n'em and told 'em not to fuck with me for the rest of the day.

I ain't have no plans on leaving the crib for the next forty-eight hours. I was 'bout to stuff my face all between Nariah's ass. Hell, I was willing to do whatever it took to get out the doghouse.

"Aight Joe. I'mma fuck with you." I said to my driver before getting out. Jogging up the steps I fished my keys from my pocket and used them to unlock the door.

"What the fuck?" I yelled and clutched my damn head. I don't know what the fuck happened but as soon as I pushed opened the door somebody fucking hit me with something.

You know the type of hit that yo mama delivered when she was whooping yo ass. Yeah, that's what the fuck I was feeling right now. I blinked my eyes repeatedly trying to see what the hell was going on and before I could formulate another sentence my ass was hit again.

"Bitch! I told you 'bout fucking playing with me. You must think I'm a got damn fool." Nariah drew back and hit me again with the belt. "Gone leave me in a muthafucking hotel while you out fucking around."

"Nariah!" I shouted and tried to dodge the next lick, but she caught me across the back. "Fuck!" I groaned. That first thrash went right across my face and it ain't look like she was 'bout to stop swinging so I did what I used to do back in the day, covered my face with my hands and tried to plead my case.

"Bae I was in the studio!"

"Studio my ass! You a lying ass bitch." She scoffed and hit me again. "I told you I'm not the bitch to fuck over. I gave yo ass a second chance after the first time." The next thrash landed against my thighs. If I ain't get that belt away from her ass I was going to have welts all over my body.

“On God bruh don’t hit me no fucking more!” I roared and reached for the belt. Nariah struck my ass across the back again making me fold over. “I’m on yo ass now.” I groaned. As soon as I was upright, I charged at her. She was swinging the belt wildly in the air and before it could connect, I had wrapped my hand around it.

Tugging on the belt I pulled her into me and spun her around. Nariah fought against me, but I maneuvered and now had both of her hands behind her back. I was able to snatch the belt from her and toss it on the ground. Bringing my face down to the side of hers I gritted in her ear, “you got that one but Nariah when I let you go, yo ass better not hit me a-fucking-gain. If you do I’mma dot yo muthafucking eye!”

“Let me the fuck go!” She yelled and tried to wiggle herself free.

But I gripped her arms tighter and forced her to walk up the stairs. “I told yo ass I was at the fucking studio. Had you answered the phone when I called yo ass would’ve known that.”

“Fuck you, Julius.” She sniffled.

Fuck. Now she crying. Letting go of her hand I spun her around and backed her into the wall on the stairs. Hovering over her I peered down into her face and asked, “why you crying Nari?”

Nariah looked everywhere but at me, “cause you full of shit and I’m tired of doing this with you.”

“Tired of doing what with who?” I queried and got eye level with her. “You tired of doing what? ‘Cause if it’s what I think it is you ain’t.” I shook my head.

“Yes I am.”

“Nawl. You really not.” I reiterated. “You done came up with this whole scenario and now yo ass think I’m out here fucking off. Ain’t nobody dogging you out Nariah. We was at Criteria. You already know the service be shitty in there so I’on even see why you fucking tripping.”

Okay. So, I was lying but shit. What else could I do? I wasn’t ‘bout to willingly let Nariah walk out on me. Fuck nawl. My bitch was bad, and I say that with all respect. Nariah ain’t need my ass. She had her own shit going and was really a boss out here. Nariah used being a girlfriend to a successful rapper to her advantage.

Shit any time she got booked muthafuckas was dropping anywhere between twenty and sixty racks for a club appearance. Not to mention the money she made from social media as an influencer. Nariah’s net worth was well over four million at this point. So, when I say my girl ain’t need me I meant just that.

On top of her being every nigga dream girl. Nariah went to school, popped out when necessary, was a damn good mother, and kept shit up around the crib. With me knowing that ain’t no way I was ‘bout to just let my girl leave me. For another nigga to slide in and try to take my place. Yeah, you gotta be smoking that hard shit to think I wasn’t ‘bout to lie my way out of this.

“You so full of shit Julius.” She mewled. “Can you let me go? I need to get my stuff so I can leave.”

“Where you going Nari?”

“Why? Ain’t like you fucking care.” She hissed.

“On God dog wasn’t nobody out fucking off. I was at the studio. I got the song I recorded on my fucking laptop. Plus, them cookies that I brought for your black ass been sitting on the table since I got back. They ‘bout stale now but shit I thought about

you.”

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“Julius, please.” She begged. I could tell by the look on her face that she wasn’t tryna hear shit I had to say. Nariah wore that look of defeat like she did the first time I got caught slipping, almost like she was getting ready to give me my walking papers and we know that shit wasn’t happening.

Taking a step back I spread my legs and folded my arms across my chest. “What I gotta do to prove this shit to you huh Nari? What you want me to do baby? Tell me and I’ll make it happen.”

Nari glared at me before swiping her hand across her wet eyes. “I want you to get out of my way.”

“Nawl.” I protested. “Anything but that.”

“Juli—”

“Pick something else Nariah.” I based. “Cause we not leaving up out this bitch until you talk to me.”

“I don’t want to talk. I wanna go to sleep.”

I tilted my head in the direction of our bedroom. “Go.”

“At my mama house.” She clarified.

“Well then we gon’ go pack us a bag so we can go stay over there.” I shared, letting her know she could do whatever she wanted as long as it was understood that I was

gon' be right there with her.

"You might wanna go check on your eye. It's starting to swell." She smirked.

"You think that shit funny." Running my fingers over my face I shook my head. I definitely had a welt under my eye where her ass hit me at. "On the real Nariah a nigga wasn't doing shit. I was at the studio and we ain't have service."

Chuckling smugly, she retorted, "I hear you talking."

"Believe me then nigga. I love you too much to be out here doing you dirty. Tito knew to call the studio, that's how I found out you was looking for me. I figured I could get some work done while you were sleep, I ain't plan on being there long baby."

I wanted to think that she believed me. Her eyes had kind of softened up while she stood there listening to me explain myself, so I continued. "I left as soon as he said you had called and couldn't get through. Had yo ass stayed put you would of found this out that same day. But no, Nariah blocked everybody and refused to listen."

"Cause I told you to stop fucking playing with me." She bellowed.

"Ain't nobody playing with you girl." Laying my head in the crook of her neck I kissed her collarbone. "I love yo ass too much to be out here like that, Nariah."

"Okay Julius." She sighed. "Maybe I overreacted."

Bingo. "Nawl, you didn't. You ain't know what to think and 'cause I fucked up in the past you took it to the extreme. I get it and I ain't mad at you for that. But Nari, next time give yo nigga the benefit of the doubt."

“Okay.” She murmured.

Rearing my head back I searched her eyes. They looked uneasy, almost like she wanted to believe the shit I was spitting but she knew I was lying. I was gaslighting the fuck out of Nariah and I knew it. But shit. What other choice did I have?

“You not gone leave me are you?”

Turning her head to the side Nariah tongued her cheek. “I’on know Julius ‘cause I feel like you playing games with me.”

“I’m not though baby.”

“That’s what you saying.” Pushing me off of her Nariah smoothed her ponytail out. “I’mma give you that one ‘cause I ain’t got no solid proof. But Julius you seriously skating on thin ice. If a bitch even insinuate that she was with you, I’m packing me and my baby shit up and leaving yo ass. And it ain’t a bag or car you can buy that’ll make me change my mind.”

Looking me up and down one last time Nariah marched up the steps to our bedroom. The way she slammed the door behind her let me know not to even bring my ass up there. I wanted to think I was off the hook but the way Nariah had just beat my ass and threatened to leave I knew I wasn’t. Like she said it was gone take more than some bags for me to get back on her good side.

The first thing I was gone do was hit Tamia up and let her know it was a wrap. I couldn’t risk losing my family behind a piece of ass. Hopefully she ain’t get in her feelings ‘bout the shit. And more importantly I prayed Nariah never found out that we were fucking around. She for sure wouldn’t forgive my ass.

nariah

. . .

Bendingover in front of Shunta I popped my ass to the beat of the song, while everybody in the section hyped me up. Dropping down into a squat I twerked one cheek at a time before rolling my hips. The DJ was playing “Wanna Be” by Glo and Meg and that was my shit.

Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:05 am

I was kid free for the weekend, and my nigga was on ice so when Shunta invited me to Opium, I hopped at the opportunity to leave the crib. She had been booked for a hosting and wanted me to tag along. It had been a whole three weeks since the fiasco in Miami and Julius was nowhere near getting on my good side.

To keep the peace in the house I played nice with him around Jude but when my baby wasn't around, I wasn't fucking with that nigga. Julius thought I was dumb, had to, cause that bullshit ass story 'bout being in the studio that he tried to feed me ain't do shit but piss me the fuck off. The only reason I hadn't left was because I didn't have any solid proof that he was fucking off.

If I ever got some—believe me, it was a wrap for his ass. He thought 'cause he was playing the crib close that I would be cool but that was the furthest thing from the truth. I ain't let thatnigga touch me since Miami and I ain't felt no type of way about it.

When the DJ scratched the song and dropped “All Dere” I got too turnt up. Cameras and shit were flashing all through the section and for the first time in a long time I didn't care. I was having the time of my life just kicking it without having to worry 'bout anything. I knew Julius was going to be pissed. I'll deal with that tomorrow, but tonight...Oh, I'm gone turn up.

The sheer onyx catsuit from NoSceneGirls had my entire body on display. I had a black thong under it and made sure to cover my nipples with pasties. At the end of the day I was a mother, a sexy one but I still had a child.

I was standing on the couch dancing when Shunta tapped me on the thigh.

“Somebody sent you a bottle.” She noted and pointed her finger at the sign the bottle girl was holding up.

My eyes glanced around the packed club after I read the sign. “Girl.” I drawled after not spotting the person I was looking for. “Ain’t no somebody sent me shit. That’s from Julius.” I specified with a quick roll of my eyes.

“How you know?” She queried.

Propping my hand up on my hip I stared at her. “Do yo shit twin.” I read off. It took Shunta a few seconds to catch on but when she did her ass fell over laughing. If Julius was nothing else, he was my biggest hype man. It was rare that I popped my shit, I honestly felt like I didn’t have to do too much. But Julius would always tell me to “pop my shit”.

“Juice said you thought you was ‘bout to enjoy a night out without him.”

“Shunta that is not funny.” I pouted and stepped down from the couch. “He supposed to be at home.”

“Bitch, do you see how you came out the house looking? Ain’t no way you thought Juice was gone let you be out here on your own.”

“That’s the thing. Julius didn’t see me.” I purposely got dressed in my makeup room so that Julius wouldn’t see what I had on. Hell, I didn’t even tell him I was going out tonight, I just left. I stopped sharing my location with him back in Miami so the only other way he would’ve known where I was is if Lox told him. And judging by the way he was sitting there avoiding my death glares I would say my assumptions were correct.

Trekking over to Lox I propped my hands on my hips. “Where ya boy at?” Instead of

responding he tipped his head behind me.

I didn't even have to look 'cause the crowd gave him away. Rolling my eyes I huffed and fell back on the couch. "I can't never have fun." I pouted, forcing a deep chuckle out of Lox.

"Come on Nari, you know that man not 'bout to let you out of his sight for too long."

"That's not the point. I'm mad at Julius."

"Clearly he don't care." Shunta giggled.

I could feel Julius's eyes on me as he neared the section. As soon as he stepped in like the gentleman he was he went around and spoke to everybody. Once he was done being chivalrous, he stood in front of me. Glancing down at my nails I tried to ignore him.

"You on yo shit tonight huh twin?" He teased while kneeling in front of me.

"Why are you here?"

"My girl here. Where else I'm supposed to be?"

"You know what I mean Julius."

"Nawl, I don't." He lied. Grabbing me by the hand Julius pulled me up from the couch and wrapped his arms around me. "You out here looking good and shit. Twerking and shit with all ya ass out. Give me a hug nigga."

"Nope." I kept my hands at my side, refusing to hug his ass back. He smelled and looked too damn good, and I almost gave in, but I was still mad, so I didn't. "If I look

good just say that.”

“You know you look good, Nariah. I ain’t even gotta tell you that.” Julius glanced down at my feet then back up to me. “I like them shoes.” He winked.

Amongst the few bags Julius had bought me the other day was a pair of YSL Tribute platform heels. I thought they would look good with my outfit, so I put them on. “I bet you do.”

“You hosting or just partying?” He asked, getting all in my business.

“Partying. Shunta hosting.”

“Oh aight. So that means you can leave?”

Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 8:06 am

“I’m not leaving my friend Julius.”

“You don’t even fuck with that girl like that.” He chided.

Jabbing him in the stomach I turned my face up. “Yes, I do.”

After I quit Stax, Shunta and I kept in touch. Her dreams ended up coming true when she snagged a football player. The two of them had two kids before calling it quits with their relationship. Much like me Shunta had gained a big following on social media which resulted in her getting booking gigs and shit.

Outside of doing this she didn’t work. Her baby daddy paid all of her bills and stayed out of her way. They had an odd arrangement, but it worked for them. We weren’t the best of friends, but she and I hung out from time to time.

“If you say so, Nariah.” Julius glanced around the section before focusing back on me. “You ready to go?”

“Nope.”

“Aight then. Well, I’mma sit here until you are.” He winked and sat down next to Lox. Leaning over Julius held his hand out. “Preciate the heads up my nigga.”

“You know I got you.” Lox quipped and dapped Julius up.

I really wasn’t ready to leave since I was having fun kicking it with Shunta so since Julius had bombarded his way into the section he was gone sit there until I got tired.

Sauntering over to Shunta I leaned against the railing. “Guess we partying with my baby daddy tonight.”

“I’ on know why you thought he was going to leave.”

“Girl cause...” I sighed. Turning around I looked out at the crowd. Opium was packed the fuck out. I had hosted here a few times, so I already knew what the vibes was going to be. Unless I was hosting or rolling with Julius it was rare that I frequented clubs, so I was really looking forward to letting my hair down.

Tucking my hair behind my ear Shunta said, “I won’t be mad if you left.”

“I don’t wanna leave.”

“You also not ‘bout to enjoy yoself with Juice hovering. Nigga be cock-blocking without even saying shit.”

Looking over my shoulder at him I rolled my eyes. “You got your backend?”

“Bitch I got that when I walked through the door.” She laughed.

“I know that’s fucking right.” I drawled. Sighing dejectedly, I groaned. “I’mma leave.”

“I knew you would. It’s cool Nari.”

“We can do lunch one day this week. Go shopping or something.”

“I’mma hold yo ass to that shit too. You always make plans just to turn around and cancel them.”

“Guilty.” I held my hand up. “But I promise I won’t this time. Jude going to Maryland with my mama and grandma so I ain’t got nothing but time.”

“Hit me up.”

Wrapping my arm around her shoulder I hugged her. “I will.”

After saying my goodbyes, I ambled over to Julius and conceded. “We can go.”

“You sure?” He asked and eyed me.

“Yeah.”

“Bet.” Rising from the couch Julius looped his fingers through mine. “Let’s be out then.”

We left out of the section and made our way through the crowd with Lox leading the way. When we made it to the parking lot, I didn’t see Julius’s car, so I assumed he had someone drop him off. The two of us ended up in the back seat of my black truck while Lox occupied the front passenger seat.

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“You cold?” Julius paused and asked mid conversation.

“Yeah.”

“Ass should’ve put on some clothes.” He fussed but passed his jacket over to me.

I wrapped it around myself and nestled into his side. After we left Opium, he had hit up the guys and told them to meet us at Marietta Diner. Thank God, they sat us in the back of the restaurant ‘cause these niggas was drunk and talking loud as hell. I had tuned them out and was scrolling through Instagram.

I hadn’t seen either of them since Miami and just like I wasn’t fucking with Julius I wasn’t fucking with they ass either. The only one that really got any talk from me was Tito and that’s ‘cause he wasn’t with Julius when I was looking for him.

“Nariah, what’s up with your girl Shunta?” Lucas asked.

“Ask her.”

“Wait. Not you checking for Shunta. You know Tito cracked her some years back.” Julius blurted out.

“First of all, stop telling my friend business.”

“Ain’t nobody telling that girl business. I’m tryna keep this nigga from back dooring that nigga.”

“It was a one-time thing. As a matter of fact, she really wanted to get at yo ass, but you swerved her.” Tito asserted.

“You cool with somebody that tried to get at yo nigga, Nari? Not yo possessive ass.”

“Byron, that was before Julius, and I were a thing. And I’m the one that told her to try him.”

“You did what?” Julius damn near yelled.

The elevation in Julius’s tone made me giggle. “I told her to shoot her shot. Hell, you was trying to get at me and I wasn’t interested.”

“Shunta cool and all but you know I love me a chocolate chick.” He bragged and pinched my cheek. “Milk chocolate, dark chocolate, cocoa powder brown. I like my chicks dark with an ass that’s round.” He rapped.

“Ignorant ass.” I grinned. “You got bonus points for not taking the bait though.”

“So, you really was interested huh? Yo ass was just playing my nigga for weak.”

“You’ll never know.” I winked at Lucas. Taking a sip out of my cup, I peered at Julius over the rim before saying. “He tell y’all I whooped his ass with a belt.”

“See now you ‘bout to piss me off. Get yo shit and let’s go, Nariah.” Julius said and stood up from the table.

The guys were doubled over in laughter while I sat there smirking at him. I knew he had told them ‘cause I heard him on the phone asking Tito what he could use to get that welt to go down.

A cute lil frown etched across Julius's face when he sat back down. "T'on think I ever got my ass whooped that hard."

"I've been meaning to ask you what the fuck was going on in your head when you did that shit."

"T'on know." I hunched my shoulders. "He hurt my feelings, so I wanted to hurt him."

"Nawl yo ass played me. You weren't even supposed to be at the crib yet."

"I keep telling you I'm always gon' be ten steps ahead of you." Julius was trying to surprise me and got surprised himself. He thought I wasn't around when he was talking to my mama, but I heard their whole conversation.

When he asked her to keep Jude, I was cool with that because I had planned on confronting his ass anyway and didn't need my baby around to hear it. I don't know what was going through my mind but when I heard the truck pull up outside, I got pissed off all over again.

Jude's belt was the first thing I put my eyes on, so I used it. I tried to whoop him something serious with that fucking belt for playing with me. Julius was telling a bitch ass lie 'bout him being at the studio. I knew it just like his ass did. He thought I fell for that lil spill but that was the furthest thing from reality.

Truthfully, I don't know where he was or who he was with. That shit was still a mystery to me. I searched his Apple devices front and fucking back and hit a brick wall every time. No cap something in my heart was telling me to just ride it out 'cause the truth was going to reveal itself soon.

I can't explain it, but it was this feeling that I had. A feeling I ain't never felt before.

Like to the point where I was damn near restless at night. I was lying beside this nigga staring at the walls 'cause I couldn't sleep. Something had me so uncomfortable that it kept me up at night.

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That's how I knew Julius was fucking around. I ain't have the evidence but my heart knew it. We were a couple of years shy of being together for ten years and this nigga was being a nigga. As much as I hated the thought of splitting up my family, I was prepared for it. That shit was going to hurt Jude more than it did me, but it wasn't fair for him to see me at my lowest.

'Cause let's keep it a stack. If I found out Julius was doing me wrong, I would be hurt. Hurt beyond words 'cause I had been holding his ass down for years. Never stepped out, hell never even looked at another nigga. A nigga couldn't get close to me if his name wasn't Julius Jones. And everybody in the city knew that. So yeah, a bitch would be fucking devastated if some shit did come out.

Taps to my temple jarred me from my haze. "You in that big ass head of yours?"

"My bad. I was thinking 'bout the stuff I need to get done next week." I lied.

"Nari, when is you launching your stuff?" Tito asked.

"A week from tomorrow." I beamed.

"Yo IT team make sure your website can withstand the traffic?"

"They said they did. I can only hope for the best."

"I'll stop by your warehouse and check out your server." He let me know.

"Thank you for that."

“You know it’s nothing.”

Tito was a god send. Thanks to him I didn’t have to have a team. Outside of the talent agency that I was signed too, and my assistant, Tito helped me for whatever else I needed. It was nothing for him to pull up at my warehouse to help me with anything. I really appreciated him for that because with me being in school and being an influencer sometimes things kind of fell to the side. It was him and Julius that stayed on my ass about my designs and the logistics of my business.

“Nari ‘bout to have the biggest drop of the century.” Lucas cheered. “Them hoes ‘bout to go crazy for that shit.”

“I hope they do.” I giggled. “I worked hard on it and spent a bunch of money so it would be nice to get a lil return.”

“If you don’t you know I got you.” Julius let me know.

“I already know you do but I don’t want that. I want my stuff to really sell out.”

“Nari the Great.” Bryon chided, making everyone at the table laugh.

Out of everyone around me Julius knew how much Jurnimeant to me. My feelings would be so hurt if my line wasn’t a success. Especially since this is what I planned on doing instead of actually putting my degree to use.

Elbowing me lightly Julius peered down at me. “Get out ya head. You got mad followers, them girls gon’ sell you out Nari.”

Tonguing my cheek I smiled. “Thank you, Julius.”

“It’s nothing.” He shrugged while biting down on his bottom lip. It had been

along three weeks. Julius and I were very sexual so not getting my cat played in had my ass extremely horny. The fact that Julius looked damn good tonight played into the mix. The way he was staring at me 'caused my face to flush. When he leaned down and whispered, "you ready to slide?" I couldn't stop my head from nodding.

I had kept him on ice as long as I could. Now I was going to let what happened in Miami rest, at least until something came out. Wasn't no sense in living in misery while sitting back waiting for the shit to fall into my lap. If my relationship was on the verge of ending, I might as well enjoy what was left of it.

juice

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Wrapping my hand up through her hair I pulled Nari's head back and pumped in and out of her. "Shit Nariah." I groaned. "Throw that shit back just like that." I encouraged.

When we made it home from the diner earlier, I sat out on the balcony and faced a blunt while Nari showered and did her nighttime skin care routine. I figured since she'd been out partying that her ass was gon' be ready for bed. My ass thought wrong, after I finished washing my ass Nariah crawled into my lap and the two of us had been going at it ever since.

Nariah hadn't let me touch her ass since Miami and I been feening something bad. Now, I won't say I ain't had no pussy since then, but it wasn't Nariah's. Tamia wasn't a slouch and had some good pussy but Nari... Nari shit belonged to me. Her shit fit me like a glove.

Tamia wasn't my bitch so her shit just ain't feel the same way Nari's did. Nari had some of the best pussy that I'd ever had. I owned that shit so every chance I got to

mark my name in it you got damn right I showed out.

Leaning my head to the side I grabbed ahold of her hips. “Yo pussy feel so good bae. You gone let me nut in you.”

“Julius.” She moaned.

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Slowing down my strokes I circled my hips and bit down on my bottom lip. If Nariah kept throwing that ass back on me like she was doing, I was gone skeet all up in her shit. After she had Jude, she was adamant ‘bout not getting pregnant again until we was married. I ain’t see what the big deal was since we was damn near married now. Nariah knew I wanted a lil girl, but she rode on that hill of not pushing out another one until I gave her a ring.

My plan had always been to propose to Nariah, but I procrastinated ‘cause I knew the minute we signed our marriage certificate all that bullshit I was doing in the streets was a wrap and I wasn’t so sure I was ready to stop. I’m fucked up for real, I know it.

“Shit.” Nariah groaned, snapping me out of my head.

“Just like that.” I praised. Leaning over I licked up the middle of her back before resting my head there. “Yo pussy ‘bout to pull that nut right up out of me Nari. Let me put another baby in you.”

“Mmmm. That shit feels so good, Julius.”

