



War About You

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Category: Romance

Description: War — the state of armed conflict between a group of people.

Jordan “Skip” Mills is the middle of the three Mills brothers — quiet, calculated, and cold as ice. He doesn’t talk much, but when he does? You’d better listen. His silence alone says more than most men’s threats.

Life was moving smoothly...until strange things began to happen.

Now, ghosts from Skip’s past are crawling out of the shadows, and they’re not just looking to haunt — they want revenge.

His old life is colliding with the future he’s been building, and there’s no more running. A Mills never folds under pressure — especially not Skip. He’s playing for keeps, and if that means going to war, so be it.

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Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

"Damn, little mama! You sure know how to put it away!"

Groaning as I entered the restaurant, the first thing I heard was Wild's annoying-ass voice. I sent him in here to grab us a couple of sandwiches to hold us over until later, and I should have known the task was too much. The place wasn't too crowded yet, but that was about to change as soon as people started coming in on their lunch break. Ducking off in a corner, I could see my brother trying to spit game to some broad that was unbothered by his shit.

"You know, you would be a lot cuter if you weren't so ignorant." She rolled her eyes as she continued to eat her Philly cheesesteak. I smirked as she giggled at him. Frowning, he pushed his locs from his face. "If you don't mind, I'd like to enjoy my lunch in peace."

"Girl, this is my city. Ain't no damn peace when I'm around!" He folded his arms and mugged her. "You ain't from 'round here."

"Good eye, Adrian." She clapped sarcastically, causing his arms to fall to his side. "You're not as slow as I thought you were."

Placing his hand on his hip, I hurriedly made my way over to diffuse the situation. He obviously didn't know her, so her knowing him must have rubbed him the wrong way. As shady as these hoes are, I can't say I blame him for reaching for his gun. Approaching them, I was slightly taken aback when I locked eyes with the beauty.

This girl was hands down the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. Her caramel-colored skin seemed to glow under the fluorescent lights of the restaurant. With her

locs pulled into a tight bun, her round face was on full display, and damn was it a sight to see. Her cute button nose and round, expressive eyes were perfectly positioned on her heart-shaped face. A small dimple that played peek-a-boo in her left cheek accentuated her beauty. With a slow grin, she winked at me before giving her attention back to my brother.

“Who the fuck are you?” He gritted his teeth as he leaned forward and placed the palms of his hands on the table. “How the fuck do you know me?”

“Wild, you said you were going to be in and out.” I tapped him on the shoulder. “We got shit to do.”

“I came over here to speak to this damn girl, and she acts like she knows a nigga,” Wild answered with his eyes still on her. “I’d remember if I fucked you, shorty, because the lips on you?—”

“Man, come the fuck on!” I snatched him up by the collar. The mystery girl was amused by our interaction as she continued to eat. “You just don’t know what to say to people.”

My brother was the true definition of a crash-out, and shorty didn’t know she was playing with fire. However, the look on her face told me she wasn’t moved by his demeanor at all. As he continued to rant, my eyes watched hers dance between the two of us. The girl seemed familiar, but I’d never seen her before. There was something about her that told me she wasn’t a regular woman. Too bad I wasn’t in the running to figure her the fuck out.

“Nice meeting you, Jordan.” She wiped her mouth and hands before standing from her seat. Wild backed up, giving her minimal room to move around. With her hand extended to me, I looked at it as if it was covered in shit. I didn’t know this damn girl either. “I’m Noemi.”

“Noemi?” Wild frowned as he hovered over her. From the corner of my eyes, I could see an unknown man approaching us, and instantly, I was on high alert. People were starting to file in, but I wasn’t opposed to airing this bitch out. “I don’t know no damn Noemi.” Facing me, he tapped my chest with the back of his hand. “You know this broad?”

“Broad?” She giggled lowly as she finally lowered her hand. My eyes followed the movement, taking in her curves as her hand found her hips. Shorty was motherfucking pressure. “I’m a Boudreaux, baby.”

At the mention of her last name, a light went off in my head. Stepping between her and my brother, I folded my arms and dragged my eyes across her frame again. “You’re Andre’s cousin?”

“In the flesh.” She grinned cheekily. “It’s my job to know everything about everyone who works in close proximity to my family, so I’m familiar with you both.” Turning her attention to my brother, she shook her head before addressing him. “You are exactly what your name is: Wild. Is that how you approach women in real life?”

“Hell yeah...” He chuckled as he reached out and pulled her into a quick hug, catching her off guard. “I was seconds away from blowing your shit back, girl. Good thing I didn’t because your folks would’ve been pissed.”

Throwing her head back, her laugh seemed to fill the restaurant. There was something different about this girl, and all I could do was stare. Dre spoke of his cousin often and talked about how smart she was, but he would describe her in a way that made me feel like she was his kid sister. The girl before me, decked in all black from head to toe, was a grown-ass woman.

“I’m not worried, love. I keep shooters around me too.” She winked as she trashed her food just as a man came to stand by her side and size us up. “Come on, Nicky...

we have a lot to do before tonight.” Turning back to face us, she extended her hand once more. This time, I was inclined to take it. “Again, it was nice to meet you guys.”

“You, too, shorty.” I winked as I placed my hands in hers. Her skin was so soft that I immediately thought of other places she could touch. “I’ll be seeing you around.”

“Definitely.” She giggled before shaking Wild’s hand. “You, too, Adrian.”

“Girl... don’t be calling me by my government name like you know me.” Wild mugged her as we watched her walk away. “Tell your crazy-ass brother to stay his ass away from me too. I got Sweets number on speed dial, and I ain’t afraid to use it.”

Laughing even more, my eyes stayed trained on her as she walked away. The sway of her hips had me hypnotized to the point I didn’t know I’d followed her out of the door until I was approaching her blacked-out truck.

“Noemi!” I called out, stopping her from getting in. “Let me get your number. You know... just in case you need something while you’re in town. This is our city, after all.”

She turned to face me before she could slide into the back of the truck. “How do you know I don’t have a man, Jordan?” The guy she was with had already gotten into the driver’s seat. With a raised brow, she pointed in his direction. “How do you know he wasn’t my man?”

“It wouldn’t matter to me if he was or wasn’t.” I shrugged and answered honestly. “He was going to get his ass beat and possibly a bullet if he bucked stupid. Either way, I’m getting the digits.”

Grinning, she took my phone and input her number. With my hand in my slacks, I watched as she dialed her own phone and logged me in as well. Handing it back to

me, she adjusted her Brahmin bag on her shoulder.

“I’m supposed to go back home after the night’s festivities, but I’d be inclined to stay an extra day or two if I had the right incentive.” She bit her bottom lip as she eyed me. “See ya soon.”

Holding the door open for her, I made sure she was settled into her seat before closing it behind her. Stepping back from the curb, I crossed my arms and watched as the SUV pulled away. Through the tinted windows, I could still feel her eyes on me, and I couldn’t wait to see Miss. Noemi Boudreaux again.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

I couldn't put my finger on it, but there was something about this girl that intrigued me. Even if it was just showing her around the city, I wanted to be in her presence, and from our brief encounter, she proved to want to be in mine too. I had to shake the other thoughts lingering in my mind, though, because the little head was doing some talking, and it wasn't saying shit I wanted to hear. Noemi was fine, but not fine enough to have me shifting my focus. It would always be business only.

"You know... when you asked me to go on a breakfast date, I didn't think this was what you had in mind."

Chuckling lowly, I sipped my orange juice as I sat across from her in a crowded IHOP. Last night, we attended the trafficking auction for the young girls, and I'll be so glad when this shit is over with. Knowing that something as deplorable as trafficking was happening in Milly Grove was sickening, but I was thankful that Dre was close to getting the shit squared away. He's become the homie, and if he ever needed me to assist him with anything, I was there. Before we left, I'd pulled Noemi to the side and told her to give me the information for her hotel so that I could pick her up the next day for food. Happily, she agreed.

"What? The Boudreaux Princess too good for fuckin' pancakes." I smirked at a cute little frown appearing on her face. "Were you expecting something a little more upscale?"

"Boy, please." She balled up a napkin and threw it at me. "I'm a vibe wherever I go. I just expected to go to a place like this with Wild. It fits his personality more."

As the waitress placed our food we'd ordered before us, I laughed internally at the

way Noemi watched her watch me. From the time we stepped foot in here, all eyes have been on us. Noemi was bad, dressed in hip-hugging jeans and a baby tee. Her Chanel sandals with the matching bag let me know that she was comfortable being a plain jane but could pop her shit if she wanted to.

“Is there anything else I can do for you, Skip?” The waitress nibbled her bottom lip as she placed her hand on my shoulder. “I’m here for whatever...”

“Thank you, but if you don’t get your hand off me, the only thing that’ll be needed is an ambulance.” I gave her a small smile as hers dropped, and she snatched her hand back. “I’m good, love.”