“I know it do baby.” I muttered between clenched teeth.

Picking up speed I thrashed in and out of Nariah. She was so into it, fucking me back and shit with her ass slamming against my pelvis. When she raised up from the bed, I wrapped my arm around her neck and held her close to my chest, all the while still holding my rhythm.

Our bodies smacked against each other every time I pushed into her and pulled back.

“You know I love you don’t you Nariah.” I said into her ear. “You know how crazy you got my ass over you. I’ll wet a muthafucka up for even looking in yo direction. That’s how crazy you got me out here.”

“Baby.” She cried out and wrapped her hand around my wrist.

Nariah’s head was thrown back, her eyes were closed, and her mouth was wide open. She was at my mercy, and I took full advantage of it. Stroking the side of her neck with my tongue I bit down on her pulsating vein. Jutting my hips forward I fucked her harder. “Gon’ let it go for me Nariah. Wet my shit up.”

“Baby.” She sang over and over again. The way her pussy clamped down around me I knew she was near. “I can’t.” She shook her head. “I... Shit... I.”

“You can.” I interrupted her. “You right there. I can feel it. Do yo shit twin.”

Me saying that must’ve been all she needed to hear. Nariah’s nails dug in my wrist as she yelled out that she was cumming. Her body shook violently against my chest; with the way her ass was moving she would’ve fell over if I didn’t have my arm secured around her neck. While pounding into her feverishly a rush of heat radiated through my body and before she had the chance to protest, I was spraying her walls down.

When the two of us finally calmed down I unwrapped my arm from around her and pulled out. Laying back on the bed I shielded my eyes with my arm.

“Julius, you was supposed to pull out.” She sighed.

“My bad Nari. Yo pussy had a vice grip on my dick. I couldn’t pull out. I’ll stop by the pharmacy and grab a Plan B.” I was lying like fuck. If Nariah ass got pregnant that means it was meant to happen.

It took her a few seconds to respond but when she did, I couldn't mask my smirk. "It's cool. Just don't do it again."

When I went to speak Nari added "I'll go get one before the gym." My smirk was wiped off instantly. It honestly felt like Nari had just doused my ass with some cold water.

Sitting up in I glared at her. "When you start taking Plan B's and shit."

"When the nigga I'm fucking offered to buy one." She retorted and slipped out of bed.

I couldn't tell if Nariah had just pulled my card or not, but I wasn't feeling the way she said that shit. Hopping out of bed I trekked behind her, dick swinging and all. "Fuck you mean by that, Nariah?" I quizzed and stepped into the ensuite bathroom.

"I'm just saying." She shrugged. Leaning over Nariah turned the shower on before sitting down on the toilet. "Any other time you slip up you never mention a Plan B then tonight you hollering 'bout going to buy one."

Bringing my arms up in the air I rasped. "Nigga you the one hollering 'bout not wanting another baby right now."

"And I don't." She yelled.

"Okay so what the fucking problem is?"

"Nothing, Julius." Nariah finished pissing and flushed the toilet. "You moving like a nigga that's out here living foul." She glowered before stepping into the shower.

Following behind her ass like a kid that had just got caught stealing out of the store I

shut the shower door and backed her into the wall. “I’m moving like a nigga that’s living foul but anytime I mention you giving me a lil girl you steady hollering ‘bout wanting to be married first.”

“Okay and I meant that.”

“So again. What the fuck is the issue with me offering to grab you a pill, Nariah?” Rubbing my hand across my forehead I huffed. “You got me feeling like I ain’t getting nowhere with you. You fuss when I ask for a baby. I let off in you and say I’mma be an adult and get you a pill to stop you from getting pregnant. That’s a problem. What you want Nariah?”

“It don’t even matter.” Dipping under my arm Nariah snatched her exfoliating glove down while mumbling something inaudibly under her breath.

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“You sitting here upset ‘bout the shit so tell me what the fuck the issue is now.”

“You!” She barked. “You’re the fucking issue Julius. And the fact that you can’t see it is very telling.”

“Very telling of what? How I’m the issue though Nariah? I’m trying to respect your wishes. You wanna get married before we have another baby, and I respect that.”

“You don’t respect shit Julius.” She snorted, low key calling me out, but I wouldn’t tell her ass that.”

“On Juju I do.” I argued.

Licking the corners of her mouth Nariah narrowed her eyes at me before a sinister smirk spread across her face. “You don’t. If anything, you just confirmed what I already knew.”

“Which is what?” I challenged.

“You got a bitch on the side. Prolly been fucking that hoe raw and shit. Pop up with a baby if you want Julius.”

Sucking my teeth I shook my head. “You gon’ keep saying that shit until you believe it. Ain’t a bitch out there that can say I stuck my dick in ‘em raw. And if somebody do say it that bitch telling a muthafucking lie.”

“Oh, they lying if they said you fucked raw but not if they say y’all fucked. Got it.”

She nodded her head like she had solved a mystery.

“That ain’t what the fuck I meant Nari and you know it.”

“Hey.” She shrugged. “It’s what you didn’t say, love.” She winked.

Instead of arguing with her I went to my side of the shower and washed off. The two of us showered without uttering another word to one another. Once I was done, I hopped out, dried off, and got my ass in bed. It was clear that Nariah was still in her feelings, and she had it. Instead of baiting her into another disagreement I was gone wait for her mood to shift. Maybe then the two of us could come to some type of understanding.

Dropping my phone down on the table I sat in front of the mixing board and replayed the track. Shit at the crib had been sticky for the past three days and I needed a moment to clear my head. Nariah’s show was in a few days, and I knew it would be all hands on deck so I’d had my assistant clear my schedule for the week.

I tried on a few occasions to help Nariah out, but she kept saying how she ain’t need my help. Her ass needed some kind of help cause all week muthafuckas had been in and out of the crib. Hell, even my niggas had been over helping her get ready. It was clear her ass just wasn’t fucking with me.

I could’ve forced myself in her mix, but I let her have it, instead I left the crib first thing this morning and had been held up in the studio. My plan was to stay busy until she decided she was ready to fuck with me.

Folding my arms across my chest I leaned back in the chair and bobbed my head to the track I’d just laid down. One of Nariah’s favorite songs was “Gonna Love Me” by Teyana Taylor so I thought it would be a cute gesture to spit a couple of verses over the track. Ya know, to let my girl know just how much I loved her. Hopefully I could

get Teyana's camp to approve it before the fashion show. If they did, it would be an ode to Nariah and I would have the DJ play it.

I was busy listening to the track when the studio door was pushed opened. When I tossed my head back and saw who the uninvited guest was, I cut the song.

"You must love me?" I joked. "You don't never pull up on this side of town." Rising from the stool I took the few steps and met Ma Dukes in the center of the room. "What you doing overhere?" I asked, and wrapped my arms around her, pulling her into a hug.

"Was at your house and noticed you were missing." She let me know after reciprocating my gesture.

"Yeah." I sighed. "Nari ain't fucking with me like that right now." Tossing my body down in the seat I folded my hands behind my head and gave Ma Dukes my undivided attention.

With raised eyebrows she confirmed. "I heard about Miami."

"Ma." Her raising her hand put an immediate halt to what I was 'bout to say.

"I also heard about what happened the other night between the two of you."

"Mayne." I groaned childlike. Nariah had to really be in her feelings if she was confiding in Ma Dukes. Early on the two of us made a conscious decision to keep our folks out of our business. We ain't wanna blur the lines and give nobody any preconceived notions 'bout each other. So, for my OG to be sitting in front of me giving me that "you know better look" my ass really was in the doghouse."

"Julius, I done told you plenty of times before if you not ready to step up and be the

man Nariah needs and a positive example for Juju then you need to let her go.”

“That’s just it Ma. I am ready.”

“Not ducking out of the hotel while she sleep you ain’t.”

“That was a one-time thing.” I sucked my teeth. “And I was at the studio.”

“Julius, you must’ve forgotten that I gave birth to you. I raised your lil ass. I know when you’re lying before it rolls off your lips.”

“I ain’t lying though Ma.”

“Julius.” She held her hand up again and sighed. “You are. And you know I usually don’t speak on anyones relationship but my own, but at some point, we gotta call a spade a spade. You gon’ fuck around and Nariah gon’ leave you and take Juju with her.”

My heart doubled in speed hearing Ma Dukes say that. I could stomach Nariah leaving me but what I couldn’t stomach was her taking my seed. In the beginning everything I did was for Ma Dukes. That was until Juju came into the picture. Now it was all for him. I thought signing my record deal was the greatest day of my life, but it wasn’t. The day Nariah pushed out my son was and would always be the best day of my life. I loved Nariah more than anything but the love I had for my jit just hit different.

“I can tell from that stupid look on your face that you never even considered what would happen if she left.”

“I mean. I thought ‘bout it.” I admitted. “Taking Juju never crossed my mind though.”

“Well allow me to break it to you. When two people who share a child split up one parent becomes the custodial parent while the other one has to settle for being part time. Now tell me how you think that’s going to affect Jude.”

Sighing dejectedly, I dropped my head. “I’on know.”

“I can tell.” She chuckled. “All I’m saying is whatever you do to Juju’s mother affects him the most. Nariah gon’ leave yo ass.” She snorted and from the way she said it I knew she wholeheartedly believed that shit too. “And we just gon’ have to see Juju whenever she allows us too.”

“Nariah not like that though Ma.”

“A hurt woman is the most vindictive creature ever. You out in these streets playing games like you don’t have everything to lose. Like Nariahneedsyou. Newsflash Julius, with or without you she’s going to be good. That girl a damn doctor.”

“She don’t practice.” I bleated.

“And she don’t have too.” She stated matter factly. “She still got money. What you think they gon’ stop booking her if y’all split up. Boy please.” She laughed. “Nariah a boss.”

“I ain’t saying allat Ma Dukes. I’m just saying.”

“Nothing.” She quipped. “You ain’t saying shit.” Patting me on the knee Ma Dukes got serious. “Whatever you got going on out there.” She pointed to the door. “Ain’t worth losing what you got at home. I suggest you straighten up and fly right ‘cause if she leaves I’mma help her pack her shit up.”

“Damn.” I groused. “Not you gone turn on ya boy like that. I’m your son.”

“And Juju is my grandson. I gotta stay on her good side if I want to continue having a relationship with him. But above all of that Julius, I’m a woman. A woman that has given my all to the wrong man. A man that I put on a pedestal ‘cause I justknewhe wouldn’t break my heart. Not after all of the shit I did for him. And I was wrong.”

Dabbing the corner of her eyes Ma Duke cleared her throat. “Ain’t nothing worse than loving a man that can’t keep his dick in his pants. Hurting Nariah is hurting Juju. You can’t separate the two. Do with that as you may. Just know when she walks—cause she’s going to do it when she finds out. Know that getting her back the second time around won’t be easy.” With nothing left to say Ma Dukes stood and smoothed out her skirt. “I raised you better, Julius. Don’t let me down.” Placing a kiss in the center of my forehead she turned and exited the room.

The shit Ma Dukes had just said lowkey had my chest on fire. If Nariah left and took Juju, I honestly don’t know how I would feel. That shit would hurt the fuck out of me. Juju was my heart and soul and not being able to see him every day would kill me. If I didn’t know nothing else, I knew it was officially time to cut Tamia off.

Using the phone they had in the studio I dialed Tamia’s number. When she answered the phone the sound of her voice disgusted me for some reason.

“Who is this?”

“This Juice.”

“Hey baby. What number are you calling me from?” She probed.

“Say Tamia. Whatever we was doing gotta die down.”

“What you mean by that?”

“Exactly what it sound like. I can’t fuck with you no more. In any capacity.”

“Oh.” She giggled. “Baby mama must be breathing down your neck. That’s cute but okay Juice. I hear ya talking.”

“Nawl.” I shook my head as if she could see me. “This ain’t me just talking. Dead ass Tamia we done.”

This girl yawned like I was boring her or some shit. That shit ain’t do nothing but piss me off. “You said that the last time, Juice. When she stop bitching, you’ll be back.”

“On my soul I won’t.” I swore before hanging up the phone.

I knew me running into Tamia was unavoidable seeing as though she was an industry bopper but I meant what I said. I couldn’t fuck with her no more. Not if it meant losing my family. I prayed if I saw her out, she would keep it P. If not, I was bound to have a problem on my hands.

nariah

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Tucking my phone in my robe pocket I closed my eyes and listened to my assistant Jada run down the check list while I got my face beat. Today was the day I was unveiling my baby to the world and my ass had been on edge since I woke up this morning. Everyone around me kept telling me not to be nervous but shit...something about putting my baby out there for the world to judge had me scared shitless.

“Who in the room with the models?” I asked.

“Your sister for right now. Shunta has been in and out and so has Stormy.”

“Okay.” I sighed in relief. Stormy was the person who was essential for bringing Jurnito life. When I expressed my interest in coming out with a swimsuit line Tito had introduced the two of us. Together the two of us worked around the clock on this collection. She was the brains behind the entire thing.

“You seen Julius yet?”

“No. No one has heard from him.” Jada mumbled. “Everyone has been trying to call him.”

“It’s cool. He will pop up eventually.”

“Right. I’m going to go check and see how much we have left.” She faltered before

ambling out of the room.

“Uh uh bitch.” Devon my make-up artist chastised when a tear rolled down my cheek. Snatching a Kleenex off the counter he forced it into my hand. “You not about to mess up my masterpiece.”

“I need Julius.” I mumbled lowly. When I left home this morning, he promised he would be here before the show started and now his ass was missing in action.

“Girlllllll.” Devon drawled. “Juice ass will be here. He probably got caught up with something. Now hold you head up.”

Tilting my head up I stared at the ceiling. “Today is a big deal, Devon.”

“We know. Just like Juice knows. He will be here Nariah. Trust me he won’t miss something like this.” He alleged.

I heard everything he was saying but Devon didn’t understand how tense shit had been at the house. Julius and I weren’t necessarily walking around on eggshells but there was some uncertainty looming through the house. As much as I wanted things between us to be okay my heart wouldn’t allow me to let my guard down.

Did I think Julius would miss my big day? No, I didn’t. but the fact that he wasn’t here right now kind of made me feel a way. My mama had picked Jude up before I left so I knew he wasn’t getting him ready. Grabbing my phone, I decided to text him.

Me: Where are you?

I held my breath and waited for my message to say ‘read’. When it did those infamous three dots danced at the bottom of the screen a few seconds before disappearing. When it happened a second time my heart rate doubled. Grabbing

Devon by the wrist I asked, “Can you give me a moment?”

“Chile.” He sighed before giving in. “One moment Nariah.”

I waited until Devon had left the room before dialing Julius’s number. The phone rang repeatedly in my ear before rolling over to the voice mail. I was in the process of calling back when I heard the door open behind me. “Just a moment.” I croaked out. My breath got caught in the back of my throat when I heard a phone ringing behind me.

Spinning around in my chair I gasped when my eyes landed on Julius. Ending the call, I tossed the phone on the counter, dropped my head, and bawled my eyes out.

“I know bad ass Nari ain’t sitting up in here crying.” Julius teased from behind me.

Covering my eyes with my hands I sniffled. “I thought you weren’t coming.”

“Nariah.” He chuckled. Stepping in front of me Julius wrapped his hands around my wrist and pulled my hands down. “You ain’t thought I was ‘bout to miss your big day.”

Instead of responding I nodded my head making Julius toss his back and chuckle. “Girl come here.” He ordered and lifted me out of the chair. With his arms wrapped around my waist Julius walked us over to the couch in the corner of the room and sat down. Patting his legs he instructed me to sit as well.

“Now tell me what made you think I was going to miss this shit, Nariah?”

“I don’t know.” I shrugged. “They said you wasn’t answering nobody calls. Then you didn’t respond to my text or answer my calls.” Fishing the balled-up Kleenex out of my pocket I straightened it out as best as I could and used it to wipe my eyes. “I

thought you was bailing on me.”

“And it never occurred to you that I was possibly setting something up for you?” He asked and stared me in the face waiting for an answer.”

“No.” I pouted, making him chuckle.

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“You so hard but sitting here with your face fucked up from crying.” He teased.

Before I could say anything else soft knocks to the door caught my attention. “Come in.”

“Aye Juice. Where you want these at?” Lox asked as he stepped in the room carrying an arrangement of the most gorgeous red roses that I’d ever seen.

Tossing his head to the other side of the room Julius told him. “You can sit ‘em over there.”

“Aight.” Lox nodded. When he left the room, I thought he was done but he wasn’t. In fact, when he came back through the door, he was telling somebody behind him the same thing Julius had told him. For the next few seconds people were in and out of the room delivering not only flowers but a bunch of shopping bags. Leave it to Julius to go all out.

Once everything had been brought in Julius leaned back onto the couch and pondered. “And you were crying for?”

“Shut up.” Playfully rolling my eyes at him I laid my head on his chest. “I’m nervous.”

“Why though?”

“What if they don’t like it?”

“What if they do? He countered.

“Julius.” I groaned. “You’re not helping.”

“You already know this shit gon’ be a hit Nariah. You been working on it for a minute and everything that could’ve gone wrong has been ironed out. Them folks gone fuck with it ‘cause it’s you. Them not liking it is the least of my worries.” Nipping me on the cheek with his finger Julius grabbed my face and turned it to him. “You’re Nariah the Great. Everything you touchturns into gold. Don’t be nervous ‘cause you got this. Besides I’mma be right there in the audience with my pistol in my hand daring a muthafucka to say something negative.

Laughing at his antics I shook my head. “You are insane for real.”

“Bout Nariah I’m grippy socks crazy. You ain’t know.” He affirmed.

“Thank you, Julius.” I breathed.

“Ain’t no need. You already know how I’m coming behind you, love. Now stop crying and let Devon fix yo face cause whoo—You look like Beyonce did on that video when she had that black shit running down her face.” He heckled, making me elbow him in the stomach. Getting serious Julius sat up. “Dead ass Nari. It’s up from here. You did this shit effortlessly, now it’s time to sit back and watch muthafuckas fall in love with it.”

A wide smile broke out across my face. “I love you, Julius.”

“Not like I love you.” He avowed. Sucking my bottom lip into his mouth, Julius kissed me so passionately that I almost forgot where we were. When he pulled back, he pushed my hair out of my face. “Do yo shit twin.”

Once I finished getting myself together Julius slipped out of room and let Devon know I was ready. One look at my face and his sassy ass was pissed. The rest of the time was spent with him fussing while he worked overtime to fix the mess I'd made.

After I got dressed it was officially time for my show to start. With my family sitting in the front row beside me my models hit the runway and did the damn thing. All of my hard work had come down to this one moment. When the show wrapped, the immense amount of love I received from the crowd had my heart smiling. I couldn't even get through my thank you speech because everyone was up on their feet cheering me on. First graduation and now dropping my swimwear line.

The one thing I was the happiest about was showing my son that all of the times where I missed putting him to bed at night wasn't in vain. His mommy was setting up his future. If nothing else I wanted him to be proud of me and the way he was clinging to me, I would say mission accomplished.

Sitting back in the chair I crossed my ankles and stared at the contract in front of me. It had been a month since I'd unveiled my swimwear line and like Julius predicted it was a hit. So much so that I had been getting offers for investors. Of course I'd shot them all down, in the event that I needed some front money my man was more than willing to take care of that.

The less hands you had in the pot the less profit you had to split, or however Tito said it. What I had done was took a few department stores up on their offer to have my line in their stores. The contract that I was reviewing was from Nordstrom, Tito had sent it over a couple of hours ago, but I'd been out shopping with Shunta and failed to read over it.

Now that I had a few minutes to spare I decided to take check it out.

Sauntering out of the dressing room, Shunta stood in front of the mirror with her

hands perched on her hips. “Nariah, you like these?”

Locking my phone, I tossed it in my bag and glanced at the rhinestone embellished Christian Dior tights and nodded my head. “I do. I got the same ones.”

“Bitch. You damn near have everything in here.” She fake pouted.

“You gotta take that up with Julius.” I teased.

“Can’t stand his ass either.” She laughed and spun around in the mirror. “They look good on my ass.”

“They do.” I confirmed.

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“I’mma get em.” She finally said before twirling off. “You getting anything else?”

“Nawl. I think I’m good.”

“Okay.”

Shunta had the sales associate pull a few more pieces and once she had more than enough shit we were checked out and headed to Mariposa at Neiman to eat lunch. After being escorted to our seats the two of us ordered a cocktail.

“Friend, you gone come to Vegas for my birthday?”

“It’s in two weeks, right? The nineteenth.”

“It is.” She confirmed.

Taking a sip out of my drink, I nodded my head. “That’s the plan. Julius has a show that weekend in D.C and he’s taking Jude with him so I’m available.”

“Good. My new friend gon’ fly us out on his private jet.”

“What new friend?” I queried, cause the last I heard Shunta, and her baby daddy was back fucking off.

“Somebody I met at Allure the other night.”

“I thought you was?—”

“You thought wrong.” She frowned and waved me off. “I gave him some pussy a few times and had the nigga thinking we was ‘bout to be a family again. Yeah no.” She shook her head. “I tried and failed.” The way her eyes dipped down I could tell it was more to the story, but I wasn’t going to pry.

Hell for once Julius and I were back to how we were before the whole Miami debacle. The night of my fashion show had ultimately put us in a better position. I wasn’t looking over my shoulder at him or doubting anything he was saying. Can’t really say why it changed but I was happy that it had.

“I’m sorry friend.”

“Don’t be. He did it.”

“I know but still.”

“Truthfully Nariah it’s cool. I knew better than to double back with Rome.”

“You got kids with the nigga though Shunta so it’s perfectly okay if you wanted to give it another go. Can’t nobody fault you for that. And definitely not me.”

“The last thing I’m worried ‘bout is a bitch judging me. Hell, I’m judging myself. Should’ve fucked that nigga and ran his pockets like I usually do. Thinking with fat ma had my ass all sad. I see the light now sis.” She giggled and stuck her tongue out.

“Okay girl. I hear you.” My phone buzzing inside of my purse put the conversation on pause. Pulling it out, I unlocked it and narrowed my eyes at the screen. “This nigga.”

“Nari, what’s wrong?”

Instead of telling her I decided to just show her. Turning the phone around I held it up. Snatching the phone out of my hand Shunta swiped through the pictures. “I know like hell Juice ain’t go out like that.”

“Apparently he did.” Licking the corner of my mouth I thought of every lie that nigga had told me.

According to the post Lariah had sent me Julius had been fucking around with the bitch I asked him about in Miami. Sis decided to air the nigga out ‘cause he abruptly stopped paying the rent on her condo. I guess she thought airing him out was going to do something. If anything, she had pissed him off ‘cause now I had proof that he had really been fucking around.

Handing me back the phone Shunta asked. “What you gone do now, Nari?”

“Oh I’mma leave that nigga.” I stated with conviction. “In fact.” I paused to pull a few bills out of my wallet. Dropping them on the table I excused myself. “I’mma hit you up later.” Thank God my shit was already in my truck. Racing out of Neiman’s café I dialed my mama number.

“Nariah, I already know. Your sister sent it to me.”

“Oh, I didn’t call for that. Can you get Jude from Ms. Norma house. I’m ‘bout to run home and pack us some clothes.”

“Yeah, I can leave right now.”

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“Bet. I’mma come get him from you when I’m done.”

“Nariah.” My mama called out. The beeping in my ear indicated that another call was coming through.

Pulling the phone down I glanced at the phone. “Give me a second I’mma call you right back.” Clicking over I sucked in a deep breath before answering. “What’s up?”

“Nariah, where you at?” The desperation in Julius’s voice let me know that he’d been made aware of the post circulating the internet.