Hurriedly, she dropped her head and scurried away from the table. Noemi damn near choked as she held her laugh in. I wasn’t a rude person, but I have boundaries that will be respected at all times, no matter where I am or who I’m with. It seemed women thought common decency didn’t apply to them since they had pussies.

“You are something else...” She giggled as she cut into her waffle. “Are you always so brash?”

“I’m always me,” I corrected as I pointed a piece of bacon at her. “Tell me something about you. Who is Noemi Boudreaux?” I changed the subject because I really wanted to know more about her. Since picking her up, I’d felt an unexplainable pull, and I needed to figure out the reason with facts, not feelings.

She looked at me as if she was seeing me for the first time, and all I could do was admire her beauty. Today, her locs were flowing freely, and somehow, she was more beautiful than when she was dolled up last night.

“You wanna know something...?” She wiped her mouth before sipping her water. “No one has ever asked me that before.” She looked off for a moment before giving

her attention to me. “I’m the baby of the family, so I guess you can say I’m spoiled.” She giggled sweetly. She didn’t even have to tell me that because after watching her interactions with her family, I knew that. “I love all things tech, so it’s only right that I’m Head of IT at Boudreaux Enterprises.”

“So this date is on you?” I raised my brow. “Seems to me like you got it.”

“Yeah, it’s nothing.” We shared a laugh at her popping her collar. This girl was witty—fact number one. “I love to travel and have fun. I’m very outgoing and will make the most out of any situation.”

“I can tell.” I nodded as I forked my eggs. “You have a light-hearted energy around you.” Suddenly, I thought about something. “I know you’re part Haitian and all, but I just want you to know... I’m not with that hoodoo shit. I rebuke your ass right now in the name of Jesus.”

Her eyes widened in shock before she threw her head back and laughed. A few people turned to face us, but I’m sure the glare I gave them made them think twice about saying anything that would piss me off.

“Oh my gosh! You have been hanging around Dre, for sure.” She wiped the tears from the corners of her eyes as she got herself together. “Listen, I promise you... I don’t practice at all. I’m not ashamed of my heritage, but my brother is by himself with that.”

Nodding, we made small talk while we continued to eat our food. Noemi was a character and had the type of personality that would have a man lost. From the way she smiled to the way she could hold a conversation, she was a rare find.

“Thank you for breakfast. A nigga ready to go home and lay down.” I yawned as we walked through a nearby park. She thought I was playing about her paying for

breakfast until I got to the register and said I left my wallet at home. The waitress from earlier was still having a hard time making eye contact with us, but Noemi gave in when people began to whisper about a Mills possibly being out here, doing bad. These people knew me, and the last thing I would ever be is short on cash. I was more intrigued to see how Noemi would respond to having to pay for breakfast.

“Lie down?” she asked, looping her arm in mine. I glanced down at where we connected and frowned. I’m not touchy-feely with these women, but I let her make it. “I spent my money on you, baby. You owe me some ass.” I looked at her as if she were crazy, and all she did was cackle. “I’m kidding! I can tell you don’t laugh much.”

“What makes you say that? A nigga laughs...” I said as we approached a nearby bench.

The weather was so nice out today. At any moment, the sky could open up and pour a bucket of God’s tears on Milly Grove, so when the weather held up, most of us residents took advantage. I took a seat and watched as the kids ran about as their parents yelled for them to be careful. This particular park was renovated for the hood after my brother took over as mayor, and the Boudreaux crew did a good job with the construction. A few city officials side-eyed my brother for having a company outside Milly Grove handle our city’s renovations. Yet, once them damn Boudreaux’s came and started stacking them bricks, nobody said a word. Everything they’d done had proven that my brother made the right decision. I, myself, was thankful for his decision because of the little lady sitting in front of me, smirking.

“I can’t tell...” She settled beside me. “You may smirk here and there, but you don’t laugh. Why?”

“Shorty, I’m just chilling.” I waved her off and went back to viewing the scenery around us. “Since you’re all in my business, let me ask you something. You got your

shit together, and you're pretty as hell. Why you don't have a nigga somewhere beating down your door?"

"Who said I don't?" She grinned before shoulder-bumping me. "There are a few guys here and there, but none are worth my time. It's hard to find someone who wants me for me and not for my name. Guys either want to be known for fucking with the Boudreaux sister or use me to get close to my brothers. I'd rather be lonely than have someone near me that I know is only around for the moment."

Nodding, I understood all too well. People weren't genuine these days and only wanted you because of what you brought to the table. I'd be killing hoes left and right if I gave in to every bitch that tried to brush up on me.

"What about you?" she asked as she tapped my leg. "You're handsome, got money, and you smell good as hell." I chuckled at her sniffing my shoulder. "Why are you single?"

Looking off, flashes from the past came to mind. There was a time when I thought I'd found the one for me, but she showed me she was just like the rest of the bitches that wanted to use a nigga. When I think about it, my ex was probably worse than any broad I'd encountered or would encounter in the future.

"Bitches ain't really what they say they are." I shrugged as I peered into her curious eyes. "They claim they love you, but in reality... you're just a transaction."

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“You want me to beat her up?” She stood before me, doing that little wiggle women do as she pulled up her jeans. “I’m a straight shooter too! Point that hoe out, and I’ll make her bleed today.”

Looking at this girl and how serious she was, I couldn’t help but throw my head back and roar in laughter. My side started hurting as I tried to stop myself from laughing so hard. Seeing she had yet to crack a smile made the shit even funnier—shorty was deadass ready to beat somebody’s ass.

“Whew! Shit, girl,” I said as I calmed down. Standing, I draped my arm over her shoulder and pulled her to me for a quick hug. “You were right... I haven’t laughed like that in a while. I needed that, and I appreciate the offer, but I’m good. Time has taught me to see people for who they are. Nothing more, nothing less.”

“Well, I hope time shows you that I’m not like that.” Once again, her arms found mine as we continued to make our way through the park. I’d already figured out that Noemi didn’t care about personal space, or at least she didn’t care about mine. I knew she didn’t have bad intentions, so I was rolling with it.

“We’re going to be good friends, Jordan,” she continued, smiling at me so brightly that it dimmed the sun. “You need a little joy in your life, and it doesn’t get any better than me.”

“I come to your city, and you think taking me out in the middle of a musty-ass swamp with alligators was going to fly with me? You done lost your goddamn mind!”

Bent over in laughter, I listened to Jordan fuss as he drove us through downtown

Miami. After spending time with him in Milly Grove, we kept in touch as I'd hoped. After months of texting and FaceTime calls, he finally came to visit. Skip was a very stubborn man who was set in his ways. He was guarded for some reason, and although I didn't push the subject, I always did my best to show him that he didn't have to be that way with me.

"I thought it would be nice if I showed you something pertaining to the culture."

"You could have taken me to a damn Canes football game, Noemi!" he shouted as he glanced from the road to me. He told me regardless of whether he was visiting or not, he wasn't trusting me to drive him around. "Ain't no way you thought I was going to Lake Placid."

Listening to him mumbled how I had life fucked up, I couldn't help but take him in. Jordan was so handsome with his low cut, lean build, and the plethora of tattoos adorning his exposed limbs. There was hardly ever a time he wasn't dressed in all black and today was no different. Dripping in Prada from head to toe, everything about him screamed boss. From the way his diamonds hit the light to the way he leaned as he whipped my car through the busy streets—whoever was crazy enough to let a man like this slip through the cracks must be losing at life.

"Can I ask you a question?" I sat sideways and stared at him as we approached a gaming center. I couldn't help but giggle because he hates being around a lot of people, but I knew he was doing it for me. "Have you ever thought about getting into a relationship? You're a good man, and you deserve a good woman."

"You trying to be my girl, Mimi?" He smirked as he pulled into the lot and parked. "Sounds to me that you are."

"You wish." I rolled my eyes and punched his shoulder. "A man that refuses to watch The Originals is not the man for me. Not to mention... your taste in fun is horrible."

“So you’re saying I’m boring?” He turned and raised a brow. “Let a nigga know.”

“Yes.” I giggled at his hurt expression. “Skip, your idea of fun is sitting home on a Friday night with a box of Church’s chicken while you clean your guns, watching SportsCenter. You need to find a good woman, some kids, and a puppy.”

Mugging me, he got quiet. Jordan is a good man, and he deserves all of those things. I hate that he went through whatever happened in his past, but I wanted him to move on and let love find him.

“First off, I eat Popeyes.”

“Jordan—”

“Secondly, I’m good on the rest of it. Look, Mi... I appreciate you looking out for a nigga and wanting to see me happy. Love just ain’t for me. I’m a good nigga, but I will murder the next bitch that plays with my feelings.” He took my hand in his and gave it a strong squeeze. “I’m good on that. I just want to run my businesses, get some pussy here and there, and see my people happy.”