Deciding to play like shit was all good I said “At Neiman’s with Shunta. We just finished eating.”

“Bae.”

“Why you sound like that?” I asked his ass. Handing my ticket to the valet I stood off to the side while he ran off to retrieve my truck.

“Like— “ He cleared his throat before recovering. “What I sound like?”

“Like you nervous or some shit.” I giggled to throw him off. “Thank you, sweetie.” I said to the valet after taking my keys out of his hand. After slipping him some money I hopped in my truck.

“Where you headed?”

“To the house so I can put all of this shit up. What time you hitting the stage?”

“Shit.” He dragged out. “In like fifteen minutes. Aye Nariah you good?”

“Yes.” I drawled. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Oh okay.” He sighed. “No reason. I was just checking in with ya. Say Nari, you know I love you right.”

“I do. And I love you more.”

“I’m coming to the crib as soon as I’m done.”

“I’ll be waiting.” I lied.

Julius didn’t let me off the phone for another few minutes. He kept asking if I was okay and every time, he asked I lied. I knew the minute he finished his performance he was gone do the dash getting back to the house. Unlucky for him I would not be there.

The first time Julius cheated I purchased a three bedroom, three and a half bath condo in Buckhead. When I moved back in with him, I kept it. It’s where Lariah stayed anytime she came into town and didn’t feel like staying with my mama.

Julius knew about my condo, even tried to convince me to rent it out but I refused. Lucky enough for me I kept it furnished and move in ready. By the time Julius made it back to the house me nor Jude would be there to greet him.

When I made it to the house I shared with Julius I stripped out of the clothes I had on and threw on a set from Alo. I took my time packing up everything that I needed because I had no plans on coming back over this way. I had even went as far as

removing my degrees from the wall as well as taking me and Jude's birth certificates out of the safe.

In the event that I missed anything I had no doubt that Tito or one of the other guys would bring it to me. Once I had my truck packed down, I stopped by my condo and unloaded everything before going over to my mama house to get my baby. As soon as my feet hit the pavement my mama was standing in the doorway asking questions.

"Nariah, you sure you wanna leave?"

"As sure as I'll ever be." Kissing her on the cheek I stepped around her and entered the house with her trailing a few paces behind me. "Jude." I called out.

When he ran from the back I smiled. "Hey baby. You have fun at your Meme house?"

"Yes ma'am." He beamed.

Crouching down I wrapped my arms around him and pecked his forehead. "Good."

"You ready to go home?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Alright." I stood. "Ma, I'mma call you when we get settled."

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“Nariah, think about him.” She nodded her head toward Jude.

I know my mama wasn’t encouraging me to stay with Julius. That was the least of my concern, her plight was how all of this was going to interrupt my son’s life and I understood that. However, I also knew when to hold and when to fold. And right now, I was choosing me. Nibbling on my bottom lip I looked down at Jude before bringing my eyes back up to my mama. “I am.” I muttered before giving her a faint smile.

Julius should’ve thought about Jude before he fucked off. Now he was going to have to face the consequences and explain to his son why the two of us were no longer living with him.

juice

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Glancing down at my phone, I tried to talk myself down off the ledge. I was in the middle of sound check when my fucking phone kept going off. I thought something had happened to one of my hearts when Tito ordered my DJ to cut the track. The last fucking thing I expected was to be aired out by Tamia.

Bitch had got on Instagram posting ‘bout how we had been fucking off behind Nari back and how I refused to pay her rent and shit. Hoe even put screenshots of our texts up. The nigga in me wanted to kill that bitch but when I thought logically, I knew this wasn’t on Tamia. I fucked up, hell. I was the one in a relationship not her ass. She ain’t owe Nari no loyalty, I did.

When the shit came out, I hit Nari up and if she had heard the news she ain't let me know. The only way I knew she had found out was 'cause Juju called me from his iPad asking me if we got a new house. My ass was confused until he flipped the camera and showed me Nariah's condo. He said his mama had told him they was staying there now. What she should've told him was not to tell anybody but who am I kidding. Juju all me, my lil hitta was gone put me up on game.

Instead of having the driver take me to the crib I had him bringing me across town so I could pull up on Nari and my jit.

"Don't go in here on no stupid shit either Juice." Tito said the minute we pulled up to Nari building.

"I ain't." I lied. "I'm 'bout to go get my son though."

"You moving foul, Juice. What you expect?"

"I ain't expect her to take my fucking son out the crib!" I roared.

Holding his hands up palm side out Tito conceded, "You got it nigga."

"I know I do." Hiking my jeans up I hopped out of the sprinter and started for the door. Over my shoulder I heard Tito tell Byron to come with me. I ain't give a fuck who came to be honest. When I stepped through the door the bellman spoke to me. The nigga was so starstruck he ain't even ask for id or which unit I was going to see.

"You think she gone let him go with you?" Byron questioned once we were on the elevator.

"Choice ain't really up to her if I'm keeping it a bean."

“Aight Juice.” He snorted. “She done already whopped yo ass once with a belt. Don’t get up here and get beat again.”

“I wish Nari would.”

When the elevator dinged the door opened revealing Nari’s front door. Ambling over to it I beat on that muthafucka like I was the police. Nari had the penthouse suite, so her unit was the only one on this floor. That was probably the only thing working in my favor right now.

I heard Juju yelling that somebody was at the door and when he asked if he could open it Nari and I both yelled no. Juju opening any door was something we didn’t play with. Muthafuckas was weird nowadays and celebrity or not our address could easily be found.

The chains on the door started to rattle letting me know that Nari was getting ready to open it.

Narrowing her eyes at me, Nariah stood in between the door, blocking my view. “Why are you here, Julius?”

“Fuck you mean?” I asked and looked her up and down. “My muthafucking son in here.”

“With his mother. Where he’s going to stay.” She shared while snaking her neck around.

“Look I know you heard?—.”

That muthafucka hauled off and slapped my ass before I could even get the shit out of my mouth. “Yeah, I heard. Yo lying ass told me you ain’t know that bum

bitch. Shesaid y'all been fucking off for a cool minute."

"Nariah."

"Nigga don't call my muthafucking name. I knew yo ass was lying then. I couldn't prove it, but I knew. Bitch was looking at me like I was stepping on her toes. Whole time it was her doing the shit to me."

"You mad—I know right now you not tryna hear nothing I gotta say. I just wanna get Juju and take him home."

“Oh, he home.” She snarled.

“Fuck that supposed to mean?”

“Just what it sound like. We not coming back.”

“You tryna take my son, Nariah?” I pinched the bridge of my nose. “I just know you ain’t convinced yoself that I’mma let that shit fly.”

“I’ll never take him from you stupid. But this is where we’re living from now on. You can get him whenever you want him.”

“Well send him out.”

“Just not tonight.” Folding her arms across her chest she stared at me like she was waiting for me to make the next move.

“You got it, Nari.” I accepted defeat. I mean what else could I do? I fucked up so ultimately the ball was in her court.

“Jude, come say goodnight to your pappy.”

Nariah opened the door and took a few steps back so I could get to Juju. “Hey buddy.” I kneeled.

“Hey daddy.” He met me halfway for a hug. “We going home now?”

“Nawl big man.” Getting choked up I tossed my head back. “You and ya mama gone stay here for a while.”

“But why?” he asked and glanced behind him at Nariah.

“Daddy uh...Daddy did something bad and ya mama a lil mad right now.”

“Dog.” Byron groused behind me but shit I ain’t know else to say. I wasn’t ‘bout to tell him Nariah had left my ass and moved out.

“Mommy, can you not be mad at my daddy anymore?” Juju asked her.

Nariah mumbled something under breath before smiling at him. “I’m not mad baby.”

“Okay she not mad. Can we go home?” He asked again.

“Not tonight buddy. I’mma come get you tomorrow. How ‘bout that?”

“Okay.” He mumbled uncertainly. Holding him back I looked at him. “You know I love you right.”

“Yes sir.” Juju nodded.

“Good and you know daddy gon’ always be here right.”

“Yes sir.”

“Aight.” I held my fist out. “Pound me up.” Juju stretched his fist out and knocked it against mine. “Go to your room and let me holla at ya mama. I’mma call you as soon as I wake up cause I’mma be on my way.”

He eyed me suspiciously before confirming that he understood and walking away.

“How we gone do this Nariah?” I asked as soon a Juju was out of view.

“I don’t have an answer for you Julius. That’s probably something you should’ve considered before you stepped out.”

“I did consider it.” Closing my eyes I ran my hands down my face. “Nariah, I’m sorry as fuck bruh. I wasn’t thinking.”

“I know. What you love that girl or something?”

“Hell nawl.” I responded quickly. Love is what I felt for Nariah. I had nothing in my heart for Tamia. I did what I did for her 'cause shit I was a trick. But that didn’t mean I loved her.”

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“You did.” Nariah scoffed. “I know you, Julius. You love that girl, that’s why you fucked around with her for so long.”

“I ain’t mean for it to end up like this. I cut Tamia off, and I guess she jus?—”

“Just what?” Nariah spat. “Bitter. She’s bitter ‘cause the nigga she been fucking with up and decided he wanted to be faithful. If we gone be anything Julius be fucking for real.”

“What can I do to fix this Nariah?”

“What can you do to fix this?” She repeated. Palming my face Nariah mushed my ass. “What you could’ve done was keep ya dick in ya pants and not fuck that girl. You could’ve kept it a bean and put me on game instead of embarrassing me by letting this girl air yo ass out on social media. You could’ve done a lot but like a fucking coward you didn’t. So now you gotta live with me moving on.”

Umph, I see what type of time Nariah on. She was popping off at the mouth and shit and all I saw was fucking red. Talking ‘bout how she was gone go give her pussy to a nigga that deserved it. And I was all kind of fuck niggas and ain’t shit ass niggas. She was gone hurt me like I hurt her and all that rara shit. Grabbing her by the robe I hiked her ass up against the door.

“Fuck off me! I’m just talking to her.” I raged when Byron tried to pull me off her. “Nariah I will murk you. I love you but I’ll kill you if you even think ‘bout fucking with another nigga. You don’t want that on yo conscience love, I promise you don’t.”

“Julius this late in the game your threats don’t move me. I’m done with yo ass.”

Getting eye level with her I chuckled. “You ain’t done with shit.” I let her robe go. “Go fuck a nigga if you want and yo folks gone be picking out yo burial plot.”

“Julius, fuck you.” She laughed manically. “Niggasbeenin my inbox. I been playing them niggas to the left for yo nothing ass. I’ll go fuck a nigga, get pregnant, and bring the baby home for you to raise!”

Nariah pushed the wrong fucking button. I knew she was mad and all but that bullshit she just let slip out of her mouth cut a lil too deep. “Bitch you got me fucked up!” Before I could catch myself, my hand was landing across her face.

The hallway grew eerily quiet. Nariah’s mouth was gaped wide opened, and her hand was over the area I struck. It took a few seconds for the shit I had done to register in everyone’s mind.

“Nigga you muthafucking tripping.” This time when Byron pushed me back, I didn’t fight him on it.

Rushing to Nari’s side he walked her further into the crib while I stood there with my hands on my head. “Nariah, I’m sorry.”

“Get out!” She wailed and turned back to Byron. “I’m calling the cops.”

“I’m sorry.” Tucking my hands in my pocket I backed out of her crib. I moved on autopilot until I was back outside and sitting in the sprinter. I heard Tito asking me what happened but the sounds of police sirens advancing on us drowned him out.

When twelve pulled up I stepped out of the sprinter with my hands in the air. After reading me my rights I was cuffed and thrown into the backseat. For the first time

since I'd been in my position, my name was now in the blogs all because I fucked the wrong bitch.

Ducking my head I trekked out of the precinct doors with Tito and my attorney beside me. The three of us didn't utter a word until we were in the back of the black truck pulling away from the precinct.

Tito was the first one to speak up when he asked, "What the fuck were you thinking, Juice?"

Dropping my head I sighed. "I wasn't."

"You sure as fuck wasn't. Byron said Juju was standing in the hallway watching everything unfold."

"Fuck!" I yelled and punched the seat in front of me. "Bruh, can you take me to get my son?"

"Absolutely not! He's with Nariah and until I can get this bullshit ass domestic violence charge squared away, you're not going anywhere near her."

"I need to see my son, Tito." I insisted. Right now, my ass was facing some serious ass charges and the only thing that could make this ache in my heart go away was Juju. "Please man. Call Nariah for me and tell her we gone come get him. I'll stay in here and let you grab him."

"Juice." Tito shook his head.

"Tito man please." I begged. "That's all I want." I violated and Nariah had every reason to feel that way she felt. I owed her an apology but right now my focus was on Juju. If what Byron said was true, then I needed to see my son and apologize to him

for putting my hands on his mama.

I never in my life wanted to taint the image of me that Juju had. Ain't never wanna give him a reason to look at me as anything other than his hero. Seeing my son was a must. "Tito." I said again, stressing just how serious I was.

"Aight man." Grabbing his phone up he dialed Nariah.

The truck was silent while we waited for her to pick up. "Hello." She sniffled.

"Nari, listen I'm with Juice."

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Cutting him off she cried. “I don’t want to talk to him.”

Her whimpering was breaking the shit out of my heart, and I couldn’t stop myself from speaking up. “Nariah baby. I fucked up.”

“I hate you.” She sobbed.

Taking the phone from Tito I took it off speaker and held it up to my ear. “Baby I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking and I know that don’t make the shit right, but I am sorry.”

“I’m so mad at you Julius.”

“I know you are. Hell, I’m mad at me too.”

“Why couldn’t you just be faithful. You ruined everything that we worked for.”

“I know baby and I don’t know why Nariah. I can’t tell you why I did it ‘cause I legit don’t know. But baby I fucked up.” The line went quiet; the only thing I could hear was muffled cries. “Baby I know you might not wanna hear this, but I don’t love that girl. I never did.”

“It doesn’t matter now Julius. Nothing you say will change the way I feel.” She fretted.

“And baby I’m not tryna change anything. I’m letting you know the only person I love is you.”

“But you didn’t love me enough to be faithful.” She sobbed.

Nariah had my ass there. I didn’t know how to respond so I didn’t say shit.

“Like I thought.” She finally said after a minute of us sitting on the phone listening to each other breath. “Goodbye Julius.”

“Wait. Before you hang up Nariah, can I come get Juju.”

“Your mother has him.” She clarified before ending the call.

“Take me by Ma Dukes crib.”

I spent the rest of the commute to my mama crib in silence. Tito and my lawyer were discussing ways to make this go away while I was trying to figure out how I could get my girl back. I know Nariah said she was done but my heart wouldn’t just let me up and walk away from her like that. I really wanted to pull up to her crib, kidnap her ass, and make her be with me but I knew it was no use. I lost Nariah when I got in bed with another bitch.

Muthafuckas had been preaching ‘bout me keeping my nose clean and here I was thinking I was moving like I ain’t have everything to lose. Done fucked my life up for a bitch that ain’t hold a candle to my girl. I didn’t know how I was going to go about getting Nari back but eventually I was gone make the shit happen.

What I did know was when the dust settled, I was gone get some of my homegirls from around the way to bank Tamia’s ass. Bitch had to know that fucking with my family was a death sentence. If I knew I could get away with the shit I’d handle her myself, but I was in enough trouble with the label as is.

When we pulled up to Ma Dukes crib her and Juju was hopping out of her car. He

was still in the same pajamas he had on last night, so she must've just picked him up. Before the truck could even stop, I was hopping out. "Juju." I yelled, gaining his attention and mine.

Normally when Juju saw me his face would light up and he would run to me. This time I wasn't so lucky. Instead, he latched on to my mama and looked at me with his face balled up. Ambling over to where they stood, I reached for him. "Buddy."

"No!" he yelled.

"Julius." Ma Dukes keened.

Getting down on my knees I focused my attention on Juju. Staring in directly into his eyes I said. "When a man messes up what is he supposed to do?"

Juju hesitated a bit before saying. "Apologize."

"Right." I nodded. "Mistakes are always forgivable if one has the courage to admit them." I said, referencing this quote I found on an affirmation app one time. And what did I teach you about forgiveness?"

"Forgiveness is the final form of love." He mumbled.

"Good job buddy." I praised lowly. "You remembered. Juju I'm sorry for hurting your mama. I won't try to explain why I did it because there is no justifiable reason. Just know that I will never raise my hand to strike her ever again in life."

"You promise?" He asked with a face full of sorrow that I'm sure matched mine.

"All I have is my word." I held my hand up.

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Juju looked up at my mama who nodded her head in approval before wrapping his arms around my neck. Rubbing my hands up and down his back I fought back tears. I got out of character last night and broke my number one rule. The way my son stared at me brought all of this shit to the surface.

In all of my years I had never witnessed a man strike my mama 'cause had I, my ass would be in solitary confinement. Hell, I'd never even thought about hitting Nariah. I just lost my cool and did some fucked up shit. That put my son in a bad situation. Going forward I would walk the fuck away before I lost my top like I did last night.

nariah

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Rolling over in bed I tugged my duvet over my head and slid down, burying my head under the cover. It had been four days since Julius, and I argued at my front door. And it had been three days since I last saw Juju.

He'd been calling me from his iPad trying to see me, but I didn't want to face him until the bruise on my cheek healed. I still couldn't believe that Julius struck me like that. And granted I said some foul shit but even still he should've had enough restraint than to do some shit like that.

I was so embarrassed that I'd pretty much shut myself off from the world and laid in bed like my life was over. I mean—in a way it was. My relationship issues were being spread across every blog site there was. Not only that, but someone had also leaked Julius arrest to the public and someone had come out with this story about him

beating me to a bloody pulp.

The fact that I hadn't been on social media made the shit sound true. Julius would never beat me. Hell, I didn't think he would ever hit me either, but he had. When he apologized, I knew he was being genuine because that's the type of person he was. Julius wasn't a bad guy he just had fucked up ways.

All day I had been lying here blaming myself for how out of control things between us had gotten. Had I kept not giving him any play the two of us wouldn't be here right now. But then Juju also wouldn't be here so it's kind of like I don't really regret it because this relationship gave me my son shine.

"Sissy!!!" Lariah yelled from the front. I knew this was all my mamas doing. She'd been over a few times trying to get me out of the house and I refused to leave.

Groaning I kicked my feet like a child throwing a tantrum and flipped the covers back. "Why are you here? Didn't you just leave town?"

"I surely did." She popped. "Then mama called and said you was hiding out in the house."

"I think I got a reason." I sighed and turned over to face the door.

One look at my face had Lariah's nostrils flaring. "I'm going to kill Juice ass."

"Now you see why I'm still in the house."

Sauntering over to the bed Lariah sat on the side of me and ran her finger across my bruise. "Really it looks better than what I thought. Probably because it's been a few days."

“Yeah, it was fucking purple.” I chuckled softly.

“What the fuck were y’all thinking? Mama said Juju was home.”

“He was. Saw it all happen.” I whispered the last part.

“Did he have questions?” My sister probed.

“He did. And I left it up to Julius to clear up.”

“Well seeing as though he did it, I think it’s only fair.”

“So did I.” The look on my baby face was one I would never forget. Had Jude been a few years older I had no doubt in my mind that he would’ve killed Julius. My baby was torn for starters but once the initial shock wore off, he kept telling me how much he hated his father just like I did.

I had to tell him that adults go through things sometimes and it’s during those times where we say things that we really don’t mean. I explained that I didn’t hate Julius, and I could never hate him, but I was disappointed in his actions.

Not once did I make an excuse for Julius because it wasn’t my place to reassure our son that he wouldn’t do anything like that again. As I’ve stated before Julius is a damn good father to Jude, I couldn’t have asked for a better one. The two of them had a special bond just like Jude and I had one. I would never come between that. I left it up to Julius to fix that problem, which is why when he called asking for him, I let him know his mama had him.

“Have the two of you talked since then?”

“Who me and Julius?”

“Yeah. I know he’s not over there letting your mind wonder. I know he’s tried to get you back.”

“He has. I’m not going back.” Concierge called and let me know that I had a few items that needed to be delivered to my condo. When I found out where they were coming from, I refused them and all future packages. Since I’d powered my phone off, I didn’t know if Julius had tried other ways to contact me.

Hopping up Lariah rounded the bed, kicked her shoes off, and slid under the covers with me. Pulling me into her she grabbed my head and laid it on her chest. Nestling up to her I closed my eyes and listened to her heartbeat while tears pooled on my lower eyelids.

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“Are you sure you’re done Nari?” she queried after a bout of silence.

“I am.” I sniffled. “Two years. They’ve been messing around that long. She’s been at shows with him when I wasn’t there. Been around everybody. They all knew ‘bout this girl and nobody thought to tell me.”

“I’m mad that you expected them to.”

Lifting my head up I looked at her. “That’s my family too, Lariah.”

“Okay and. I’m not refuting that they are. However, that’s a family you inherited, they’ve known that nigga longer than they’ve known you.” Lariah grabbed my head and pulled me back down. Stroking my hair, she hummed while I lay there mulling over her words.

After a minute I finally said. “It’s not fair.”

“Nothing about life is. Juice fucked up Nari, but he’s human.”

I tsked. “Sure.”

“He is.” Lariah laughed. “A fucked up one but you knew that he had it in him. This isn’t the first time.”

“He promised he wouldn’t do it again.”

“And the nigga lied.”

“He did more than lie.” I scoffed. “He was in a whole ass relationship with this girl. They went out on dates and shit while I’m at the crib taking care of his kid. He was tricking off on her and shit. Flying her out to be with him. The nigga was really in another relationship.” I chuckled at the thought.

Julius didn’t just cheat he did his biggest one on my ass. Like what we had didn’t even fucking matter to him.

“So again. What happens next?”

“Well... For starters I’mma drop the charges on him. It wasn’t like the nigga whooped my ass like the blogs seem to think. If I drop them then he should get off with a slap on the wrist.”

“Okay we dropping the charges.” Lariah rattled off like she was making a list. “What else?”

“The two of us will coparent. Eventually I’ll move on and find me a new nigga.”

Lariah stopped rubbing my head. “See bitch I was with you until you said that last part. Now you tryna get all of our ass killed.”

“Girl.” I giggled. “Julius don’t do shit but make a bunch of threats.”

“That he is capable of following through on. Are you crazy?” She fussed.

“Can’t no nigga that I’m not with clock my pussy. Julius and I are done. Fuck y’all think I’m supposed to do. Sit around like I’m fucking Amish.”

“Aye them Amish hoes be fucking more than anybody.”

“Exactly!” I boasted. “Eventually I’mma move on.”

“Yo ass better pray when that time come that yo nigga done went through a few anger management courses.”

“That man no longer belongs to me.”

“He doesn’t have to belong to you. Bitch you belong to him.” Lariah chided. “No seriously though. I’m proud of you for choosing yourself. The last time you went back because you were determined to give Juju something neither of you had growing up.

Just because there’s a kid involved doesn’t mean the two of you have to be together. Juice knew this was a possibility when he was out tricking off on the next hoe. Let him deal with whatever being separated comes with. In the event that you decide to forgive the nigga and take him back I’ll put a ‘dumb bitch’ sticker on your forehead, but I’ll still have your back.”

“Girl go to fucking hell.” I laughed. “Thank you sissy. I needed this pep talk.”

“I know you did. That’s why I’m here.”

Holding my pinky out I waited for her to wrap hers around mine. “I love you, Lariah.”

“I love you more sissy.”

I won't sit up here and pretend that my talk with my sister cured my broken heart. I was hurt as bitch and probably would be for a mighty long time. I'd been with that nigga since I was eighteen. Everything I knew about love and relationships wasted directly to that man and now I had to pick up my life and unlearn some shit. Would it happen overnight? Hell nawl. I can't say for sure that I won't double back a time or two.