“Friend, what about you and your happiness?” I asked, giving him a small smile. “I heard you, but you deserve all of that too. Promise me that when you meet somebody who proves that they’re worthy of your love and trust, you’ll be open to the possibility of happiness...”

He stared at me before running his hand down his face and sighing deeply. “Aight, man... you got it. If it will make you shut up, I promise. You gotta promise me the same, though. Every nigga ain’t out to get you, and there’s a nigga somewhere that don’t care about your money or your brothers. A real one will go toe to toe with Zoo and the Witch.” He smirked as he tweaked my chin. “When it’s real, nothing will matter to him but you and the love he has for you. The same way you want that shit

for me, I want it for you. We got a deal or what?”

Looking at his outreached hand, I pondered on what he said. I wanted real love so badly, but I was scared I’d set myself up for failure by falling for the wrong man. I want my man to love and want me for me—not because of who I’m attached to. At the same time, I had to be open if I wanted to receive it, and I knew that much was true.

“Hello pot, I’m kettle...” I smirked and placed my hand in his. He snatched it back and kissed his teeth. “Seriously, you have a deal. Now, come on! It’s time to put belt to ass.”

Walking into the arcade, I laughed as I glanced over at Skip. My friend looked like a fish out of water as he glared at everyone, yelling at sports on television, playing the arcade games, or just sitting around drinking and vibing.

“Will you please get your hand off your waist and relax?” I giggled as I dragged him over to a card dispenser to get us tokens. Glancing over my shoulder, I caught him mugging me. “We could always reschedule the gator ride. The swamp comes alive at night.”

Placing me in a headlock, I laughed uncontrollably as he dragged me around the arcade. Once we made it over to an idle basketball game, he snatched the card from me to start.

“I’m about to light your ass up in here.” He chuckled as he slapped the buttons, causing the baskets to adjust in each of our lanes and the balls to fall. “You ready?”

“They don’t call me Noemi Curry for nothing,” I smirked as I grabbed the first ball. “It’s about to be lights out for you, buddy.”

“Who the fuck calls you that?” He frowned as he dribbled the ball a few times. “It’s been months, and I ain’t never?—”

“Gametime, scrub!”

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

As the buzzer sounded for us to begin, the balls began to fly. Now granted, I love playing arcade games, and this shit is right up my alley, but I didn't have an athletic bone in my body. I was bricking everything that slipped through my fingers. Glancing over at Skip, I was pissed that he had so many more points than me.

"Keep your eyes on your own lane, homegirl." He laughed as he shot another three. "The bricks you're throwing up ain't the ones I'm used to."

Pissed, I said to hell with the game and went to find a different one. Hearing him laugh behind me, I squealed once he hauled me in the air.

"You're a sore-ass loser," he said as he placed me on my feet near the bar. "Let's get something to eat. I got all night to tap that ass."

Taking our seats in a booth, we ordered food and drinks and got lost in each other's company. Jordan was a little rough around the edges, but he was nice to be around once he opened up. Seeing the girls stop and stare, I understood where they were coming from. A fine nigga that's paid and loves to have fun? Sign me up. Little did they know, this nigga was only in this type of facility because of me.

"Noemi? I thought that was you."

Peering over my shoulder, I locked eyes with Chandler Gourneau. His family has done a lot of business with mine over the years, but lately, there has been nothing but tension. He was handsome, though, but he was a dick. This man felt as if he was God's gift to women, and I couldn't stand him.

“Hello,” I spoke dryly. “Hope all is well.”

“Things are definitely better now. You look good.” He smirked, causing the girl next to him to scoff. He pulled his bottom lip between his teeth before dragging his eyes over to Jordan. Extending his hand, his smile grew wider. “You must be?—”

“You don’t know me, nigga.” Jordan spat over his shoulder. He didn’t even bother looking at him or elaborating. The disrespect rubbed Chandler the wrong way, and I could tell by the twitching of his jaw, he wanted to react. Dropping his hand slowly, he turned his attention back to me.

“Well... I will let you get back to ‘whatever’ this is.” He chuckled and gestured between us as his date said nothing and looped her arm in his. “Tell your brothers I said, ‘hello.’”

Angling my head, I said nothing as he moved slowly and walked off. I watched until they disappeared into the crowd before turning back to Jordan, who was still watching the game on the screen.

“I’m sorry about that,” I apologized genuinely as I grabbed my phone and keys. “We can leave if you want.”

“Man, sit down and finish your food.” He threw a fry into his mouth as he pointed at my uneaten burger. “I still owe you plenty of ass-whoopings, and that nigga ain’t gettin’ you out of it.” He paused for a moment before adding, “Just know... I’m not above showing my ass in here. I don’t care who that nigga is.”

Sliding back into my seat, Jordan and I continued our night as if nothing had happened. As promised, he beat my ass in every single game we played. Thankfully, Chandler didn’t resurface anymore that night because I knew it wouldn’t end well if he did. I wondered what he was doing in town because I wasn’t notified of him being

in Florida. Rosier usually lets me know when they have meetings for security purposes, so his pop-up was truly a shocker.

Brushing it off, I let it go. Chandler wasn't my concern, and his being here wasn't either. All I wanted to do was enjoy my night out with Jordan and have a good time. As he grabbed my wrist and dragged me from game to game, I knew he and I were doing just that.

"Sorry, I'm late! I had to finish up a few things for work," I stated, apologizing to my family as I entered the private room at the steakhouse. Today, we decided to have a family dinner, and I was the last one to arrive. Kissing my mother on the cheek, I did the same for my brothers and cousin. Taking my seat at the table, I sanitized my hands before grabbing a roll. "Where are the girls?"

"This one is a more private dinner," Rosier said as he sipped his drink and eyed me over the rim of his glass. "This dinner is more so about you."

Confused, I glanced around the table at my family. While Jules' and Dre's expressions gave nothing away, my mother wore a look of sympathy. Reaching across the table, she gripped my hand as the waitress brought out platters of food. The appetite I had when I first arrived began to dissipate.

"Noemi. You know that being in this family means certain actions may be required of you," Rosier began once the doors slid back shut. "There will be times we all may have to do things we don't like, but?—"

"Just tell me," I cut him off as my heart thudded in my chest, and I could feel the sweat forming above my brow. "What is this about?"

Leaning forward on the table, I could see the seriousness in my brother's eyes. Before me wasn't my big brother, but the head of the Boudreaux Mafia.

“As you know... there were some things that needed to be realigned when our father died. Some people didn’t like the takeover, and unfortunately, they’re not here to speak for themselves.” He sighed heavily, scratching the scruff on his face. “I love you, Mimi. You know that, but this is for the Family. The Gourneau’s have been wanting retaliation for the death of their leader. The only way to mend the bridge between the two families is marriage.”

Right on cue, the sounds of the guests in the main dining hall invaded the room as the doors opened, and Chandler Gourneau walked in. Dressed in Armani, the grin on his face caused my stomach to churn. I watched as he rounded the table and shook hands with my brothers and cousin before kissing my mother’s hand.

“Nice to see you, Mrs. Boudreaux.” He smiled as he bowed his head slightly. “It’s an honor.”

“Same,” is all she said as she dragged her eyes over to me. “Have a seat, son. We need to speak.”

Nodding, he made his way to the side I was on and stared. Extending his hand, I looked from it to my brother as tears began to flow slowly down my face. Shakily, I said nothing as I placed mine in his.

“We meet again...” He grinned as he kissed the back of my hand before taking a seat beside me. “I told you that you’d be seeing me soon.” He reached over me and grabbed a shrimp from my plate. “I hope nothing was too serious between you and your little date.”

“Look... I know that no one is happy about this, but let’s be respectful,” Dre spoke up and eyed Chandler. Although Rosier was head of our family and his word was law, all of his choices were discussed with Dre. “Noemi, we know that this may come as a shock to you, but this arrangement is not at all uncommon. Jules will ensure you

have everything you need monetarily as his wife. He's going to make sure the legal logistics are handled in your favor. You can continue to stay on the compound should you wish?—”

“No!” I wiped my tears as I finally spoke up. “He will not be living on the compound with me.”

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“You expect us to be married and not live together?” Chandler asked as he poured himself a glass of wine. “No wife of mine will have a separate domain.”

“Then I suggest you find us a house!” I replied sharply as I turned toward him. “The compound is for the Boudreaux family, and regardless of what this marriage entails, you will never be one of us. Until we are married, our time will be spent at my condo and your residence. You will provide us a home, and I’d prefer one that you haven’t fucked multiple women in.”

My mother hissed and glared at me “Noemi! Watch your mouth!”

“Wow...” I laughed humorlessly before sipping from the glass of water. “Not only do I not have a say in a marriage, I can’t voice my opinion or make requests?” Looking toward Dre and a pissed-off Rosier, I waved my hand toward them. “Please, enlighten me on what I can and can’t do to ensure I’m the perfect little wife.”