What I will say is, heartbreak isn't forever. At some point the rain gotta dry up and the rainbow has to come out. It's all a matter of hold long it takes.

Turning around in my seat I pulled the Beats headphones down. “Jude, you wanna go eat first or you ready to go jump?”

Pausing his iPad, he looked up at me. “Can we eat there?”

“Sure. If that's what you wanna do.”

“Yes ma'am.”

“Okay cool.” Turning back around I let my driver know we could head to Ninja Kidz. It had been six months since Julius and I split up. Julius pretty much got Jude anytime he wanted, the only time the two of them spent more than a few days apart was when Julius would be travelling. Other than that, my baby was bouncing from house to house. While it wasn't the most ideal situation, we dealt with it as best as we could.

Anytime I had to travel for a hosting and wanted Jude with me my mama would travel with us. Like today, I was booked for an appearance at Omnia nightclub and brought my baby along so that the two of us could spend some time together. Jurni had my ass so busy that we hadn't had the chance to have a mommy/buddy date.

When I told him that he and his Meme were joining me on this trip he was so excited. He gave me a list of activities that he was dying to do and before we hopped on a flight back home, he and I was going to do it.

Since I had missed Shunta's birthday trip, I hit her up and invited her to tag along and since she was still kicking it with her Vegas boo, she was down for the ride. Once we landed and checked in, she parted ways and promised to be back before I left for the club.

"What all you got planned for the day?" My mama asked.

"Kicking it with Jude until like five. I bought y'all tickets to go see Lilo and Stitch.

That's one of the things on his list and since I'm taking him to the aquarium, I figured you would do this solid for me." I smiled, trying to butter my mama up.

"Oh, so I gotta go sit through a show. While you do what?"

"Take a nap." I giggled. "I mean just last month I took him to the show. And you of all people know how much I hate the movies."

"Ummhmm, I hate it too. But anytime you or your sister wanted to go I took y'all."

"And I took him." I fake pouted.

Rolling her eyes she gave in. "I'll take him Nari."

“Thank you, mommy.” I beamed. “He needs to call his daddy before y’all go though.”

“Now why I gotta oversee that. I thought the two of you were doing good.”

“We’re getting along.” I shrugged.

“He’s been okay since that last incident.”

The last incident she was referencing was the time my baby daddy crashed out on Instagram after a baseball player posted a picture of us on his story. I took Jude to an event at the Braves stadium and a few of the players wanted to take a picture with me.

Completely harmless. The Shade Room messy ass took the picture and posted it on their page claiming that someone had alluded to the two of us being a new item. Julius posted a picture of his guns and subtly threatened to kill that man. I had to go make a post and tell people that I was still single because my baby daddy was really planning on killing him. Mind you he’s still fucking off with the bitch he cheated on me with.

Julius thought I was oblivious, but the bitch had my friend in her close friends and posted pics of them often. “He hasn’t bothered me anymore so I really can’t tell you. I pull up, drop Jude off, or pick him up and that’s about it.”

“Y’all need to cut that foolishness out.” My mama shook her head like she was disappointed.

“Girl that is him. Not me. I ain’t let that man touch me in months. I don’t know why he still think I belong to him. I am a single woman. Free to fuck whomever I want.” Doing a quick glance behind me I checked to see if Jude still had his headphones on before elaborating. “Besides, I got a lil friend that I’ve been seeing on the low.” I

smirked.

“On the low huh.”

“Yeah. Can’t introduce the world to my hoes just yet. Gotta make sure he ain’t for everybody like my baby daddy.”

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“You just be careful.” She said, issuing a warning that I had no intentions on adhering too. I was single and very much unattached. If and when I decided to let a nigga get in between my legs that was my business. I wasn’t fucking nobody and planned on keeping it that way. If my lil friend stayed on his shit I planned on throwing the pussy at him eventually.

Grabbing the bottle of 1942 off the counter I held it up to my mouth and downed a shot. The manager at Omnia had gone all out for the night. Upon entering the packed club, we were ushered to our section and greeted with about ten bottles of liquor. My crew which consisted of Shunta, my MUA Devon, my hairstylist Pixie, and my camera man, were all in attendance and down for the turn up. It was hot as hell in Vegas, so I was rocking a black and white pair of Dior shorts with the matching tracksuit jacket and my black Christian Louboutin Loubi Queen sandals.

“It’s all there?” I asked Lox who had just came from the manager’s office.

“Neatly banded and tucked together.” He confirmed after tossing the duffle bag over his shoulder. “I’mma get Moses to run it back to the hotel. We’re good here?” He asked.

“We are now.” I winked and downed my shot.

After having a fun filled afternoon with Jude and my Mama I slipped away from the two before they went to the movies so that I could unwind at the hotel before my hosting tonight. I was in the middle of getting my makeup done when Shunta came

waltzing in my suite. Once everyone had finished getting dressed, we hopped in the sprinter and got ready for the night.

Lox had been my security for so long that the thought of travelling without him scared the hell out of me. When I cut Julius off, I almost let his ass go but Lox did a good job at having my back. Byron and Lucas weren't fazed by me not fucking with them, Tito not so much. Since he doubled as my manager, I still had to deal with him, at least until I found someone to replace him.

With the business that I'm in trust doesn't come easy so I'm kind of stuck between a rock and a hard place with that. I let business be what it was and kept the personal out of it.

"Friend. Look who in here commenting." Devon said, holding my phone out to me. Devon had gone live on my Instagram page, and somebody was in the comments saying something that he thought I should see.

I grabbed the phone out of his hand and stared at the screen. Turning the camera around on me I cocked my head to the side. Flocco a rapper from Miami was in my live saying how he heard I was back outside. I knew folks was probably screen recording just waiting to run to the blogs with something so instead of entertaining that I simply said. "Get out of my comments." I laughed. "Flipping the camera view back around I passed the phone back to Devon.

"What's up with that?"

"Who knows." I shrugged.

"Them niggas been on you bad since you and Juice split." Shunta laughed.

"Tried to tell that nigga he wasn't the only one checking for me."

“You gone holla at Flocco? Nigga look good and I heard he got a big dick.” She smirked.

“Fuck no. That’s a lil close to home. And that nigga ‘bout don’t want shit but some pussy.” Not only was Flocco a rapper but the nigga and my baby daddy had collaborated on a few tracks. On top of all that Flocco was a hoe and I’m talking big one. The nigga had like seven kids, two of them were the same damn age.

Shunta wasn’t lying when she said the nigga look good. Flocco was dark skinned and I’m talking black as shit, but he had a gorgeous set of white teeth and a head full of dreads. If anything, I’d let the nigga trick off on me but fucking with him was where I drew the line.

“And the other one don’t?” she asked and narrowed her eyes at me.

Shunta knew ‘bout my lil friend. Hell, she’s the one that encouraged me to give him my number the day we ran into him at Phipps. He was in the industry but wasn’t a rapper. I felt like if I fucked with anybody heavily it should be him. I think my baby daddy had ruined it for all the rappers in the world. Hell, I was so scarred I wouldn’t even entertain dating a producer.

“Nawl. It’s been a few weeks and he ain’t even on that type of time. We really be cooling it.”

Sounding just like my mama she snorted. “Yo ass better not let Juice find out.”

“He will be okay if he do.”

“I hear ya but Flocco on yo body bad.” She teased, causing me to stare at her.

“Why you say that?”

“He done sent you a message already.” Swiping through my other phone Shunta read the message out loud. “I see you in Vegas lil mama. Hit me up when you get back to the A. I’m in your city for a few weeks, let a nigga take you out to eat or sum’n.”

“Girlllllll.” I drawled.

“It’s just dinner.” She shrugged. “What’s the worst that can happen?”

Pondering over it for a second, I thought about all of the worst things that could go wrong if I went to dinner with Flocco. The top of the list was my baby daddy crashing out again. The more I thought about it the more I began to not give a fuck. Julius was out doing him with no regards to how I felt. Maybe it was time for me to move the same way.

“I think I got a better idea.” I let her know before taking the phone out of her hand. After responding to the message, I hit the button to lock my phone and stuffed it in my pocket. Raising the bottle of 1942 in the air I shouted. “Drink up bitch. We ‘bout to set the city on fire.”

juice

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Whippingmy truck down the street I trailed behind Tito as he maneuvered in and out of traffic. What started out as a good day could've ended up being the worst day of my fucking life. When I woke up this morning, I had a message on the phone from Tamia telling me her cycle and shit hadn't come on. She claimed she was two weeks late.

I asked her if she had taken a test, and her ass claimed she was scared. Shit my ass was scared as fuck too. If I had fucked around and got her ass pregnant Nariah wouldnevergive me another chance. My ass ain't know what to do so I hit Tito up and per usual he hopped right on it. After grabbing a few tests, he instructed me to meet him by Tamia's crib so we could figure out if she was or not.

I know Tamia pissed on 'bout six test and every time one came back negative my fears subsided. This wasn't my first rodeo, so I knew we wasn't necessarily in the clear just yet. Tito had already scheduled her an appointment to do a blood draw, and I was praying like hell that came back negative too.

Turning into my driveway I hit the button to let the garage door up before backing into it. Before I could even shut the ignition off Tito was standing at the driver door.

"What's on ya mind Juice?"

"Shit." I huffed, scratching at the back of my neck. "How I done fucked up even

more.”

“Out of all people why you fucking Tamia raw? You know she been dying to be in the position Nari in. Girl been waiting on y’all to split so y’all can be together.”

“That’s just it though Tito. I ain’t fucked no bitch raw but Nariah. The condom popped with Tamia and when I felt that shit, I pulled out and put another one on. I’ on even nut in the condom while inside of her.

I ain’t no lil nigga so I know that lil incident could’ve very well been all that it was. However, I done been around the bitch a few times when I’m fucked up and couldn’t recall if I had hit her the previous night or not.”

“Tamia tryna trap yo ass.”

“Bout is.” Running my hand up my shirt I reclined in my seat. “I’mma quit fucking with her. She don’t think I know she been on the net fucking with Nari.”

“Yo ass might wanna do it sooner rather than later. Ain’t you tryna bring both families together for Juju’s birthday.”

“Yeah. Ain’t had the chance to sit down with Nari to see if she game or not.”

“Sounds like you got a lot of shit you need to handle.”

“I do.” I sucked in a deep breath. “The label on my ass ‘bout me completing this album and what not.”

“You done missed that deadline twice Juice. Yo head not in this shit right now. You too busy doing other shit. Lock the fuck in and knock this shit out so we can get to the money.”

Tito wasn't lying when he said my head wasn't right. Hell, I hadn't been right since Nariah dipped on my ass. The only thing that garnered a smile out of my ass these days was Juju. When it was time for him to go back to his mama that dark cloud was back hovering over my ass. Simply put I needed my fucking heart back. Nari wasn't trying to give me a chance to make shit right with us. I thought her dropping the charges was her way of saying she forgave me. Bullshit. Nariah hit me up and told me to stop sending shit to her crib if it wasn't for Juju, only call or text her phone when I was trying to get him, and to fuck off. Hell, she was really telling my ass to die 'cause that's what it felt like I had been doing. Dying slowly and painfully.

Me fucking 'round with Tamia was still just something to do. I had kept her on ice for a cool minute but shit I wasn't fucking nothing and was backed up and like the duck she was her ass was willing to let me take my frustrations out on her pussy. Should've stuck with my first mind and had her ass banked, now I was facing a maybe pregnancy.

Hopping out the truck I shut the door and hit the locks. "I'mma lock in Tito. I just gotta get my mind right."

"I hear ya."

Tito opened the door that led from the garage into the crib, and I followed behind him with the weight of the world on my shoulders.

Byron was the first one to notice us. The nigga spun around in his seat and joked. "Juju 'bout to be a big brother?"

"Nawl." Dropping down on the sofa I kicked my slides off and folded my hands behind my head.

"The test was negative so until we can get her to the doctor we won't know for sure."

Tito added, making Byron and Lucas laugh.

“Sis ain’t ever gone fuck with you again.” Lucas said in between laughter.

I stuck my middle finger up at both of they ass. “Fuck y’all. And as far as I’m concerned both of y’all can raise up out my shit.” I based.

“Get out yo body nigga. We just fucking with you.”

“Fuck with me out there.” I pointed towards the front door. Them niggas ain’t take shit serious and right now wasn’t a laughing moment. My life would forever be fucked up if Tamia ass was pregnant with my jit. The worst thing a nigga could do was get an industry bop pregnant. Might as well hand my fucking bank account over. I would take care of my jit no matter what, but she wouldn’t get the same benefits as Nari, and that wouldn’t do shit but piss her the fuck off.

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I was sitting here in deep thought when Lucas dropped his phone in my lap. “You seen this?”

Grabbing it up I watched the collage of pictures that somebody had posted on the internet. Turning my face up I nodded my head. I knew I had my own shit going on but clearly so did Nariah. “When this was?”

“Last weekend.”

“Wasn’t she in Vegas with Juju last weekend.” I said to no one in particular. Juju and I spoke several times while he was away with Nariah. His lil ass called me after everything they did bragging ‘bout how much fun him and his mama was having. He was all smiles, so I sat there every time he called and listened.

“Yep.” Byron confirmed. “Lox ain’t say shit ‘bout this though.”

“Y’all know that nigga gon’ have Nari back.” Lucas chuckled. “I ain’t tryna start nothing Juice but I had been peeped the way that nigga Flocco used to look at Nari.”

“Fuck is you tryna say?” I asked and tossed him back his phone. “Nigga was kicking it with me like we was cool and whole time he was tryna get at my girl on the low?”

Tito popped around the corner with a look of confusion plastered across his face. “Wait...What the fuck is going on?”

“Shit judging by them pics Nari and Flocco call they self fucking off.” I grabbed my phone off the table and dialed Nariah. Holding the phone up to my ear I listened to it

ring before her sweet voice came booming through the receiver, the call had gone to the voicemail.

I was getting ready to shoot her a text and tell her to hit me back when Lucas said some shit that had me hopping off the couch. “Nari freaked out.”

Grabbing that nigga by the collar I snatched his ass up off the couch. “Nigga we bros and all but don’t ever let me hear you say shit ‘bout Nariah like that. Fuck yo personal opinions and how you may feel that’s still yo nephew’s mama.”

“I ain’t mean no harm Juice.” He held his hands up.

Coming to my senses I let him go and paced the living room floor. “My bad G. I know you ain’t mean it like that. My anger was misdirected. Regardless of her not fucking with them like that Byron and Lucas loved Nariah like she was their blood.

She running ‘round here not talking to them ‘cause she think they was holding my secrets and whole time they ass stayed out of it ‘cause they weren’t trying to break the family up. “Flocco gotta know I’mma see him.”

“And you not!” Tito interjected. “Whether you like it or not Nariah is free to date whoever she wants to date. Is it fucked up for her to be kicking it with him.” He pointed at the phone. “Yeah, it is. This all part of the game Juice. You violated and Nariah doing her now. You can feel how you want but don’t go creating no beef behind no pussy.”

“Yeah aight.” I snorted. “I’mma holla at you niggas later.” Ambling out of the living room I went into the garage and hopped in my truck. I ain’t give a fuck what Tito said, that niggaFlocco had to see me. I was gon’ beat that nigga ass the minute I laid eyes on him, and I put that shit on Juju.

Leaning up in my seat I peered out of the front window. I left the crib earlier without a destination in mind. I really was trying to calm myself down before I did some shit that was gone land my ass back in jail. No matter what I told myself the only way I could erase this hurt feeling was by wrecking some shit.

I had been calling Nariah ass since before I left home, and she still hadn't picked up the phone, so I decided to pay her a visit. I knew she was in town cause Juju had sent me pictures earlier of the shoes she had bought him. When I made it to her condo, she wasn't there, and I was getting ready to leave when a thought popped into my head. Something was telling my ass to camp out in the parking lot and I'm glad I did. A black Maserati had pulled in front of the building.

I watched some nigga get out of his car and walk around to the passenger side, when the door opened Nariah stepped out. Whoever the nigga was had a hood pulled over his head so I couldn't quite make out his face.

Reaching in my middle console I pulled my pistol out and sat it in my lap. How the next few seconds played out was solely on Nariah. The two of them was standing at the car talking. I mean the muthafucka was all smiles and shit. The way she was giggling and dropping her head I could tell she was feeling this nigga. Nariah fucked up when she pulled the hood down, I caught a good glimpse of him, and I swear fo' God all I saw after that was red.

Sliding out of the car I shut the door and cocked my pistol. With it resting at my side I walked toward the two of them. Theyass was so enthralled in their conversation that neither noticed me approaching.

"Touch her again and yo ass won't be able to dribble another fucking ball." I threatened.

“Julius!” Nariah gasped. “Are you fucking serious?”

“As a muthafucka.” Inching closer to them I stood with my legs gaped apart and my arms crossed in front of me. I wanted that nigga to see how serious I was. If we was anywhere but in front of her crib I would’ve shot that nigga dead.

“What’s up Juice?” He had the nerve to ask and lean back on his car like my presence didn’t bother him.

Before tonight I fucked with the nigga. Dip Pearce was the shooting guard for the Hawks. Just like myself the nigga was Atlanta born and bred. We had seen each other many times in passing and it was all love. Now that the nigga called himself checking for Nari, he was officially an opp.

“Nigga we not cool. You in uncharted territory Pearce. I suggest you dip if you tryna make it out on the court for your next game. All pun intended.”

“These rapping niggas.” He chuckled under his breath. “Nariah baby I’mma holla at you. Unlike yo fuck ass baby daddy I actually got some shit to lose.”

“Fuck you say my nigga.” I pressed. Before I could get in the nigga face Nariah was stepping between the two of us.

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Without taking her eyes off me she told him. “Dip I’ll call you later.”

“You make sure you do that.”

“Don’t wait up on that call my nigga. It ain’t happening in this fucking lifetime.”

The nigga had the nerve to wink at me before pushing away from his car. Nariah kept her hand planted on my chest until the nigga was able to get in his car. When he shut his door, she pushed me back. “You a stupid ass nigga. What if somebody saw that shit and called the fucking police. Are you trying to go to jail?”

“Naw! but clearly you tryna send my ass there. You know I’mma kill that nigga don’t you.” I laughed but wasn’t shit funny. I meant that shit with my whole heart.

“Julius.” She sighed. “Give it a rest.” Folding her arms across her chest Nariah cocked her head to the side. “Why are you here?”

She was standing here asking me questions while my eyes were busy roaming up and down her body. Her and the nigga must’ve called they self being on a lil date or something. Nariah had on a cropped denim top, a pair of fitted camouflage pants, and the denim Jennifer Le heels I bought her. Her hair was slicked back in a low bun and her lips were bare.

Either she had ate her gloss off or her and that nigga was swapping spit. I guess it took me too long to answer ‘cause her petty ass turned and walked off. “Say Nariah don’t walk away from me like that.” I fussed.

Instead of stopping Nariah kept it pushing through the door of her building. I thumbed my nose a few times before following behind her. When we got on the elevator she stood with her back against the wall and typed something on her phone. “You gon’ ignore me?”

“Oh, like you ignored me when I asked what you was doing here.” She sassed without taking her attention off the phone.

“Keep fucking playing with me Nariah.”

“Trust. The last thing I’m doing is playing.” Fixing the watch on her wrist she glanced up at me and smiled. “You look like shit.”

“Fuck that supposed to mean?”

“Ya girl must be stressing you out.” The elevator dinged before stopping on her floor, when the doors popped opened Nariah stepped around me and exited.

“I ain’t got no fucking girl.” I mumbled lowly before marching off behind her. This girl unlocked her door and had the nerve to try to shut it in my face. “Gotta be quicker than that.” I laughed after catching the door.

Leaning down Nariah unstrapped her heels and stepped out of them. “You still ain’t said why you here. I thought I told you not to say shit to me if it wasn’t about Jude.”

“You ain’t tell me shit.” I lied and leaned against her couch. “So, you fucking with Dip?”

“We cool.”

“Cool huh?” I nodded and swiped my tongue across my bottom lip. “Let me guess

you and Flocco cool too.”

That halted her steps. Nariah turned and looked me up and down before snorting. “That’s why you over here?”

Walking up on her I towered over her and glared at her face. “You fucking that nigga Nariah?”

“You got a baby on the way?” She countered and folded her arms, waiting for me to answer.

“Where the fuck you get that shit from?”

“Yo baby mama.” She laughed. “She been on her close friends posting how late she is. I guess congratulations are in order.”

“I ain’t hit no bitch raw but you.”

“That ain’t what I heard. You know you a real clown ass nigga. Pressing me ‘bout Flocco and you still fucking that bird. If I was fucking with him that’s my business.”

“So, you are?” I quizzed.

“Nawl. We just cool.” She popped, sounding like a whole ass nigga.

Nariah sure knew how to piss me the fuck off. “Just cool huh.” I repeated. “Say Nariah stop fucking with me. Dead ass. Cause the shit that’s running through my mind right now ain’t of God.”

“You can go fuck a bitch and put her up, but I go to dinner with onenigga and you ready to cause a scene. Grow the fuck up Julius.”

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“You real mouthy tonight. I guess them new niggas done boosted yo head up.”

“Somebody had too. The nigga I was fucking with was too busy creeping behind my back.” Pushing me back Nariah tipped out the living room.

“Just tell me. I promise I won’t be mad.” I said and trailed her down the hall. “If you fucked him, you just did.” I was gone be pissed the fuck off if Nariah let that nigga touch her. On my soul I was gone pissed.

“Julius if I cared anything about you being mad I would do better at hiding shit.” Peeling off her pants she tossed them in the dirty clothes hamper and unlatched her AP. Sitting down at the vanity she placed it in her jewelry box and proceeded to take her earrings off. “I’m single if you haven’t noticed.”

“So, in other words you did fuck him.” I based.

Shooting a dagger right through my heart she hissed. “Yeah, Julius I fucked Flocco and if you hadn’t of interrupted me, I was getting ready to let Dip eat my pussy.” She stared at me through her vanity mirror. “Happy now?”

My heart wanted to believe she was lying but I knew she wasn’t. Nariah knew I was missing a few screws, ain’t no way she would’ve said no shit like that if it wasn’t true. I wanted to wrap my hands around Nariah’s neck. On God I did. But I couldn’t ‘cause that would fuck Juju up. “You a slut ass bitch.” I barked. As mad as I was, I’m surprised spit wasn’t slinging out of my mouth. I had to force my hands in my pocket to keep them from shaking.

“Nigga we one in the same. Difference is I waited until I was single before I did my dirt.”

Mushing her head with my finger I gritted. “Fuck you. On God fuck you!” I had to bite down on my lip to keep from crying. “If you wanted to fuck with a nigga in the industry you should’ve got at that nigga Drake at least you would’ve got a bag or something out of the deal. Ya know—how the rest of these hoes do.”

“And unlike the rest of these hoes I’on need a nigga for a bag. I got my own.” Standing from her chair Nariah looked me up and down before turning to walk away. “I suggest you be gone before I get out of the shower. APD dying for another reason to arrest your ass.”

“Yeah, aight slut!” I bellowed. The way Nariah and I had just talked to each other it was clear it wasn’t meant for us to reconcile. I’m thinking I had me a good girl, whole time Nariah was just like the rest of these sluts out here. I was good off her ass. If it wasn’t ‘bout Juju I ain’t want to parts in it.

Murderous thoughts were running through my head when I left Nariah’s condo, leaving me faced with one of two options. I could go find Flocco and put one in his head or go to the studio and let my frustrations out. Taking the nigga out was what my head said to do but visions of me getting locked up and disappointing Juju flashed through my mind, ultimately making the decision for me.

nariah

. . .

“Jude!” I shrieked. “Not you cheating.” I giggled.

“What?” He feigned clueless.

“Don’t what me.” Swiping him up from the ground I twirled him around until he begged for me to stop. “Yo lil ass took off before I said go.” I breathed. I placed Jude down on the bench and sat beside him. “You having fun?”

“Yes ma’am.” He nodded and I smiled.

This morning Jude woke me up and asked if I could bring him to Andretti’s. My baby loved going to the arcade. I didn’t have anything to do today so after the two of us had breakfast I called and had the place shut down so we could enjoy the park without having to deal with a bunch of people in our face. To make his day I went ahead and invited both of his grannies. Unbeknownst to me Jude had called and invited his father and his uncles.

Before they even pulled up, I hit Tito up and let him know that it would be in their best interest to keep Julius far, far, far away from me. After the way he showed his ass at my house the other night I didn’t have two words to say to him. So far, they had been doing a good job.

The few times Jude had both of us together Julius would mumble something under his breath. His ass knew not to say the shit out loud, or we would end up turning Andretti’s the fuck out. I had heard through Lox that Tamia wasn’t pregnant. Apparently, she’d gotten her cycle the day after Julius had her pissing on a test. Good for him.

“Can we bowl next?” Jude asked, snapping me out of my thoughts.

“Sure can baby.”

“Yay!” He cheered before hopping down to run off. Taking a minute to check my notifications I blushed at a message from Dip.

Dip: A nigga hard down missing you right now

Me: Is that so?"

Dip: It is... You gon' come kick it with me later?

Me: Where you gon' be at?

Dip: Highrise

Me: Yeah... I'll see if my mama can stay over my house with Jude until I get back.

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Dip: Bet. Hit me up and let me know.

“Nariah.” Julius deep, raspy voice boomed from behind me.

Rolling my eyes I turned and asked. “What’s up?”

“You bowling?”

“I guess.” Sliding off the bench I tugged my shorts out of my ass and walked toward the bowling alley.

Over my shoulder I heard his chapped ass talking shit. “Lil ass shorts.”

My shorts were in fact little, and I looked damn good in them. Ignoring Julius’s ass I searched for my baby. When I found him, I groaned. Jude was standing between Bryon and Lucas barking out orders.

“Mommy.” He called out when he noticed me. “You can be on the team with me and my daddy.”

“Anything for you baby.” Dropping my phone down on the table in front of my mama I grabbed bowling shoes for me and Jude.

Easing up beside me Ms. Norma leaned against the counter. “I like y’all like this.”

“It’s a façade.” I chided. “I really hate your son but I gotta play nice.”

“You don’t hate him, Nariah.”

“Yes, I do.”

“You don’t.” She shook her head. “You may dislike his ways, but you don’t hate him. Hate is such a strong word ya know.”

“I do. But anytime he gets in his feelings he yells out how much he hates me so I’m reciprocating the energy.”

“Don’t be like Julius. Be better than him.” She advised.

“That’s hard to do.”

“You ain’t gotta tell me.” She jested. “That boy is stubborn.”

“As hell.”

“But he does love you, Nariah. Always has.”

“And you know what Ms. Norma.” I sighed. “I’ve never doubted that. I know Julius loves me and I’m sure he knows my heart swings his way.”

“Now what kind of shit is that?” She laughed. “Your heart swings his way? Just admit that you love him just as much as he does you.”

“I do.” I admitted. “Julius is...” I paused to gather my thoughts. “At one time Julius was my best friend. I thought he’d gotten it all out of his system after the first incident but clearly, I was mistaken. I can love him all day Ms. Norma but until I’ve figured out how to navigate life without being in my feelings I’ll forever be on his head.” I shrugged.

I wasn't a spiteful person at all but parts of me wanted that nigga to hurt. Shit he ain't think twice before hurting me so I wanted him to see what that shit felt like. When he pressed me about fucking Flocco I could've lied and said I didn't. But why lie? I fucked him twice and if the dick was more than average I probably would've gone back for thirds.

Flocco was really just a way for me to get my lick back. He was the last person Julius had to worry about. Dip on the other hand was slowly but surely winning me over. I could see us being in a relationship. He was educated, had a few side hustles, and had just the right amount of hood in him to keep me on my toes. More importantly Dip was really set on getting to know me, sex was an afterthought with him. Which made me like him even more.

"Two wrongs don't make a right." She tapped her knuckles on the counter and left me with that statement.

Shrugging it off I went back to the table. "Come on Jude so we can put your shoes on." Once both of us were suited up I pulled his braids back into a ponytail and helped him out of his jacket. My baby flexed his muscles and kissed his arms before betting Tito that we would whoop them by a thousand points. Julius butted in when Jude said he ain't have no money but would give up his gold AP.

"Yo ass not 'bout to give up that watch." He chuckled. "Ass be mad when yo mama take it off before you shower."

"Aww man daddy." Jude groaned. "That's all I got."

"Where yo wallet at?" Julius asked him.

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“My mama got it.”

Reaching in his pocket Julius pulled out a stack and held it out to Jude. Put this on it.”

“Oh, we cooking now.” Tito joked and pulled his own stack out. “Don’t go crying to ya mama when I spank that ass.”

“Don’t go crying to yo mama.” Jude retorted, making everybody laugh. The shit that came out of his mouth at times should’ve surprised me, but it didn’t. His ass stayed picking up on Julius’s lingo.

Julius looked at me and shook his head. “Boy talking big shit and done already asked them folks to put the bumper up. Now I gotta beat these niggas ass ‘cause can’t neither of y’all bowl worth shit.”

Flipping his ass off I grinned. “Get off my baby. Come on Jude let’s run they pockets.”

Our lil challenge was out the door when Tito rolled his very first strike. Bumpers up and all my baby couldn’t bowl a strike for nothing. My nails were long which made it uncomfortable as hell for me to stuff my fingers in them lil ass holes. Julius talked shit about me and Jude the whole time and pretty much led the score board for us.

After getting our ass beat not once but thrice, we decided to give up on bowling and enjoy the arcade games. At least we did until Jude was ready to eat. Julius and I were getting along. Surprisingly, but we were. Today kind of felt like old times. The three of us sat at the table and talked about what we were doing for Jude’s upcoming

birthday.

Jude wanted to throw him a party at the house, but my baby had other plans. Plans that would have me and his father in the same vicinity for at least a week.

Toting a sleeping Jude out of Andretti's, Julius followed me to my truck so he could get Jude's things. Before he fell asleep my baby told his daddy he wanted to go home with him. That worked out for me 'cause I had plans to pull up on Dip later.

Handing Julius the book bag I queried. "You gone bring him home tomorrow or I need to come get him?"

"It's whatever you prefer. We ain't gone be doing shit but kicking it around the crib."

"I'll just swing through and get him before I go home."

Pitching a tent with his eyebrows he asked. "Fuck you going?"

"To mind my business."

"Must be going to see one of yo niggas."

"Umph." I tsked and hopped in my truck. "Nawl I'm going to see one of yo niggas."

Perching his body between my car door Julius adjusted Jude in his arms. "Why you be fucking with me Nariah? Like you don't know how I give it up. Like you ain't worried 'bout me knocking one of them niggas over the head."

Leaning back in my seat I dropped my phone in the cup holder. "Why you clocking me like I belong to you?"

“Cause you fucking do. And even when you think we done just know we not. I’m letting you get that shit out ya system ‘cause I know I fucked up. But Nariah don’t get beside ya self. ‘Cause if I really wanted to, I could end all that shit.”

“And now you talking crazy.” Reaching for the handle I tried to shut the door, but Julius bumped it back opened.

“Tell me you don’t miss me.”

“I’on miss you. Now what?”

“You a muthafucking lie.” He snorted, making me roll eyes. “You miss the way I used to tear that pussy up huh.”

I shifted in my seat. Cause yes... yes, I did. Julius had some good dick. I mean the type of dick that’ll have you holding that nigga down while he did a bid. Instead of telling his ass the truth I flexed. “Nope.” I stressed, putting emphasis on the p.

“Yeah aight.” He chuckled. “Can I have a kiss?”

“You ain’t never thought.”

“Aye Tito. Come get Juju for me real quick.”

“Julius.” I whined already seeing where this shit was about to go.

“Hold up.” Julius handed Jude to Tito and focused his attention back on me. “Give me a kiss Nariah.”

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“No.” I shook my head defiantly. Julius was full of shit, and I wasn’t ‘bout to fall for his shit.

Taking me by the chin the nigga leaned in and sucked my top lip into his mouth. For a second, I just sat there, praying that he would let me go. When he twirled his tongue in and out of my mouth my stupid ass gave in and kissed him back.

Julius ran his hand between my thighs and cupped my pussy. “This shit mine Nariah. Another nigga can’t fuck you the way I can.” He said in between pecks before deepening the kiss. Letting go of my chin Julius broke the kiss and wrapped his hand around my throat. “Yo pussy wet ain’t it. I can smell her.” The way he sucked my flesh between his teeth had me squirming.

“Julius.” I moaned.

“Just like I thought.” He whispered into my ear before pulling back. “When you go see that nigga tell him you’re welcome. I know he can’t get it wet like I can.” Smirking, he winked before walking off.

“Stupid ass nigga!” I yelled. “Fuck you!”

“Tell yo nigga to fuck like me!” He retorted and humped the air.

Julius dumb ass had left me with a soaked thong. My ass was pissed that I even let that nigga get that close to me. Now I had to go home and rub one out before I could pull up on Dip.

Following behind Lox, me and my girls fought our way through the crowd trying to get to our suite. Tonight was Birthday Bash, and my baby daddy was performing. At first, I wasn't going to go because not only was Julius performing but so was Flocco. Julius told me more than once the night I admitting to sleeping with him that he was going to beat his ass, and I wanted no parts of that shit. It didn't make it no better that his ignorant ass got on social media and basically let it be known that he was gunning for Flocco. Instead of that stupid ass nigga ignoring Julius he fed right into the bullshit. The two of them had exchanged words and threats of gun play.

The only reason I ended up changing my mind to begin with was 'cause Lariah and Kiara had come into town and was begging me to go. Lariah knew hanging out with me came with certain perks and since she wasn't trying to drop no money for the concert her best bet was to convince me to come. I hit Tito up with the plans to which he let me know he would have a suite waiting for us.

By the time we made it to our suite Tito and Julius was already in there fucking up the food that I'd ordered.

"Don't you niggas got some manners?" Lariah fussed. Slapping Julius on the hand she closed the lid on the wings. "What time are you hitting the stage?"

Instead of responding to her Julius tucked his bottom lip between his teeth and ran his eyes up and down my body, gawking at me like I was a piece of meat. I'd been intentionally avoiding him since that incident outside of Andretti's. I really wanted to pull up and put this cat in his face, but I wasn't ready to get sucked back up in his world.

"What's up Nari? You doing that shit tonight ain't ya twin." He flirted and pointed at my breast. "Them look good."

I had on a fitted black jumpsuit that I ordered from Fashion Nova and black heart

shaped pasties covering my nipples. I paired the jump suit with a black pair of Versace platform sandals and black heart shaped sunglasses.

“Something light.” I smiled.

“It’s light alright. Neck and wrist shining just like I taught you.” He boasted, talking about the iced-out jewelry I wore.

“Um um.” Lariah cleared her throat. “This a thing?”

“Absolutely not.” I tongued my cheek.

“Nawl. Ms. Nariah in them streets. I’m just admiring my canvas.” Julius winked before swaggering off.

“Bitch.” She leaned over and bumped me with her shoulder. “Juice want you back.”

Sliding my shades up from my face I shrugged. “He’s never stopped wanting me.”

“Y’all really are twins.” Lariah laughed. “Came out the house wearing the same necklace and bracelet.

A few years ago, Julius had bought us a matching Cuban necklace and bracelet set. The only time he took his off was to get it clean. Me on the other hand, I only pulled mine out on certain occasions and tonight it just went with my outfit. Tossing my curls over my shoulder I crowed. “Great minds think alike. I need a drink...bad.”

Popping open the bottle of Tequila I poured some in a cup and stood off to the side watching the scene in front of me. Really, I was checking Julius out. Pulling my shades back down so I wouldn’t get caught eye fucking my baby daddy, I crossed my arms and took him in from head to toe.

Julius wore a tan Amiri t-shirt, Army fatigue shorts, a brown Amiri hat, and a pair of white Air Force One's. The nigga looked damn good, and he fucking knew it. I guess he could feel me watching him 'cause he paused mid conversation and winked at me. I couldn't do shit but laugh and shake my head.

We were less than a month away from Jude's birthday trip and I had to get my shit together. If I kept on playing with fire my ass was gon' end back up in bed with the devil.

"Might as well quit torturing yaself." Tito said from beside me.

Turning my cup up, I took a sip and asked. "Whatever do you mean?"

"You and that nigga. Both y'all playing hard to get when it's clear it's still some feelings there."

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“It’ll always be feelings. Don’t mean I gotta act on em.”

Stuffing his hands in the pocket of his shorts he rocked back and forth. “Listen Nari, you know I’m the last nigga that’ll block ya play.”

“What you mean by that?” I queried.

“Flocco.”

Running my fingers through my hair I blew out an exasperated sigh. “Tito—” I started but stopped when he shook his head.

Tito held his hand out. “I don’t care to hear what went down. Hell, I’on give a fuck ‘bout none of it. All I’m saying is Nari in this game you’re the Helen of Troy. Juice willneverbow down and let that nigga have you.”

“I don’t want Flocco.” I chuckled nervously. “I fucked with him ‘cause I knew it would get a rise out of Julius. Tito, I promise it ain’t shit there.”

“Do he know that? Cause from what’s been brought back to me is the nigga stay under ya pictures and shit dropping heart eyes.”

“That’s a grown ass man. I can’t control him.”

“I hear ya Nari. Juice plan on stepping to that man tonight.”

“Please don’t let him.” I begged.

“You know better than I do when that nigga put something in his head ain’t shit nobody can say to stop it.”

“See.” I pouted. “This is exactly why I didn’t want to come.”

“I ain’t tryna point the fingers but lil sis this something you started.”

“That man hit me up.” I argued.

“And you fell for the trap. If you really not fucking with Flocco like that you need to let it be known.”

“This is some real double standard type shit. Juice was in a relationship with a girl. They had a whole ass pregnancy scare but I’m the one wrong. How that even make sense?”

“It don’t. And yeah, it may be a double standard but Juice a hard leg Nari. You can’t do what he do. And don’t take me saying that as me saying he get a pass ‘cause he don’t. I be on that nigga ass more than anybody around. Some shit just law Nari, and you know that. It’s a code when it comes to certain things and certain people are off limits. Flocco violated big time.”

“I hear ya. Still don’t make the shit right.”

“Juice told me you was kicking it with Dip. Don’t tell that nigga I said this but that’s a much better look for you than Flocco. If you really serious ‘bout moving on from Juice, then pursue that. But let whatever you got with Flocco go. Fo’ somebody end up losing they life.”

Pecking me on the cheek Tito tipped his head and strolled back over to where Juice was standing. I could accept that I was wrong for fucking Flocco knowing him and

Juice had worked together.

When I did the shit the only thing on my mind was getting even. I crossed a line that shouldn't have been crossed and hindsight twenty-twenty me sleeping with somebody else would've hurt Julius regardless. I didn't have to take Flocco bait the first time, and I didn't have to double back. Eventually I would apologize to Julius 'cause had he did that shit with somebody I had to see because of my occupation I would probably feel the same.

Hopefully after I said my peace he would drop this whole vendetta he has against Flocco and just let the shit go. If I knew my baby daddy like I thought I did wasn't no letting up.

juice

...

Standing backstage,I sipped out of my solo cup while watching that bitch ass nigga Flocco bounce around the stage like he was on something. I'on know how the fuck they did the line up and had me coming behind this nigga but whoever was responsible had really fucked up.

When that nigga set ended, I planned on being the first face he saw. Flocco had to know it was consequences for touching shit that ain't belong to him. I been sitting back watching that nigga for weeks, waiting on the right opportunity to strike. He was real big 'bout popping shit online knowing I couldn't get at him the way I wanted to.

I got lucky when the promoter announced that he was going to perform tonight. The nigga wasn't a part of the original line up but just so happened to be available when somebody dropped out.

A hand being placed on my shoulder brought my attention from the stage. “Let him make it dog.”

“That nigga gotta see me Luc.”

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“I know what he did was foul but he ain’t act alone. Nari was a willing participant ain’t like he forced her.”

I waved him off. “I ain’t tryna hear none of that.”

“Can you at least wait until you perform before you get at that nigga.”

“Luc.” I patted his arm. “Now that I can do. I’ll give y’all that.” Nodding my head I repeated. “Yeah, I’ll give y’all that. But that nigga getting touched tonight.”

“Do yo thang Juice. Let’s give these folks a show first. Ain’t no sense in upsetting ya fans.”

“You right.”

Flocco set lasted another five minutes. In the time it took him to address the crowd and walk off stage my team had already ushered me on through the other side. Grabbing the mic from my DJ I stood in the center of the stage and raised my arms in the air, making the crowd go wild.

“What’s up Atlanta!” I yelled in the mic. “That non rapping ass nigga Flocco ain’t put y’all to sleep, did he?” When they yelled no I laughed into the mic. “Good. DJ drop that shit.” When the beat to War dropped the crowd went fucking nuts. I had to pause in the middle of the song ‘cause they was out rapping my ass.

My city really fucked with me and any chance I got to hop on stage and do what I do I was grateful. “I’ll go to war with anybody. Wet his ass up and then hide the body.

Niggas talking slick but they know not to try me. Knock his bitch up and then I'll brag about it."I rapped. "Atlanta!" I yelled. "Tell them pussy niggas they know where to find me." Forming a gun with my hand I pointed it out to the crowd and shot that bitch.

Jogging over to my DJ, I gave him the cue to drop the song I recorded the night I found out Nari fucked Flocco. Staring at me quizzically he asked, "you sure?"

"Fuck yeah." I drawled.

Before the track dropped, I brought the mic up to my mouth. "Niggas come to the A and think they ain't gotta see me. FloccoI'm on yo ass." I heard the crowd gasp, but I was on one now. "DJ drop that shit!"

Pounding my mic in the air to the beat I bopped my head. "What happened to that part of the game where niggas baby mamas was off limits. Guess that shit only count when it comes to certain bitches. Flocco played with fire and now he 'bout to get burned. I'mma walk that nigga down and put his ass in an urn.

You crossed the line, now I'm drawing blood in the margins. Slept with my queen? That's war no pardons. You hit once, now you think you the man? She called you "mid" while you was fumblin', ya master plan. You violate codes, now karma gotta aim. I'm ten toes down, you just limp with my name.

Flocco? Sound tough, but you not on go. More cap in your rap than a sold-out show. You ain't sliding' on nothin' but your mama's rent. Talk real big but your soul broke and bent. You smashed for clout, now you act like a star. But my girl said your stroke was weak, barely made it to par. You ain't hurt me dog, you exposed your worth. You crossed the line, now it's smoke on sight. Flocco, you fell off tryna flex my life."

Slicing my hand across my throat I signaled for the track to stop. "In case I ain't

make myself clear the first time my baby mama off limits to any nigga out there that ain't Julius "Juice" Jones. Atlanta that's my time. I love y'all." Kissing my fingers I pointed them at the crowd before walking off.

Before I could get completely behind the curtain Tito was grabbing me by the arm. "Fuck is wrong with you?" He based.

"Ain't shit wrong with me." I shook out of his grasp. "Y'all niggas thought I was fucking 'round when I said I'm on that nigga ass. Every time I see that nigga it's up."

"And how the fuck you think Nariah feel 'bout that stunt you just pulled."

"She'll be aight. It ain't like niggas ain't know what the fuck went down. Bitch ass nigga been running 'round telling the shit to anybody that'll listen."

"Nawl let me the fuck go!" I heard somebody yell.

When I turned around, I peeped Flocco trying to get through his security and mine. "Mama's boy got something to say. Let that nigga go." I ordered. Sliding my shirt over my head I tossed it to the side and taunted. "I'm right here homeboy. Ain't no running."

"Aye Juice. I fucked twice my boy. Bet she ain't tell you that." The nigga had the nerve to brag.

Flocco ain't stand a chance, the minute he was able to free himself from security I was on his ass. I hit that nigga so hard it dazed his ass and by the time he recovered I was pummeling the shit out of his face. I tried to stump a mud hole in that nigga when he slipped and fell to the ground. I had zoned out was trying my hardest to kill that nigga when somebody snatched me back.

“We gotta go!” Lucas yelled while pulling me away.

Grabbing my shirt up from the ground the two of us took off through the crowd of people backstage. We ain’t stop running until we were outside the arena and hopping into the sprinter.

“I hope you know it’ll be a warrant out for your arrest in the morning.” Tito noted.

“And I’mma be in my mugshot with all my jewelry on and a smile on my face.”

“Yo ass better hope that nigga don’t retaliate.”

“Nawl he better hope he don’t. Cause I’m coming for his whole bloodline.”

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It took us over an hour to get out of Atlanta traffic. The whole time we were in the sprinter our ass had been dodging calls from Nariah. Judging by the text message she sent I knew her ass was pissed the fuck off. I'd make it up to her. Shit the night I recorded that track she was everything but a child of God. Hell, cause we had semi made up I scrubbed a lot of the lyrics from the rap. If I had rapped it the way I did that night the two of us would never speak again.

Woke up this morning with the clip from last night circulating the internet. Folks in the comments were saying me crashing out was warranted while a few of them was talking shit 'bout Nariah. Before anybody got beside themselves, I went live and let the world know that I saw all the comments and to keep Nariah name out they mouth.

This shit might've started with her but ultimately Flocco was the cause. I also put the message out there that in case anybody hadn't caught on yet, anytime I saw that nigga it was on sight. Tito had been back and forth on the phone with the label, my attorney, and my PR rep. They wanted me to keep my mouth closed and my head down, but I wasn't hiding from shit.

If the law was looking for me, they knew where to find me. Flexing my hand, I hissed and stuck it back over in the bucket of ice water. "Fucked up my shit on that nigga hard ass skull." I fussed.

"And whose fault is that?" My mama asked. Rounding the couch, she sat a plate in my lap and tossed her body down in the recliner. "You feel like a man now that you've put that girl business out there like that?"

"I felt like a man before I got on stage."

“God Julius.” She sighed. “I swear you just don’t listen.”

“What I’m not listening to though Ma Dukes?” I asked and took a bite out of my sandwich.

“You claim you want your family back.”

“Cause I do.”

“Not with the way you’re moving. She’s never going to come back.”

“She will.” I stated confidently. Me and Nariah was meant for each other. The kind of love we shared don’t just happen. It might take a lot of ass kissing but eventually I’ll get her back.

“I’m glad you’re so sure. Have you heard from her today?”

I shook my head. “I called her back when I got to the crib last night but she ain’t answer. She in her feelings right now.”

“Ain’t you supposed to be getting Juju?”

“Yep. I’mma ride over that way after my nap.”

“Done caused all that bullshit now you tryna take a nap.”

“Hell yeah.” I yawned. “I ain’t really sleep last night. My knuckles and shit been hurting.”

“Ass ought to stop fighting.”

“I will one day.” I winked. Polishing off my sandwich I dried my hands on my wife-beater and downed the Gatorade. “Aight Ma Dukes I’m ‘bout to go take a Tylenol and get in bed.”

“Ummhmm. By the time you wake up I’ll have dinner ready.”

“Thank you, Ma.” I sang and kissed her on the cheek.