Placing his arm on the back of my chair, Chandler leaned in closer until his lips were directly at my ear. I stiffened at his closeness, pushing down the urge to gag. Pushing my locs behind my ear, he spoke where only I could hear him. “I’m going to enjoy correcting that smart-ass mouth of yours, wife.”

He kissed my cheek, and it took everything in me not to slap the shit out of him. My body began to shake as anger overtook me. There’s no way I was going to sit here and deal with this today. Jolting from my chair, I grabbed my things to leave.

“Noemi, sit back down!” Rosier stood from his seat as I approached the door. “I didn’t say you could leave. We’re not done here!”

Spinning to face him, I could see the rage in his eyes as he reached me. I gripped the strap on my purse as the others stared at our engagement. I glared at the one deemed as ruthless because, in my eyes, he was just that. How dare he marry me off to the likes of someone like Chandler Gourneau.

“You’ve said all that’s needed to be said, Rosier. You all have made it clear that my input and wishes don’t matter and will not be honored.”

“Noemi, please sit down,” he spoke lowly and calmly. “Please...”

Defeated, I nodded and did as he asked. Rosier was not one to beg, and I knew that. I wouldn’t dare embarrass him or our name by being stubborn, even though, at this moment, neither he nor our family deserved my loyalty. I knew what being in this family meant, but I didn’t like it, so my attitude was warranted, in my opinion.

Retaking my seat, Jules cleared his throat to speak, so I gave my attention to him.

“While this is unexpected, I took the liberty of composing documents to detail what this union would consist of.” He went into his briefcase and pulled out sheets of paper before handing them to Chandler and me. “I know this isn’t what you want, Mimi, but this doesn’t have to be a sentence for you.”

“So, I really can’t move onto the compound?” Chandler sounded off from the side of me. “And five years for a child is absurd!”

Looking over the document, I said nothing as I read it. While I was pissed with the arrangement, I was happy that my brothers and cousin thought enough about me to where Chandler couldn’t force himself into my homes or uterus.

“It doesn’t rule out sex!” Rosier spat as if the idea disgusted him. “While those are part of her marital duties, she doesn’t have to bear a child until she’s ready. An heir is

conditional after year five. Also, you know how things work here when it comes to adultery.” Rosier gave him a knowing look. “I can’t tell a man what to do inside of his home, but publicly?—”

“You can fuck off in private but respect me in public.” I turned to Chandler, who was aggravated. “I don’t care what you do, but you will not embarrass me. You want the doting partner in public, I understand. This marriage will be loveless, and I understand that too. Just know that I will not be anyone’s doormat.”

“Three million a month is a bit much to pay my wife for a marriage.” He frowned as he looked from the paper to my brother. “Why should I consent to this?”

“My sister has expensive taste...” Rosier smirked as he eyed him. “It’s not enough if you ask me.”

Hearing the guys speak on things that were no longer of interest to me, I zoned out of the conversation. With a woman who had her own funds, no amount of money could compensate for my misery.

“Noemi, say something, baby,” my mother asked as she reached over to grab my hand. All chatter ceased once she spoke. “How do you feel about this?”

Looking between her and the men, I shrugged as I pulled my hand back.

“It doesn’t matter what I have to say; the deed is pretty much done.” I gathered my things once more. This time, Rosier didn’t stop me. “Your minds are made up, and at this point, all I have to do is walk down the aisle.” Turning to my brother, there was a look of annoyance on his face. “There will be an aisle, right? Shit, who’s going to give me away at the wedding? Wait.” I stopped and tapped my chin. “You’ve pretty much covered that already.”

Even with me knowing an arrangement was a possibility didn't take away the betrayal I'm feeling at the moment. Rosier could have found another way to mend things between both families, but he chose to use me as a bargaining chip. As I left the room and closed the door behind me, I knew I was closing the door on my relationship with my family as I knew it. Things will never be the same with us again once I became a Gourneau.

"The crowdin here is on fire tonight, Boss!" Jerome greeted me as soon as I rounded the corner behind the bar. I'd come over to see if they needed any help. I didn't know how to mix a drink, but I could help pass a beer or clean up shot glasses. "What the hell are you doing, Skip?"

"Nigga, this is my shit." I mugged him as I took the money from the customer and handed it to him. "Ring this nigga up for a Corona."