Hopping the stairs I strolled into my bedroom and tossed my body down on the bed. It had been a minute since I had to whoop a nigga ass. Whole body felt like I had been in a wreck. Before I closed my eyes I thought ‘bout hitting Nariah up again but decided against it. When she was ready to talk, she would call. Fixing the pillow over my head I closed my eyes. Within a matter of seconds, I was out.

“Sssss ahh shit!” I yelled. It felt like something hot had just struck me across the back. Hopping out of bed I wiped my eyes with the back of my hand. “Nariah!” I barked when her ass swung that fucking belt and connected with my lower stomach.

What is it with this girl and fucking belts? I tried to snatch that shit out of her hand, but she spun around and popped my ass across the legs.

“Bitch!” She roared. “I’mma beat yo ass like Ms. Norma should’ve did when you was a baby!”

“Got damnit.” The lick to my side caused me to flinch, the moment I tensed up Nariah went to town on my ass.

“I done told you to quit fucking playing with me! You done lost yo muthafucking mind!” She spat. Nariah’s chest was heaving up and down, hell her ass looked possessed.

When she cracked the belt again, I tried to grab it and got hit on my already bloody knuckles. “Somebody come help me get this girl.”

Nariah was moving around the room like her ass was on speed or something. Thinking quick I lunged at her, knocking us both to the ground. The two of us wrestled until I was able to overpower her and snatch the belt.

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“Give me this shit!” Throwing the belt behind me I grabbed her wrist, held them above her head, and pushed my knee between her thighs. “Fuck you got going on?” I barked. “And what I tell you ‘bout hitting me with that damn belt.”

“You so full of shit Julius. How could you embarrass me like that?”

“I embarrassed you. You ain’t never fucking thought that.”

“Yeah, you dummy! How could you put my business out there like that?”

“The same way you fucked that nigga!” I bellowed. “Fuck is you saying yo? You did this shit! TWICE!”

Tears pooled in Nariah’s eyes, making me loosen the hold I had on her wrist. “Don’t tell me yo hard ass ‘bout to sit up here and cry?”

“Leave me alone, Julius?”

Sitting back on my knees I pulled Nariah into me. “Bruh don’t cry. Aight. I ain’t mean to make you feel a way. And if it make you feel better, I wrote that the night you told me.”

“It doesn’t make it right Julius.” She fretted.

“I ain’t saying it to make it right. I’m just letting you know I did it cause I was mad.”

“You know how many times I’ve been mad at you? Have I ever did some shit like

that?”

“Nigga.” I drawled and cocked my head to the side. “So, you ain’t get on live and tell the world I was a trick and had Tamia played her part her rent prolly would’ve still been getting paid.” When she ain’t say shit I asked again. “That wasn’t you twin?”

“It’s the truth ain’t it.” She bleated, making me laugh.

“Not the point Nariah.” Using the back of my hand I wiped the tears from her face. “I know you did that shit with Flocco to get a reaction out of me. I ain’t understand the shit then but the more I sit and think ‘bout it I’m realizing had I kept it a stack we wouldn’t even be in this predicament.

When you asked me ‘bout Tamia I should’ve kept it funky with you then, but I wasn’t ready for you to walk away. So, I lied ‘cause I ain’t think the shit was ever gone come out.”

“But it did Julius. You know how bad that shit hurt me. We’re not eighteen and twenty-two no more. We got a kid. At some point we gotta grow up and stop playing games.”

“You right. I’m not gon’ even argue with you.” Dropping my shoulders I clapped my hands together. “I fucked up and it really ain’t nothing I can say to make this shit better. I could sit here and act like I’mma be okay with you moving on to another nigga but I’m not. Will I try to be? Maybe so. Do it and find out.”

“Julius.” She groaned.

My eyebrows dipped. “Shit you want me to lie. I’mma ease up off you though. Let you do yo thang.”

“Are you really?”

“So, you want another nigga, Nariah?”

“See.” She sucked her teeth.

“I’m fucking with ya.” I smirked. “Like I said I prolly got ‘bout three-four more crash outs in me before I get the picture.”

As much as it bothered me to say this shit, I knew I had to. I couldn’t keep whooping niggas ass behind Nariah. I would never stay out of jail. I had to think ‘bout my jit. I would forever love her ass but if I had to let her go in order for us to survive, I was willing to put my pride to the side and do just that.

“You gon always have my heart. You gave me my seed, Nariah. I’mma always put you above the rest of them bitches. If another nigga is what you want, then you got my blessing.”

Nariah palmed my forehead and stared at me. “Are you sick?”

“Nawl. But I know I’m ‘bout to be.” I chuckled. “Especially when you get a boyfriend. I’mma be sick as a bitch.”

“I’m not looking for a boyfriend, Julius.”

“Them muthafuckas sholl looking for you. Tell Dip I’mma let him ride.”

“Well.” Nariah huffed. “I think last night was it for him. He texted me and said we need to put us on ice.”

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“Don’t tell me the nigga weak.”

“Julius, you threatened to end that man’s career.”

“I did huh.” I chuckled. “Tell him I was playing.”

“I’m good. I got too much on my plate as is. A relationship won’t do shit but slow me down.”

“That’s ‘bout the smartest shit yo ass done ever said.”

“Fuck you.” She sassed.

Now that I’d waved the white flag I prayed Nariah, and I could at least get back on speaking terms. “We good?” I questioned and held my hand out.

“We’re good Julius.”

“Good.” Wrapping my arm around her I pulled her into a hug. “I love you, Nariah.”

“I love you too, Julius.” She whispered.

After letting her go I stood from the floor and reached my hand out to help her up. “Are we still doing Jude’s birthday together?”

“He would be mad if we didn’t.”

“Aight. Let me know what you need from me, and we can go from there.”

“I’ll send you an email later.”

“Bet. You still want me to get him?”

“He’s downstairs with yo mama now.”

“Oh, shit let me go holla at my lil hitta.”

“I’mma use the bathroom first. I’ll meet you downstairs.” She let me know before pivoting into the ensuite bathroom.

“You did good, Juice.” Tito praised when I stepped out of my bedroom.

“Nigga. How long yo ass been standing there?”

“Oh, I walked up here with Nariah.” He laughed. “You ate them licks.”

“Fuck you dog. I’m in there getting my ass beat and you out here listening. You ain’t shit for real.”

“Y’all needed to get that shit out.”

“Yeah aight.” I snorted.

“You serious ‘bout letting her go?”

Glancing behind me at the bathroom door I nodded my head. “Yeah.” I breathed. “Ain’t no since in dragging her through the mud when I know we only in this position ‘cause I fucked up. When I get my head right, I’m coming for what’s mine.”

“There it is.”

“There it is.” I repeated and jogged down the stairs. My focus now was being the best father I could to Juju and my music. I was confident that before it was over Nariah, and I would be back together. I had to get me right first.

nariah

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Sliding my shades on my face I pulled the hoodie over my head and sat at the front of the jet by the window. Today was the day we were flying to Punta Cana for Jude's birthday. Julius had rented out both villas at the Nickelodeon resort so the family could celebrate with him.

Me, him, and Jude were staying in one while both of our moms and my sister were going in the other one. Tito, Byron, Lucas, and the rest of the security were staying on site in a few of the other suites. We wanted everyone to be comfortable since we were staying for the week.

"Ma, you and Ms. Norma can take the room in the back. The rest of the peanut gallery will be alright out here."

"You sure? I know you're tired. If you want to go lay down, you can." Ms. Norma said.

"No ma'am. I wouldn't dare take that from y'all."

"Alright baby." My mama smiled.

The few days leading up to today was spent with me getting mine and Jude's things ready but also at the warehouse packing orders. I had run a thirty-five percent off sale so I could get rid of the rest of my inventory because by the time I made it back to Atlanta the new shipment would have arrived.

Between doing that and finalizing the last-minute details of this trip my ass was tired and planned on sleeping the entire flight. Jude had spent the night with Julius so that I

could finish doing everything I needed to do.

“Mommy!” Jude yelled when he spotted me laid back in the seat.

Pushing my hood back, I dropped my shades in my lap. “Buddy. Are you excited?”

Jude threw his lil body into my chest. “Yes. My daddy said I get to see Sponge Bob.”

“Yes, baby you will.” I kissed his cheek. “You sitting with me or going with TT Lariah?”

“Ummm.” He pondered for a second before breaking my heart. “I’m going with TT.”

“Aight. Riah, make sure he has his headphones and his iPad.”

“They right here.” Julius said, stepping on the jet looking like something right out of heaven. Here I was from head to toe in Alo while this man looked like he was ‘bout to hop on stage. “Here Juju, give yo bag to Lariah.”

After getting him situated Julius leaned into the empty space beside me. “You gon’ let me sit here?”

Sliding my shades back on I fixed my hood. “Boy I do not care. Just make sure you or your son don’t bother me.”

Stepping out of the aisle he waited for everybody else to board before responding. “Aight. Now when you need somebody to get yo ass something don’t ask me or my son.” He laughed and mushed the side of my head.

“Trust me I won’t.” Unfolding my Hermes throw I draped it across my lap and kicked off my shoes.

Julius spoke with the pilot a few minutes before the door was closed. Once we were cleared for take-off I popped two Benadryl and let the engine lull me right on to sleep.

“Hold your nose.” I yelled before picking Jude up off the ground. Running towards the pool I hopped in it with him still in my arms. When we came from under the water his lil ass was begging me to do it again. “You gon’ have to go ask your daddy.” I laughed.

“Please mommy.”

“Aight.” I groaned. “One more time then we gotta get out and eat.”

We had barely checked in before Jude was begging to get in the pool. While Julius handled everything, I had concierge drive us over to the villa so I could get changed and get in the water with him. Once Julius finished, he joined us. The rest of the family had ventured to their own spots, so it was just the three of us.

“Don’t forget what I taught you.” I said to Jude before jumping in the pool one final time. This time when we swam to the surface Julius was standing on the edge of the pool with his hands on his hips.

“Y’all ain’t hear me calling y’all.” He fussed.

“No.” I dug in my ear. “We been hopping in and out of the pool for the last fifteen minutes. I placed Jude on the side of the pool near Julius before climbing out. After digging my bottoms out of my ass, I bypassed him and made a beeline for my towel. “What you wanted?”

“I was tryna tell y’all the food here.”

“Good. Cause I’m hungry as hell.”

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“Ain’t nobody tell yo ass to stay out all night without eating.”

“Boy I was at my warehouse I’ll have you know.”

“Warehouse my ass. Atlanta Tea said you was hugged up with Dip.”

“You lying.” I laughed.

“On Ma Dukes I’m not.”

“Oh. We went to lunch yesterday but hugged up was a stretch.” The space Dip wanted to put between us lasted all of a week. I was out at Saks shopping for the trip when I stumbled upon him at Chanel. We actually spotted each other at the same time. I was going to keep it pushing but it was no bad blood and the last thing I wanted him to think was that I felt a way ‘bout him ending things.

We ended up talking and he got some things off his chest which resulted in us agreeing to just be friends. I wasn’t bothered by that at all. Slowly but surely the two of us started hanging out when either of us had a lil free time and since I was getting ready to be gone for a week, he wanted to do lunch the other day.

We met at Lenox and went and had lunch at the Cheesecake Factory and once we were done, he got in his car, and I got in mine. No harm no foul.

“Y’all back kicking it?” Julius probed.

“We’re friends.”

“That’s what’s up. So, buddy didn’t let me run him off.” He smirked.

“Nope he didn’t.” I popped. “In fact, he told me he wasn’t worried ‘bout my bitch ass baby daddy.” I whispered the last part ‘cause we had a little person standing there all in our mouth.

“I’ll beat that nigga ass.” Julius frowned.

Ignoring him I ran my hands through Jude’s wet hair. “Come on Jude let me get you fed.”

“Can you call and order me a drink?”

“I ain’t ordering yo ass shit. Drink ya spit.” Julius fussed and pulled out a chair for him and Jude at the table.

“Chapped ass.” Sitting down across from them I put two slices of pizza on Jude’s plate before sliding over a bottle of water. “Once you finish eating and you give it a few minutes your dad will take you back to the pool.”

“Yes ma’am.”

Julius placed Jude’s iPad in front of him and sat down beside him. “Did you tell the front desk how many people we were hosting for dinner tomorrow?”

“I did.” Getting up from the table Julius pulled a piece of paper out of his bag. “I meant to give this to you. That lady said call her if this not right.”

Julius and I picked this resort because of all the amenities it had for kids. Tomorrow was Jude’s actual birthday, and we had paid to block off the Turtle Power Dinner so him and the rest of our guest can have an uninterrupted night. I’d even went as far as

finding a local baker to make his birthday cake. Julius had spent some serious money for all of this but when it came to Jude nothing was off limits.

Looking over the paper I checked to make sure that the event planner had gotten everything right. With the way life abruptly changed for Jude I wanted to make this year's party extra special. Honestly it was a little heartbreaking that he had to be in the middle of me and Julius's shit, but life happened and unfortunately the situation was out of my control.

I would much rather him experience us apart and happy opposed to together and miserable. Checking over the final details I sat the paper down. "Looks good to me."

"Bet. I ain't trying to have shit go wrong and you be in your feelings." Julius chuckled.

"As long and Jude has a good party then I'll be happy. After all, this was what he's been asking for so I'm just trying to makesure everything goes off without any hiccups. Ain't that right Jude?"

"Yes ma'am." He said, lightweight ignoring my ass.

"You know he ain't heard shit you just said."

"I know." I laughed. "I've got somebody coming in the morning to decorate. I'll have everything set up before he wakes up."

"I'm sure you will." Julius chided. "It's gone be good Nariah. Don't be over there stressing out 'bout the shit."

"I'm not." I lied. Jude was an apathetic kid. Anytime I asked him what he wanted for his birthday or Christmas he would always tell me he didn't care. So, when he

specifically asked for his birthday to be here, I knew I had to go all out. “He doesn’t require much so I want to make sure he enjoys this.”

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“He will enjoy anything you do for him. You already know that. He gon’ be good Nariah.” Julius confirmed.

“You right.” I sighed. Forcing my back into the seat I crossed my arms at my stomach. “How’s the new album going?”

“It’s going. The label tryna sway me to switch my sound up. After everything that went down with ya boy they feel like I need more mainstream songs. You know...to make me more marketable.”

“And how do you feel ‘bout that?”

“You know that ain’t even me. I’m a Grady baby through and through all I know is the struggle and how to hustle. Ain’t no way they think I’m ‘bout to be up there rapping ‘bout some shit that don’t have no substance.”

“What Tito and Noble say ‘bout it?”

“To do me.” He shrugged.

“Doing you has landed you where you are right now. So, I would have to agree.”

“Yeah. We gon’ see though. I know my ass been skating on thin ice with all of the unnecessary drama and shit, so I beentrying to do just enough to appease them to keep them off my back.”

“Well...” I drawled. “Juice doesn’t think before he reacts.”

“Juice huh.” He snorted. “I hear ya talking.”

“Just saying.” I held my arms up. “You’re hot headed and don’t think ‘bout the consequences of your actions. Juice moves how he wants to move and doesn’t care how those move affects those around him.”

“I call bullshit.” He snorted. Leaning up he furrowed his brows and stared at me. “Never once have I done some shit and ain’t think ‘bout what the fuck the consequences were. I’m very calculated Nariah and grown enough to know that behind every action lies a reaction.”

“Okay.” I chuckled under my breath. “If you say so.”

“I know so. All I’m saying is when I pressed that nigga Flocco I was fully cognizant of the reaction I was going to receive.”

“Cognizant huh.” I repeated and tongued my cheek. “Where was the cognition when you fucked outside of your relationship.” I gritted before realizing that this wasn’t the time and place for this conversation. Before Julius could respond I stood and pushed my chair back. “You know what—it doesn’t even matter. Let’s just focus on Jude this week and make sure he has the best birthday ever. Our failed relationship issues are just that. No need to rehash anything.”

Walking off I ambled up the stairs to my bedroom. I needed this week to fly by so that Julius and I could go back to existing in two different spaces. My feelings were still raw from what had happened and the last thing either of us needed was for an argument to ruin my baby’s birthday.

Sliding my chair back I held my arms out for Jude. Once he was nestled in my lap, I

secured my arms around him and rocked side to side.

“That’s why his ass spoiled now.” Tito tittered.

Glancing down at my baby I beamed. “I don’t care how old he gets he’s still my baby.” Placing a kiss on Jude’s temple I focused my attention back on the conversation unfolding at the table. Jude’s fifth birthday dinner had been a success. Not only did my baby get to dine with the Ninja Turtles the resort had also set it up for SpongeBob and Patrick to attend his dinner.

Once everybody finished eating, he took pictures with his favorite characters. Me, Jude, and Julius had taken a few pictures since we were matching and shit. Something that I hadn’t planned at all, the shit kind of just went that way. I didn’t put up much of a fight because my baby was happy. All night he’d kept telling me how much he loved me and how much of a great mommy I was. Which let me know that I’d done my job.

“Wait. What are we doing tomorrow?” I asked Julius.

“I wanna go off the resort to do a little shopping.” Ms. Norma said. “Me and Sariah.” She added, making my mom nod. “

“I’ll send Lox with y’all.” He shared before turning to me. “What ‘bout you? What’s on your agenda?”

“I thought everybody was going to spend the day at the resort.” The resort was throwing a foam party tomorrow and Jude wanted to go to that, so I’d made it my business to invite everybody to spend the day with us. I should’ve known my mama and Ms. Norma would have other plans.

“We can still do that if you want. Ma Dukes n’em can go shopping and link back up

with us whenever.”

“It’s up to y’all. The chef is supposed to come in the morning. I’m sure this one.” I glanced down at Jude “will sleep in.”

“Well, we can just play it by ear then.”

“Cool with me. Can you call the car around?”

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“Already outside. You need me to handle anything, or we can slide?”

“They have your card on file so we should be good.”

“Bet.” He stood. “Y’all let’s roll out.” Julius grabbed Jude out of my arms and walked off.

“Mama call me in the morning before y’all leave the resort and please don’t go without security.”

“We won’t.” After telling everybody goodnight I hopped onto the sprinter with Julius and headed for the house.

Upon arriving back at the villa, I retired to my room while Julius made sure Jude got ready for bed. I was standing at the mirror removing my make up when my phone vibrated on the counter. Fighting back my smile I swiped my finger across the screen and propped the phone up.

Dip’s handsome face came into view. From the lights illuminating in his background, I could tell he was sitting outside around the pool. His favorite thing to do when he was at home. Swiping his tongue across his lip he smirked. “What’s up sexy.”

“Hey.” I grinned.

“What you got going on?”

“Just got back from dinner.”

“Lil man enjoy himself?” He asked.

“He did.” I nodded. “Apparently I’m an amazing mom.” I boasted and nibbled on my bottom lip.

“Glad to know. Maybe you’ll be equally as amazing to the ones I’mma put in you.”

“Oh, shut the fuck up.” I laughed.

“I’m fucking with ya.”

“I already know.”

“Yo baby daddy behaving himself?”

“He been cool. We almost had a lil spat yesterday but I didn’t let it go far.”

“That’s what’s up.” He yawned. “I ain’t want shit though. Was checking up on you.”

“In other words, you miss me huh.” I flirted.

“Lightweight.” He joked. “Nawl, I do. Tryna get on yo calendar when you touch back down in the A.”

“I’m sure Jude will be going with one of his Meme’s so you might get your wish.”

“I think I like the sound of that.”

“How was your day?”

“It was cool.” Rubbing his hand over the top of his head he elaborated. “Had an early

morning call time for this shoot I did with Nike. Hell, I ain't too long made it back to the crib."

"How'd that go?"

"It was cool. It's for the shoe I designed. Ya know the one I was telling you 'bout."

"I remember." I acknowledged. "Gotta make sure I get me a pair when they?—"

The sound of my room door opening cut my words off. "Aye twin." Julius called out, barging into my bathroom. When he noticed that I was on the phone his eyes narrowed. The way he was standing there looking I lowkey felt like I'd gotten caught doing something I shouldn't have been doing.

That feeling quickly went away. Julius and I weren't together, and he already knew Dip and I were talking. "What's up?" I asked when I noticed that he hadn't said shit.

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Recovering quickly Julius said. “Oh, my bad.” Tossing his hands up he chuckled before backing out of the door with his eyes fixated on my phone screen.

“Baby daddy?” Dip asked.

“Yeah.” I sighed and rubbed my hand across my forehead.

“It’s cool. Gon’ handle yo business and hit me up tomorrow.”

“No. It’s okay.”

“Nawl Nariah. It’s clear you and that nigga got some shit y’all need to talk about. Handle that and hit me up tomorrow.”

“Dip.”

“We good. Handle ya business and I’mma holla at you aight.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah mama. I’m sure.”

“Okay.” I breathed. “Goodnight, Dip.”

“Goodnight lil baby.”

When the call ended, I finished taking off my makeup before hopping into the

shower. Julius and I had both agreed that me moving on was for the best. Even if we agreed I'm sure it wasn't a good feeling for him to see me entertaining other niggas. Just like I felt some type of way every time ole girl posted something about him.

Just like it wasn't shit I could do about him being with somebody else, he couldn't do anything about me and Dip. It might hurt him to see it, but this was our reality and at no fault of mine.

juice

. . .

Sitting on the edge of the pool I lit the tip of my blunt and took a long pull. Holding the smoke in my mouth I tossed my head back and closed my eyes. After making sure Juju was sleep, I was going to invite Nariah to come kick it with me outside. Shit the last thing I expected was for her to be on the phone cup caking with that nigga Dip with no fucking clothes on.

I was heated as fuck and knew I ain't have no right to be. It's just a different feeling knowing yo rib out here getting fucked on by a nigga that ain't you. A feeling I on think I'll ever be able to get used too. Us sharing a crib probably wasn't the best idea especially since I knew it was a chance that her and that nigga would be on the phone again. It was probably best for everybody if I maintained a safe distance. Ya know, to keep myself from nutting up on her.

Blowing the smoke out I pulled my phone out of my pocket and connected it to the speaker. Tito and n'em had hit up the club after we left dinner and now my duck ass was mad I ain't roll with them niggas.

The hairs on the back of my neck stood up the minute I sensed Nariah was near. The vanilla fragrance she wore wafted through the night air. "I ain't mean to interrupt

you.” Taking another toke of the blunt I held the smoke in before pushing it out through my nose.

“What’s up?” She asked and sat beside me.

“Not shit. I ain’t sleepy and knew yo ass wasn’t either. Was gon’ see if you wanted to kick it out here with me.”

“Oh.” she mumbled.

Tilting my head I looked her up and down. “I see you got on clothes now.” I pulled from the blunt and choked out. “That’s good.”

“Julius please.” She retorted.

“Ain’t said shit.” I held my hand up. Taking one last pull I leaned over and rubbed the blunt against the concrete. “Just making an observation.”

“Yeah.” She huffed smugly. “Julius, I’m going to date. We’ve already discussed this.”

“Do yo thing twin. You a grown ass woman.

“That’s something that you don’t have to tell me. I am grown.”

“Okay then. What we talking ‘bout?”

“You!” She scoffed.

“Me?” I asked and pointed at my chest. “Fuck I do to you?”

“Everything.” She grunted.

“Aight twin. You got it.” I wasn’t trying to argue with Nariah. For once I really wasn’t. I was tryna accept the fact that she was really moving on from my ass.

“I know I do.” Dropping her elbows down onto her legs Nariah cradled her head in her hands. “Why couldn’t you just be faithful.”

“Nariah, ain’t no blueprint on this shit. I love you and that ain’t never been a question. I did some fucked up shit and I can sit here and make up a hundred reasons why but it ain’t gon’ change a fucking thing. On top of that ain’t no rhyme or reason why I did the shit. Just like it ain’t no reason to try and justify the shit. I fucked up and I gotta own that.

I know I played a lot of games, but you really are the love of my life. You mean more to me than all of this shit. Ain’t nobody in this world that make me feel the way you do. I be sitting here thinking and yeah, I know we over with and moving on and shit, but I’ll never feel like it’s just over. Part of me feel like we lost our way and eventually we will find our way back.

The thought of you being with another nigga will never sit right with me and I ain’t gone sit here and pretend that it will. Cause it was supposed to be just us.”

“If it was supposed to just be us then why wasn’t it?” The tremble in her voice let me know she was ‘bout to start crying.

“I feel like we’re going in circles with no direction on how to stop and go straight. I be in my head trying to figure outhowI allowed myself to get here. Knowing I should’ve walked away when my heart told me you was out fucking off. I used to feel like what we had was a once in a lifetime kind of thing.”

“And it was.” I avowed.

“Not if you gave it to somebody else.” She hissed. “Like damn was I not enough?”

“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

“In other words, I don’t satisfy you. Got it.” She nodded. “So there really wasn’t shit I could’ve done to prevent this. Noted.”

What I did ain’t have shit to do with Nariah. And I hated that she felt the need to place the blame on herself instead of on me. Nariah was perfect in every fucking aspect. The last thing I wanted was to break her spirit and have her questioning herself.

“That’s just it. You do. You satisfy my spirit and not just my flesh. You did everything the right way. It was me who fucked us up. And that’s something I’mma have to live with. What I did had nothing to do with you and more to do with me being greedy.”

“This shit is so fucked up.” She fretted.

Thumbing away her tears I groaned. “I know baby. I’m already knowing. I need to ask you something though.” My tone was low, vulnerable even, but my heart

wouldn't rest until I knew what I was up against. Cause let's face it, I wasn't ready to give Nariah up. Like at all and was fully prepared to do whatever I had to do to get her back.

“What Julius?”

“We done? Like you don't ever see us fixing this shit?”

“Why? Why do what you did if this was where you wanted to be Julius? Why even put us through that?”

“I'on know.” I shrugged.

“Then there's your answer. I don't know.” Getting up Nariah stared down at me. “If I meant all of that to you then hurting me wouldn't have even crossed your mind. You're asking if this is it but have yet to say you won't do it again. I don't think you understand how much this broke me. I feel so weak for even wanting to still be with you.

It feels like I lower myself every time I think about coming back. Like I have no dignity. You carried on a whole relationship on the side and because you're sorry you got caught, I'm supposed to just forget that it happened. I am not that girl Julius. And the more we rehash this situation I feel like you don't respect me.” Paying me one final glance Nariah turned and walked off taking my beating heart right along with her.

It took me a few seconds to process what had just happened and before my mind could register it completely, I was off my feet and trailing her into the house. Grabbing her by the arm I pulled her to me. “I'm sorry baby. I told her as my heart twisted in my chest. “I'm sorry for fucking up and I'm sorry for hurting you.”

Nariah looked up at me with tears in her eyes. “Julius, I don’t believe you.”

“That’s fair. I never meant to hurt you though Nariah.”

“You did. A lot.” Tucking her bottom lip between her cheek she closed her eyes and expelled a deep breath.

“I’m sorry.” I repeated and grabbed her face between the palm of my hands. “I’ll let you go Nariah.”

“You said that las?—”

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Silencing her I specified. “I love you and that shit ain’t gon’ change but you deserve better.” The look of defeat in Nariah’s eyes ate at my soul. I had really broken her down. I knew the healthiest and safest thing to do for everybody involved was to let her walk. As much as the shit hurt me to do, it had to be done.

“I never wanted better. I wanted you to be better.”

“And that’s something I gotta deal with.”

Letting her go I took a step back and rubbed my sweaty hands down my shorts. “Goodnight Nariah.

She stared at me a few seconds before tipping her head. When she turned to walk off, I couldn’t move. My feet felt like they were cemented to the ground. I stood there and watched until she was no longer in view. It wasn’t until then did I decide to walk away for good.

Rolling over in bed I shielded my eyes from the sun that was blaring through the blinds. As I stretched, I recalled the events of last night that led to the throbbing of my head. My shit felt like it was getting ready to split at any moment.

When I let Nariah go, I was good, or so I thought I was. Until I laid my ass in bed and got in my feelings. Instead of crying like a bitch I drowned my sorrows in that cheap ass tequila that I had our butler to bring. Patting the bed for my phone I slipped it from under the pillow and groaned after noticing that I had slept the majority of the fucking day away. Juju was gone be mad at my ass ‘cause I was supposed to go with them to the foam party.

After plugging my phone up I slid out of bed and trekked into the ensuite bathroom to relieve my bladder. Standing at the sink I washed my face and brushed my teeth before turning on the shower. Once I'd shed my shorts I hopped in and stood with my back to the water. Nigga heart was broke. My ass had really lost my fucking peace. And I ain't have nobody to blame but myself.

The temptation, the pressure, the bullshit... the fucking lifestyle. All of that had singlehandedly played into the demise of my relationship. Ma Dukes had predicted the shit before it even happened. I remember it just like it was yesterday. I hit her up the night Nariah agreed to be my girl. Ma Dukes told me I was getting ready to experience some shit that I'd never experienced before and because of the temptation she felt like I should just be friends with Nariah until I knew for sure that I wanted to be in a relationship.

Her biggest worry was that I was gon' fuck up and break that girl's heart. My ass was so sure that I wasn't. I mean I just fucking knew I wasn't gone dog her out. Ma Dukes was right on the money when she said I was and was too stubborn to see how it was going to hurt Nariah in the end.

Had I listened and just been her friend her ass would've been with another nigga. I would've had to play the friend role, and I wasn't beat for that shit. If I could do it over again, I would've still went with my move. The only thing I would've changed was not being able to keep my dick in my pants.

If I could go back, I wouldn't have fucked none of them girls. Hell, I wouldn't have even let em suck my dick. I lost my girl behind some temporary gratification. Rookie mistake on my part for sure. I never thought I'd lose Nariah. Like not fucking ever and I had. Only thing I could do now was shit... I guess sitback and watch somebody else love her the way she deserved to be loved.

After my long shower I hopped out and put on a pair of Burberry swim trunks.

Sliding my shades over my eyes and a hat over my head I left out of the room so I could go find my family and apologize to Juju. Glancing around to make sure I had everything I hit the door and got on the golf cart so I could drive to the main resort.

Tito was the first face I found in the crowd once I made it to the pool area. Ambling over to him I plopped down in the chair beside him and rolled my neck.

“Long night.”

“Something like that.” I mumbled.

“Nari said you was still sleep when they left.”

“Got fucked up last night. Now my shit throbbing and I’m hungry as a bitch.”

“We just ordered lunch. It should be out in a minute.”

“Good. Where Juju at?” I quizzed and looked around.

“Him and Nari in the lazy pool. He been looking for you.”

“I bet.” Dropping my elbow on the table I rubbed my hand over my face. “After last night I’on think Nari want me in her presence.”

“This ain’t got shit to do with either one of y’all. It’s ‘bout Juju.”

“You don’t think I know that.” I hissed lowly.

“Must not.” He sat back and stared out at the pool. “You look like shit.”

“Courtesy of that fucking Jose Cuervo.”

“Cheap ass shit.” He chuckled. “No wonder yo ass got a headache.”

“Right.” I laughed. “I needed something to take the edge off though.”

“Go find Juju. I’ll have them bring some aspirin or some shit. I’ll come find y’all when the food come.”

“Do that.” I tapped my knuckles on the table and stood.

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It took a cool minute to find Nari and Juju. When I did, I had to laugh at the two of them. Nari was over in an innertube while Juju was pushing her through the lazy river. Hopping down in the water I caught up to them.

“Boo.” I whispered into Juju ear before reaching into the water.

“Daddy!” He squealed. Hoisting him up I sat him on my shoulder and nudged the innertube forward.

“Somebody finally woke up.” Nari rolled her eyes.

“Yeah. I had to sleep that liquor off.”

“Good thing you’re here now. He wants to go to the wave pool.” Nari hopped out of the innertube and shoved it away from her. “You can take him while I go get me another drink.”

“Tito ordered lunch. He supposed to come find us when it’s ready.”

“We can go do that then.” She shared. The three of us played in the water until we reached the front of the wave pool. When we stepped out Nari and I grabbed Juju’s hand and the three of us walked over to where Tito was sitting.

When we got back to the table Shunta and her kids was at the table with him. Juju shook his hands loose and took off running for the table. The server had brought the medicine so after popping both pills in my mouth I hurriedly downed some water so that I could put something on my stomach before Juju decided he was ready to get

back in the pool.

We sat around the table kicking shit while the kids talked. Nari and Shunta had decided that the adults would come over to the crib later on this evening so we could chill and play cards. They was busy making plans while I was busy checking Nari out. The cream two piece she wore came from her line and looked damn good against her milk chocolate skin. I had to look away to keep my body from betraying me by reacting. They had barely finished making plans when Juju shared that he was done eating and ready to go.

“Lil ass ain’t ate shit.” I mumbled, after peeping the half-eaten taco on his plate. Instead of arguing with him I let everybody know that we would be back. Hand in hand the two of us walked back to the pool area.

“You wanna go up close?” I asked.

“I don’t know.” He stared at the pool like his lil ass was scared.

“Aye.” Getting eye level I asked. “You scared?”

“No.” He shook his head.

“Good.” I adjusted the straps on his life vest before pulling him deeper into the water. “Before the water start, they gone blow a horn. That’s when the water gone start waving. Hold on to me and I got you.”

“Okay.” He tried to smile but I knew his lil ass was scared as hell. Juju could swim; we paid good money for his lessons. Plus, anytime the weather permitted we were always in the pool at the crib. I ain’t mind him being scared as long as he knew I wouldn’t let nothing happen to him.

The minute the horn blew I promise his eyes got bucked as hell. To ease his fears, I spun him around and put his back to my chest and held him to me. “Get ready.” I yelled when the waves started to pick up.

The first wave that crashed into us pushed us back a lil bit. Every time one would rush us Juju lil ass would grab my wrist. “I got you. I ain’t gone let nothing happen” I chuckled.

When it was over Juju decided that he was no longer scared and wanted to go again. So that’s what we did. Eventually Nariah, Shunta, and the other kids joined us. We stayed in there until Juju wanted to slide.

Today was all about him so I had no problem letting him drag me all across the park. The more time I spent hanging with my son the more my feelings for anything else dissipated. We wanted Juju to enjoy himself and judging by the huge smile on his face I would say we accomplished it. We had a few more days to go and if today was indicative on how things would play out then I was good. My focus was on making sure that smile on Juju face stayed there permanently. I would deal with the rest of the shit when we made it back to Atlanta.

nariah

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Slouchingdown in my chair I nodded my head to the song playing through the speaker. I let Shunta convince me to have everybody over tonight and my ass was regretting it. I had one too many shots of tequila and now I was eyeing my baby daddy.

Last night when the two of us was talking I had temporarily forgot who the fuck I was and got in my feelings. So much so that I ended up crying myself to sleep last

night. When I woke up this morning, I prayed to God that he let whatever love I had for Julius disappear.

I was over being hurt and feeling like the nigga ain't care 'bout my feelings. I knew Julius loved me just like he knew I loved him. But together we just didn't work, and I was okay with that. If we never found our way back to each other I was cool with that as well.

However, sitting here right now slightly inebriated had me wanting to climb in his lap and let him fuck my frustrations away. When we left the water park Julius had came home and showered. The blue Louis Vuitton swim trunks he had on were short and had his meaty thigh on display, not only that I could see that familiar bulge resting against his thigh.

"Fucking Reposado." I fussed under my breath before sliding my shades up from my eyes. Julius looked at me and winked like he could tell the salacious thoughts running through my mind. The way I hopped out of my chair you would've thought it was on fire. Something was on fire, and I promise it wasn't that chair. "Riah." I called over my shoulder. "Come inside with me real quick."

As soon as my sister was near, I looped my arm through hers and drug her inside of the house. Shutting the door behind us I leaned with my back against it, causing Lariah to stare at me like I had lost my mind.

"You good?" She questioned.

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“Hell nawl.” I mumbled. “Tell me I’m drunk and need to sleep it off.”

“You’re drunk and need to sleep it off.” She repeated.

“No Lariah.” I whined and stomped my feet. Meandering over to the couch I sat down and pulled one of the throw pillows over my face.

“What’s wrong?”

“Julius and I had a talk last night.” I mumbled into the pillow.

Lariah snatched the pillow out of my hand and tossed it to the side. “Talk about what?”

“The usual. He sorry he broke my heart. He love me. Blah blah blah.” I shared.

“Okay so what’s the problem?”

“I’m horny.” I whined and I wanna fuck my baby daddy.”

“Oh, bitch please. I thought something serious had happened.” Tucking her feet under her butt Lariah faced me. “Fuck him. It’s just that simple.”

“I can’t just sleep with him Riah.”

“Why not? You slept with Flocco, and it wasn’t good. At least you know Juice can put it down.”

“That’s the problem.” I bleated. “If I fuck him tonight I’mma wanna do it again.”

“Okay and do it as many times as you need to get it out of your system.”

“You don’t get it.” I pouted. “I’m in love with that nigga.”

“And that’s the point you not getting. Fuck that nigga and when y’all finish get up and leave. No cuddling, no pillow talk or none of that other shit. Get your nut and slide on his ass. If he get in his feelings let him know you needed to get touched. Thank that nigga for his services and go on about your business.”

Lariah made the shit sound like a business transaction. I don’t see myself having casual sex with the nigga that I’m still in love with. Besides I’m supposed to be healing from his ass not falling back into a trap.

“I’m tripping. I can’t sleep with Julius.” Nodding my head I got up from the couch and did a quick shimmy. “Okay, I’m okay.” I tried to convince myself.

“You not.” Riah laughed. “I say get it out of your system now that way when we get back home you can go back to not having to see his ass every day. You only feeling like you do ‘cause y’all are sleeping down the hall from each other. I say fuck him and toss a few bills on his nightstand. Let that nigga know it’s nothing.” She shrugged nonchalantly.

I shook my head. “I’m good. I was tripping.” I held my hand out for her. “We can go back outside.”

“Okay girl.” She jested.

Taking my place back at the table I grabbed my glass and downed the shot. The best thing for me to do was keep my eyes off Julius. I heard everything Riah said and

unlike her I wasn't able to mask my feelings long enough to get my rocks off. Not when the nigga had the best dick I'd ever had in my life. Yeah...nawl I couldn't.

"You good?" Julius asked from across the table.

"Peachy." I lied. "Oooh that's my song." Rocking to the music I waited for Teyana's sultry voice to come through the speaker when the song was changed. Frowning my face up I stared at Julius. "Why'd you do that? You know that's my shit."

"Cause that wasn't Teyana's song." Lucas heckled, making Tito clear his throat.

My eyes rolled around the table trying to figure out what the fuck they was talking about. Julius's head was down while he scrolled through his phone while the peanut gallery was laughing under their breath.

After a minute I finally said, "y'all weird as fuck for that."

"Nawl." Julius swiped his tongue across his teeth. "That was a song I recorded for you. I was trying to have it played the night of your fashion show, but we couldn't get it cleared on time. That's what took me so long to show up that night."

Staring at him questioningly I turned my lips up. "Quit lying."

"Dead ass." He swore.

“Play it then.”

“Nawl.” He shook his head. “It’s irrelevant now.”

“Play the song Julius.” I ordered and rolled my eyes at his dramatic ass. Shit we were seemingly getting along the night of my fashion show, so I wasn’t worried about being embarrassed like I was the night of Birthday Bash.

The track dropped again and after the intro played Julius’s voice sounded over the track. “Look Nariah, you’re the real one, no flex. You held me down through the storms, no text. You don’t have to speak I feel the vibe. You’re a queen, and I thank God you’re in my life.

Yeah, I’m gonna ride for you. I’ll put my pride to the side for you. Even on my worst days, you’re the reason I find grace. Now I’m up, and it’s clear to see you didn’t just love me, girl; you freed me.

So, I’m gonna love you back, no cap, that’s facts, Nariah. I’m locked in. A real one’s got a real one, now we’re locked in.

When the song ended everybody was looking at me waiting for a reaction, my eyes were fixated on Julius. I didn’t know what to say. I heard the lyrics, and I knew he meant everything he’d said but his actions overshadowed all of it. “That was cute.”

“Cute. Not she said yo shit was cute.” Byron joked.

Tearing his eyes away from me Julius snarled. “Shut the fuck up nigga.”

Rising from the chair I excused myself and walked off. Drunk me couldn't deal with being the center of attention. Instead of torturing myself I decided to call it a night. Strolling into the bathroom I shed my swimsuit and stepped into the shower.

God why is it so hard to walk away from this nigga. I never had to doubt Julius's love for me. It was in everything that he did. It was clear the amount of value our relationship had to him. That flesh being weak shit was a lie. You know how many times niggas had hit me up and I paid they ass dust. I knew what the fuck I had at home and knew there was nothing out there a nigga could offer me that I couldn't get from my man.

As my best friend I expected him not to give into temptation. As my partner and the father of his only child I expected him to know better. Clearly, he didn't so it was what it was. No sense in beating a dead horse.

Finishing my shower, I got out and dried off. Once I was done, I secured the towel around my body and made my way back into the room only to find Julius leaning against the door with his hands stuffed in his pocket.

"What's up? Why you in here?"

"You dipped kind of fast. Wanted to make sure you was cool."

"Oh. I'm good." I smiled. "Got sleepy that's all."

"Oh aight. Well, everybody done left."

"Cool."

He rocked a few times before tipping his head. I watched him open the door before shutting it and resting his hands against it.

“Julius.” I breathed. When he turned to look at me, I recognized the look in his eyes. It matched the one I was sporting early. “Julius no.” I shook my head. I knew the minute this man approached me I was going to give in.

“I’m sorry for what I’m ‘bout to do.” He lied before wrapping his hand around my throat and slamming his mouth against mine. I melted against him instantly. I was at war with my mind, my heart, and my pussy.

I wanted to. No, I needed to push him off me but the way his tongue was caressing the inside of my mouth had my pussy spurting. And sad to say she won. Scooping me up, Julius laid me on the bed and snatched opened the towel.

He sat there in silence for a few seconds before sliding his hands between my thighs. “I miss you so fucking much Nariah. On God I do.”

The first pad of his thumb across my clit had me widening my legs for him. I watched the way his facial expressions changed when he pushed two of his thick fingers into me. “You so fucking wet Nariah.” He groaned and tossed his head back.

Sucking on my tongue to keep from moaning I slammed my eyes shut while Julius rotated his fingers in and out of me. I was trying like hell to keep my moans at bay and had been doing a damn good job until he leaned over and trailed kisses down my neck until he reached my breast. “Don’t hold back twin.” He begged.

Sucking my nipple into his mouth he used his fingers to draw out an orgasm. My body trembled at the release and before I could catch my breath Julius was pushing into me.

“Shit, Julius.” I pushed out with a shaky breath as my hands gripped his arms.

“Damn Nariah.” He groaned. Inch by inch he fed me slow and torturous strokes until

he was fully planted. When our skin started smacking against each other I gasped loudly and rocked my hips against him.

“This shit belongs to me Nariah. On God, I’ll kill you if you give my pussy to another nigga. You want Juju to be motherless?” He taunted and wrapped his hand around my throat. Julius grinded into me like he knew this was the last time that he and I would connect this way. While I couldn’t confirm or deny that it was, I fully planned on enjoying this moment and dealing with the fall out at a later date.

“Oooohhh.” I groaned and bucked my hips when he picked up speed and started slamming into me erratically. My nails scraped against his skin as I lay under him while he pounded in and out of me.

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“Fuck you feel so good.” He gritted. The way my pussy pulsed around him I knew Julius was getting ready to draw another orgasm out of me. Gnawing on my bottom lip I tilted my head back and moaned.

“There it is.” He praised and looked down in between us. Had I looked a second later I probably would’ve missed the possessive look that flashed across his face.

“You ‘bout to cum Nari?”

“Yessss.” I cried.

“Good.” He growled. “I’m ‘bout to beat yo shit in.” Fucking me to oblivion Julius held my hips and pumped in and out of me until we were both jerking roughly from the intense release. By the time we were done not only I was spent but my pussy was sore.

Julius lay on top of me a few seconds breathing into my ear like he’d just run a marathon. When he pulled out my pussy made that sputtering noise, confirming what I had assumed. His ass nudded in me.

Licking my dry lips I croaked. “Julius.”

“My bad Nari.” He dropped his head. “I know you ain’t tryna fuck with me like that and I’mma take that shit on the chin. Just know I’on regret shit we just did.”

I thought he was going to offer to get a plan B, but he didn’t. Instead, he got up from the bed, grabbed his shorts off the floor, and left out of the room. Bastard probably

had PTSD from the last time he offered. Tomorrow, I would make it my business to go and grab one from the pharmacy. I wouldn't dare let Julius trap me with a baby.

When I regained the feeling in my leg, I hit the shower and washed my body off before climbing back into bed. I fell asleep full and satisfied.

Well, let's go wrong for wrong, let's go lick for lick. If I can handle that, let me see you handle this. Do you how you do me, bet you we won't speak again. Favorite player from your favorite team, he in my DM.

Swiping my cup off the table I stood on the couch and swayed to the music.

My baby was with his daddy, and I was bored so I had Tito call Opium to get me a section so I could hang with my girls. I was standing behind Lariah with my arms wrapped around her neck when the song switched to "Trick'n" by Mullage. Rolling my hips I sang the lyrics to the top of my lungs.

It had been a week since we'd been back from Punta Cana, and I had to damn near beg my sister to stay in Atlanta with me for a few more days. Now that I wasn't boo'd up, I was trying to be outside as much as possible and who better to party with.

After the night Julius and I slept together the two of us steered clear of each other. Well... I made it a point to not be around him if it was just the two of us. Of course, we still had to interact for Jude but that was as far as it went. That parting gift was exactly what I needed to get back to myself.

Pictures from our vacation had gone viral and hoes was in the comments saying they knew Julius and I never stopped fucking with each other. Everybody had an opinion about what they thought was going on with the two of us. And everybody was wrong. Julius and I shared a kid—that's it that's all. I felt contrite after sleeping with him so when I made it back to Atlanta, I pulled up on Dip so the two of us could talk.

I could've lied and told him nothing happened between Julius and I but what kind of person would that make me. I kept it a bean and let him know I had a moment of weakness and slept with my baby daddy.

I'm sure he felt a way, but I assured him it was a one-time thing and even though I had no plans on moving backwards, the fact that it was so easy for me to double back just confirmed I don't need to be trying to pursue anything. Dip was cool, we had fun anytime we linked but until I could get Julius out of my system, I was gon' chill out.

Leaning over, I swiped my bottle off the table when I spotted my girl. "Bitch yo ass late." I fussed at Shunta who stepped in the section looking like money. My girl had gotten her hair cut up in a bob and from the few pieces of clothes she had on my girl was tryna get chose.

"Choosing much?" I teased.

"Choosing my ass. That fat ass flunky at the front wasn't tryna let me in the door. Trying to make a bitch stand in line. Do you see me?" She asked and waved her hand up and down her body. "I look like a bitch that stand in lines?" She frowned.

Tossing her hair I smiled. "I like yo hair like this. It makes you look young."

"My baby daddy hate it." She quipped.

"Good thing we don't give a fuck 'bout him." I laughed and slapped hands with her.

"Pour me up a shot Nari!" She pointed at the bottle of 1942 I had in my hand.

After fixing her a drink and handing it off to her I quickly down my shot and poured me another one.

“That ass clapping tonight.” Shunta noted and looked me up and down.

“Yes. Yes, it is.” I smirked and tapped my thumb and pointer finger together. Tonight, I had on a Black Lace Me Bodysuit by King of Style, and a black pair of Amina Muaddi Lori Lace Up sandals.

“You talking ‘bout me choosing let me find out you on the prowl.”

“No ma’am.” I held my hands up. “Niggas on my body but I ain’t biting.”

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“That’s what you say.” She laughed.

I was getting ready to say something to my sister when I start to feel like somebody was watching me. My baby daddy was known to pop up uninvited, but I highly doubted it was him this time. Squinting my eyes I looked around the club trying to see if I could spot the culprit but didn’t see anybody. Maybe I’m tripping.

Shaking that shit off I tried to ignore that feeling and started rapping. My ass was paranoid as fuck now and didn’t want to say anything ‘cause I wasn’t trying to ruin anybody night. Lox was perched at the entrance of my section so if somebody tried anything they had to go through him first. Pulling my phone out of my clutch I snapped a quick selfie before refreshing my lipstick.

“Why this hoe coming over here?” Shunta spat.

Glancing up from the mirror I tried to see who she was talking about. I closed my lipstick and stuck it back in my purse before responding. “Don’t know but I’m on whatever she on.”

Ole girl must’ve thought I was here alone ‘cause her ass really thought she was ‘bout to come into my section. I couldn’t hear the conversation, but I saw Lox shake his head. Clearly, she was here for me.

Stepping down from the couch I walked toward them. “We got a problem?”

“No. No problem at all. I was just coming to speak.” Tamia chided, making her flunkies behind her snicker.

“Speak for what? Hoe we ain’t cool. Just cause you was fucking my baby daddy don’t mean we friends or no shit like that. You ain’t gotta speak to me.”

“Wasfucking yo baby daddy.” She gloated. “You meanstill.”

“Girl, I don’t give a fuck. That’s between the two of y’all.”

“I’m just saying. I don’t know what kind of lies Juli?—”

“Baby girl I seriously don’t give a fuck ‘bout you or that nigga. Like I said had you kept your mouth closed you wouldn’t have got cut off. Don’t think pressing me ‘bout a nigga I fucked last week gone make me feel a way. Cause it’s not. You barking up the wrong tree lil baby.” Turning my back to her I ignored whatever she was saying.

Ain’t no way she thought I was ‘bout to argue with her in a club over a nigga I could have with a snap of my finger. If Tamia knew like I knew it was in her best interest to leave me the fuck alone ‘cause if she thought that nigga had cut her off before he really not ‘bout to fuck with her when I tell him she tried to start some shit with me.

“I love money, and she love me back!” I yelled when Waka’s “Clap” came on. Bending over I did exactly what the song said and started clapping my ass to the song.

“Not you shaking ass while that girl standing there looking stupid in the face.” Lariah heckled and pointed her hand at Tamia. “Oooooohh she madddd.” My sister sang.

That’s just how unbothered I was. I wasn’t the type of bitch that approached the next hoe ‘bout no nigga. I took my issues up with the nigga I was with. Baby girl better get some balls, or she was gone forever go out sad behind a nigga if this was how she handled herself.

“Nariah!” Tamia yelled over the music.

“This girl.” I groaned.

All I heard next was “You need that.”

I spun around so fast. Nawl, I want that. Fuck is you saying!” Before I could stop myself, I was lunging at her. My fist cracked her in the nose and the next thing I know my crew was fighting hers. I was whooping that hoe ass when I was pulled off of her and handcuffed. On one hand I was pissed that I had lost my cool and gotten arrested and on the other I wasn’t. These hoes thought I was pussy, and I had to show em wasn’t shit about me weak. Bitch should’ve kept it pushing the first time now she had gotten her ass drug in the middle of Opium.

juice

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After going backand forth with the label about my sound they’d finally stopped giving me shit about my name being mentioned in some unfavorable moments. All that mainstream bullshit they kept trying to get me to record wasn’t working for me. Now that they’d given me the okay to do me, I was on the grind.

With the way life had been going lately I knew the best way to express myself was through my raps. My goal forScale Dreamswas to turn my pain into a platinum album. I had some of the best producers in the game working with me on it. Something in me was telling me this was the one.

Being a successful artist was a dream of mine. I enjoyed touring and performing for sold out arenas. But above all of that, what I enjoyed the most was sitting in front of that mic and pouring my heart and soul out. Where words failed me, I knew my

music expressed everything that I was trying to say.

Taking a long pull of the blunt I blew it out through my nose and bobbed my head up and down to the beat. The song I was recording was titled “Wasn’t Supposed to Win”. And that resonated so much with me because being a nigga coming from where I came from—winning in life was the furthest thing from reality.

I came from the streets, sold drugs just to afford my studio time. Niggas used to look at me and swear I wouldn’t make it out. When I did, them same niggas was green with envy. Whole time them muthafuckas had the same opportunity that I had they just chose to fuck theirs off. I couldn’t, my heart wouldn’t allow me to give up on myself.

Which is the reason I hustled the way I did. I wanted out and more importantly I wanted to prove to myself that I could do everything that I set my mind on.

“You got that?” My producer Delaun asked.

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“Yeah. Run it back from the top and I’mma hop in once I catch the beat.”

Closing my eyes I waited for the beat to drop. When it was time for me to do my thing, I started flowing off the top of my head.

Came up where the fiends hit the pipe in the rain. Stove top dreams, cookin’ hope out the pain. Had to dodge Feds, seen bros do a bid. Now it’s tour life, private jets with the kid. Wasn't no love, just the .40 and the scale. Now I’m chart-toppin’, still got packs in the mail. Talk pain, I lived that, cold nights, no meal. Turned my losses to lessons, now my name worth a deal.

Made it out the mud, now the sky ain't the limit. Used to pray for a break, now my name in the Senate. From the trap to the stage, yeah, I stayed on my grind. Now it’s Rollies and Wraiths, leave the pain in the rearview behind.

I was in my zone when the music was cut abruptly. When I opened my eyes, I peeped Tito standing behind my engineer waving my phone in the air.

“On God that better be an emergency.” I fussed. Muthafuckas knew I hated to be bothered when I was in the studio. Especially when I was working on an album.

“It’s Lox.”

“Fuck. Aight I’m coming out.” Sliding off the headphones I sat them on the table and exited the booth. When I made it out to the front Tito was handing me the phone and walking out of the door.

“What’s good?”

“Nari just got arrested.”

“I’m on the way.” I chuckled cause it was no way this muthafucka had done got locked up. Not with the way she stayed preaching to my ass. Jogging out of the studio I caught up with Tito and asked. “Fuck is really going on?”

“Yo guess is just as good as mine. Her and her girls was supposed to be at Opium tonight. I had got her a section.”

“Bruh.” I groaned. When I scooped Juju from her earlier, she ain’t mention nothing about going to the club. I’m just glad she was smart enough to take Lox with her. Dropping my head I shook it. “Ain’t no telling what the fuck Nariah ass did to get fucking arrested.”

“Out of all people.” He laughed.

“Right. Out of all fucking people.” I repeated.

Instead of taking my car we hopped in Tito’s truck and headed to Rice Street to go see what the fuck had went down. On the drive over Tito called our lawyer Mike and told him to meet us at the station.

Since Punta Cana, Nari and I had been keeping it strictly about Juju. It was the best thing for us since our shit was so fucking tumultuous. Me and Nariah had a bond like no other so either we was fighting, or we was fucking and since we couldn’t keep shit casual fucking was off the table.

I slipped up that night and even if I ain’t regret the shit I knew she did. It was in the way she moved the next day. I could tell she ain’t want me in her space, so I left her

alone. Outside of a few casual conversations she ain't have no rap for my ass.

I ain't too much mind because it was time for me to lock into my music and I couldn't do that if my mind was on trying to get her back and shit. I loved her enough to let her go and if we were really meant to be together, I had a feeling Big Sandals was gone make it happen for ya boy.

When we pulled up to the jail house Mike was standing out front with his briefcase in one hand and a stack of papers in the other.

"That nigga stay in business mode." Tito noted.

"Shit hopefully he can get this girl out without her having to wait until Monday morning."

Exiting the truck, I met Mike at the front. "Thank you for showing up bruh."

"You know it's no issue Julius."

Stuffing my hand in the pocket of my sweats I nodded toward the entrance. "What we looking at?"

"Disorderly conduct and simple assault."

"Who the fuck she done got into it with?"

Placing his suitcase down on the ground he shuffled through the papers. "Tamia Culpepper."

"Oh yeah I'm cooked." I scoffed. Even though tonight ain't have shit to do with me directly I knew for a fact that Nariah was about to blame all of this shit on me. Nari

wasn't the type of person to start no shit. It didn't matter how she felt about a bitch, it wasn't in her to run up on nobody.

This shit had Tamia written all over it. Bitch had hit me up talking shit after the pics from Juju birthday went viral. Ain't no telling what her ass said to Nariah to get her ass beat. And I bet everything in my account that Tamia got her ass drug. Nari had hands for fucking days. I knew from experience. "Can we get her out?"

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“That’s another thing.” Mike scratched his eyebrow. “It was more of a club brawl.”

“A brawl!” I groused. “Who else got knocked?”

“Lariah, Shunta, Bennie, Fondala, and like three or four girls with Tamia.”

Bennie was Nariah’s personal photographer, and Fondala was one of the chicks who did her makeup. So, for them to be right along with her yeah...I knew what it was.

“They just in that bitch full out fucking fighting.” Tito joked.

“Seems to be that way.”

“Aight. See what you can do to get Nariah and anybody with her out.”

“I’ll let you know.”

“Bet.”

When Mike walked back inside of the precinct Tito ass started with the bullshit. “You know Nariah ‘bout to beat yo ass.”

“Man.” I drawled. “I’m already fucking knowing. My ass ‘bout to be all kind of fuck niggas and shit. Mind you we been keeping it cordial and shit.”

“That peace done ended now.” The nigga tsked before walking off.

Trailing behind him I scrolled through social media trying to see if the shit had hit the net yet and thank God it hadn't. Hopefully Mike could do damage control before it did.

I was kicked back in the truck with my eyes closed when Tito tapped me on the chest. When I opened my eyes and spotted a barefoot Nariah and her crew walking out of the door my heart slowed.

Shit as long as it took for them to be released, I could've sworn they wasn't getting out. Before they could even cross the parking lot, I was out of the truck heading in their direction. The way they was laughing and talking shit I could tell they was bragging about the fight.

"Lariah, I thought you was better than that." I joked.

"She wanted a problem and got her friends ass kicked in the process." She shrugged.

I threw my hand up at the rest of the convicts and waited for them to walk by so I could talk to Nari alone.

"What you out here showing yo ass for Nari?" I asked and pulled her into my chest. Wrapping my arms around her waist I hugged her tightly.

"You should've put a muzzle on yo bitch." She said into my chest before pulling back.

"What happened?" I asked after I let her go.

"She call herself tryna press me 'bout you. Talking 'bout how y'all still fucking off

and shit. I tried to tell the dummy I ain't care, but she wouldn't drop it. Her stupid ass fucked around and got dropped. Talking 'bout you need that."

"She said that?" I queried because that didn't sound like Tamia at all.

"Hell yeah. I told that hoe I wanted that."

"When yo court date?"

"Who knows. Mike said he would let me know."

"Cool. Cool." I stroked my chin. "You aight though? Got anything to get off yo chest?"

"We good Julius." She laughed. "I'm not mad at you if that's what you're wondering."

"You sure?" I asked and narrowed my eyes. Nariah would say one thing then the next thing I know she would be on the phone cursing my ass out.

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“I promise.” She giggled. “I’m grown enough to know how to hold my composure. I owed her that ass whooping for playing in my face.”

“I’m the one that owed you loyalty, but I get what you’re saying.”

“Right.” She sighed.

“Can we go? I need to wash my ass.”

“Yeah girl we can slide.” I chuckled. “You going by my crib or I need to take you home?”

“I’m going home nigga. You ain’t that fucking slick.” She tittered before walking off.

I couldn’t do shit but laugh and shake my head. That was my lil hitta right there. I didn’t care how much it cost me I would do everything in my power to make sure her name ain’t hit the blogs behind this shit. I’m just grateful that she ain’t mad about it. Tamia pressed the wrong one and had to catch them hands. My ass just happy I wasn’t the one on the receiving end of that ass whooping.

Sitting at the mixing board I instructed my engineer to lower the snares in the background of the song. “I’on know what it is bruh. But it almost feels like I’m running from the beat or some shit.”

“Let me try something.” After adjusting the track, he clipped it and ran it back. “Tell me if this is better.”

Tapping my thumb on the table I rapped over the beat. The song *Regret* that I had recorded was about my relationship with Nariah. I was on my Rod Wave shit when I came up with this one.

I was young, I was blind, took your love for granted. Had a queen in my corner, now it's empty-handed. Used to argue 'bout nothin', pride ran the show. Now I scroll through your page like, "Damn, let me go." You held me down when I barely had a name. Now I'm iced out, but it don't feel the same.

Every text I don't send, every call I replay. Got me prayin' at night like, "Lord, bring her back one day." I see your smile in my sleep, still hear your laugh. But I broke what we built, can't change the past. If you out there listening, just know that I'm tryin'. Still got your heart on my chain, I ain't lyin'.

I let you go when you was all I ever needed. Now I'm up, but my heart still feel defeated. Countin' blessings, but it don't add up to you. Lord, if you hear me, bring her back like you do. Tears in my chain, pain in my voice, swear I'd take it all back if I had the choice. She was real, I was lost in the fame, now it's late nights, just me and the blame.

When the verse ended me, and Pack looked at each other and slapped hands. "That's fucking it boy." I boasted. "That's how you mix a song."

"Fucking right nigga." He bragged. "You gon' fuck around and get yo girl back when this one drop."

"Nawl nigga." I chuckled. "Nari ain't fucking with me like that no more."

"Never know." He shrugged. "I'mma give you a minute." He added after the door to the studio was pushed opened.

It had been two weeks since Nariah's arrest and surprisingly shit had gone back to normal. Nari was chilling, handling her business and shit while Tamia duck ass was crashing out on the Gram.

Instead of Nari playing into the shit she decided to take the high road, but not before her petty ass posted the roses I had sent to her crib. I ain't have no ulterior motive or no shit like that when I had them delivered to her but Tamia ain't know that. She hit me up this morning crying and shit all in her feelings talking about how I had lied and played with her.

I wasn't beat for the back and forth, so I sent her my lo' and told her to pull up. It was time for me to dead this shit once and for all.

Waving my hand at the couch I told her. "Have a seat." She stared at me a few seconds before sitting down. "What's good?" I asked and spun around in my chair to face her."

"You tell me." She sassed. "You're the one that invited me here."

"After you hit me up talking shit. Seem like you got some things you wanna get off your chest so I'm giving you the floor."

"I don't have shit to say." She lied.

Swiping my thumb across my nose I snorted. "Aight Tamia."

"You not gone apologize for your baby mama?"

Apologize. I looked at Tamia ass like she had lost her fucking mind. "Apologize for what?"

“Seriously Juice.”

“Dead ass.”

“That girl attacked me in the club.” She yelled.

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“After you rolled up on her talking shit. Fuck was you on anyway? You act like Nariah did something to you. You was the one fucking around with her nigga, not the other way around. She the only muthafucka in this equation that’s entitled to feel slighted.”

“I wasn’t fucking with myself.” She hissed.

“You are absolutely right.” I nodded. “That’s on me. I fucked up and gotta live with the shit. You don’t.”

“So, I’m supposed to not have any feelings.”

“No, you not. You knew what it was when we started fucking off. You the one trying to make some shit seem like more than what it is. If your feelings hurt, it’s cause you got called out on the shit. And you know what—I’m man enough to take the blame for that too. I should’ve stopped fucking with you when you ran to the blogs being messy. Ain’t nothing worse than a muthafucka that can’t keep they mouth closed.

I’mma take it a step further by saying this shouldn’t have even been a thing. Had I passed you off to one of my niggas we wouldn’t be here right now. But you got it Tamia. I’m to blame. I’ll eat that shit. But hear me and hear me good. Stop fucking with Nariah ‘cause she ain’t did shit to you. You want smoke with anybody have that shit with me. I can handle it ‘cause I know the part I played in it.”

“You’re a fucked up individual Juice.”

“You right. I am.” I agreed, because I really was fucked up. I could sit back and say

with conviction that I had fucked some shit up. Tamia wasn't innocent either but if I had to take the blame for the shit then I would.

"I hate that I even let myself get caught up with you." She sniveled.

"I think we can both agree on that. You a cool ass female Tamia. I ain't gone sit here and try to make it seem like you a bird. You might have bird ways but you a good girl. That's why I fucked with you as long as I did. But the seat you tryna fill already occupied mama and I'm sorry if I made you feel like it was available."

Tamia stared at me with fury in her eyes. I could tell she really wanted to let my ass have it. Instead of speaking her peace she stood from the couch and wrapped her bag around her. "You'll be back Juice. You always do."

"Nawl." I clicked my tongue. "Not this time baby girl."

Tamia stared at me a few seconds before leaving the studio. She might've thought I was joking but I was dead ass muthafucking serious. Me continuing to fuck with her after Nariah found out ain't do shit but have my girl feeling like I had feelings for somebody else.

Nobody won at the end of this shit, and it was now that I was realizing that nigga Tito had been right the whole time. Me fucking with Tamia as heavily as I did had her feeling like she was on an even playing field with Nariah. Nariah had always and would always be number one in my book. Some people just couldn't be replaced and that person for me was Nariah.

"Julius, what you want? I'm kind of in the middle of something."

“I’m outside your warehouse. Come chop it up with me.”

“Julius.” Nariah groaned.

“It’ll only take a minute.”

“Fine...” She drawled and ended the call.

After my talk with Tamia, I had some shit I needed to get off my chest. As soon as my session ended for the day I hopped in my whip and raced across town so I could pull up on Nariah.

The door to her warehouse pushed open and she strutted out. Hitting the locks on my truck I slid out and leaned against the door. “What’s up twin.”

“Boy what the fuck you want.” She laughed.

“I had some shit on my mind that I needed to get off real quick.”

Folding her arms across her chest she tilted her head to the side and rolled her eyes. “Here we go again.”

“Nawl.” I chuckled and pulled her arms down. “On the cool I wanted to apologize to you.”

“For what?” She quizzed.

“For fumbling you like I did. I been thinking ‘bout how shit ended up here and I realized I was a selfish muthafucka.”

Her face frowned up. “You just now realizing that.”

“Nawl I been knew.” I clarified. “Just ain’t realize the magnitude until now.”

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“Umph. So, what you sorry for now Julius.”

“Man.” I groaned. “It’s like this here. Never in a million years did I ever think Juice and Nariah wouldn’t be a thing. Never saw this shit playing out like this even though I knew I was fucking off. I guess a part of me felt like you wouldn’t leave. When I fucked up the first time and you forgave me, I felt like you would always stick around.

Real shit Nariah I got comfortable like a muthafucka and with comfortability comes sloppy moves. I was out here on some slime bag shit, and I can admit that now ‘cause I know yo ass don’t want shit to do with me. To be completely honest though even with me moving foul my love for you never went away. It ain’t a muthafucka out here that ain’t know how I felt ‘bout you. I never denied that. Like I told you the last time I knew the right thing to do but my ass just ran the other way.

I’m sorry for hurting you. Sorry for making another female feel like she meant something to me. I know you prolly tired of hearing this shit, but I’ll never stop telling you how sorry I am for fucking up. We will probably never be back how we were. I accept that and I understand. I begged for a shot at your heart and ruined it. I pray one day you’ll find it in your heart to truly forgive me. And if we can’t be anything else I at least want us to be friends. I know you prolly hate my ass but if you ever stopped, I do want us to be cool.”

“Believe it or not I don’t hate you. I hate that your actions landed us in this position but it’s impossible to hate you when I’m still in love with you. It might not happen today, hell might not even happen next month, but I do want us to work on being friends. At one point you were mybestfriend. The one person that I could count on to

have my back.

I hate that this is what we've become but I also believe everything happens for a reason. I got so used to it being a us that I don't know how to thrive as just me. I thought me finishing school and doing all of this." She waved at the warehouse behind her. "Was my way of maintaining my independence but the truth is anytime my name is mentioned it's always Nariah girlfriend of rapper Juice. I never wanted that to be my story. So maybe us being broken up is a way for me to remove that connotation from my name."

"Maybe so." I surmised.

"Apology accepted." She smiled.

"Good shit." Things got quiet for a beat. The two of us were busying staring into each other's eyes. The love we shared was still strong. I felt it and I knew Nariah did as well. "I ain't gone hold you up though. I just came to get that off my chest."

"Thank you, Julius." Nariah breathed.

"Ain't nothing."

Nariah gave me a faint smile before turning to walk off.

My heart broke with every step she took. As much as I wanted to believe our fate was sealed my heart was still holding out hope that one day she would come back. If I ever got the chance to write my wrongs, please believe I wouldn't fumble again.

epilogue

...

Juice

I was stunned. I mean completely caught off guard. Everything that I'd worked for had come down to this very moment. Standing on stage in front of the audience I held the Grammy in my hand trying to find the right words to say.

The raw words, the illicit emotions, the realness, everything that I poured into Scale Dreamshad won me album of the year. An award that only two rappers had ever won. And here I was the fucking third.

"Man..." I spoke into the mic. "First off, I wanna give honor to God because without him none of this would be possible. Proverbs 28:20 says, "A faithful person will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished". I never knew what that meant until this moment. It took losing everything I had for me to change.

I raised hell for years. I mean I was a straight up menace. Until one day I looked around and realized I was putting in the work, receiving the recognition, with nobody to celebrate with.

Scale Dreamswas my life summed up in fifteen tracks. Probably the illest project I've ever done. But it's me and it's my reality. Thank you to my producers, my team, the label, helleverybody that was instrumental in seeing that this project did it's best.

Lastly, I want to thank my family. I'm nothing without y'all. Everything I do, I do it for y'all. To my wife Nariah." Everybody in the crowd started to cheer, causing me to pause and clap it up for my girl. When they settled down, I continued.

"Baby, thank you for holding me down. Helping me to realize the caliber of man that I can be when I walk right. I owe this to you and only you. Thank you for being my peace, none of this would be possible without you." Kissing my fingers I held them off to the crowd and swaggered off the stage.

Funny how life spin the block on you. One minute you losing everything, next minute you holding it all like it never left. I lost Nariah and not because she stopped loving me. But because I ain't know how to loveherright. Fame came fast. Shit I was too caught up in the lights to see that I was dimming hers.

Too many nights out, too many texts I shouldn't have replied to. Too manyI'll call you backthat never got called. Nariah was loyal when I was foul. She was quiet when I needed peace. But time taught me and pain humbled me. I prayed for her. Not just to come back, but to heal too.

And when she did, she ain't come back to the same nigga she left. She came back to a man who finally understood whatforevermeant. This time I ain't taking shit for granted. This time our song doesn't end in heartbreak.

I joke with Nariah all the time about how God knew this was where she was supposed to be. That night in Punta Cana was the night Nariah and I conceived our baby girl Jurni. When she found out she was pregnant she was hurt. She felt like life was playing a joke on her. This was the second time she walked away from the relationship and ended up pregnant.

Unlike the first time we didn't jump back into a relationship. Nariah made me work to regain her heart. It took some time, plenty of prayer, and a lot of therapy, but we were able to get us back right. And when we did, I got down on my knee and proposed. Now I get to hold her like I almost lost her forever because I did.

This the end of our album, or maybe the start of a new one. Either way I'm forever grateful.

The End