Tittering lowly, Rome did as I asked, and I moved on to the next customer. I never thought I would meet another nigga that worked my nerves more than Wild. It's been around a year since Dre and Denim have been together, and in that amount of time, Jerome has become an annoying addition to our family. He was also the perfect addition to my club as a bartender, so I saw him more than everyone else now.

"Hey, handsome! Is a shot of you on the menu?" a pretty brown-skin broad asked as I walked over to see what she wanted. "The only thing I want to slide down my throat is you."

Leaning forward, her large breasts all but sat on top of the bar top. Her eyes shone under the lights, and I could see the lust in them. The look she was giving me was nothing new, being that I was Jordan Mills. Pulling her bottom lip between her teeth, she scanned my frame, and I knew I could have her if I wanted her.

"One taste of this will have you drunk for life, baby." I winked at her before

acknowledging the next guest. “You want something that’s actually on the menu or not? It’s too many muthafuckas in line for you to be playing with me.”

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

The people in earshot laughed as she turned red from embarrassment. Hoes like her only saw dollar signs, and I refused to be a mark-ass nigga. I've learned my lesson with these hoes a long time ago. To keep from killing these women for playing with me, I'd rather not even take it there with them.

My club manager, Irene, walked over and tapped me on the shoulder. "Mr. Mills, there's a situation in the section in the back to the left. If you could go and check that out, I'll help them with the drinks."

Nodding, I let her take over as I made my way to where the problem was taking place. Walking through the sea of people, I adjusted my suit jacket as they all stopped and stared. Being well-known in the city, people knew I wasn't the one for any bullshit, so to know that someone is causing issues in my spot wasn't sitting well with me. Approaching the section in question, the sounds of Pastor Troy flowing through the speakers seemed to have amped the guys up even more.

"You in the wrong city, bitch!" I heard one of the guys yell as he stepped to the dude I assumed he was into it with. "I'll blow your shit back right now for coming to my hood!"

"You can blow his shit away any place you want, but you won't do that shit here," I spoke as the small group of men turned and faced me.

I guess they called themselves bangers since the ones on the left of me were dressed in red while the ones on the right were dressed in blue. By looking at them, I could tell they were some young niggas. Some faces were familiar, but I would be lying if I said I knew everyone who lived in the city. I'm not Uno; I could give a fuck less

about the citizens of the Grove. “Enjoy the vibe like everyone else. Maybe if y’all get some bitches over here, you’d be less focused on each other.”

“Who the fuck are you supposed to be?” one of the little niggas in red said, stepping to me. He didn’t look any older than twenty. If he knew like I knew, he’d get the fuck out of my face if he wanted a fair chance of leaving this bitch alive tonight. “You can get popped along with the rest of these niggas.”

Pulling a baby nine from his hoodie, my face remained neutral. Not only was I pissed that this nigga had the nerve to brandish a weapon at me, but he was able to get it into my club, which was a no-go. How the fuck did security let that happen? The thought of my men failing on the job caused me to fume. Most of the crowd was still partying, but the ones near were tuned in to what was happening while others scrambled away. I needed to diffuse this situation before it became a bigger one. The problem was that I diffused most issues by eliminating them with a gun.

“Look here, lil’ nigga... I don’t know what the fuck the problem is, but you’re going to have to get the fuck out of here.” Mugging him, I glanced around at the other niggas in attendance. “Matter of fact... all of y’all get the fuck out. Talking about ‘my city this and my city that.’ This is my muthafuckin’ city, and if you niggas don’t want to be the reason balloons are flying in the sky this time tomorrow, you’d get the fuck outta here and take your dumb asses outside with the bullshit.” I stepped to one of the niggas in blue and hovered over him. “I’ve seen you around, lil’ nigga, so I know you know who the fuck I am. Get your boys and go the fuck home.”

Chest heaving, he eyed me for a moment, but he didn’t say anything as he turned to his boys and told them it was time to go. They began to groan but complied. I didn’t give a fuck what they did when they left, but they weren’t doing that fool shit in my spot.

“Yeah, run like the bitches you look like!” tough guy in red yelled over the music

behind me. “I told y’all niggas we were coming to town and taking this bitch over!” The leader of the boys in blue glanced over his shoulder and smirked as he and his crew continued out of the section.

I watched as they all made their way to the front door. Turning to face the remaining group, I nodded to where the previous ones went. “Follow suit, muthafuckas.”

“Or what?” He smirked at me, gun still in hand. “What the fuck you gone do if I don’t?”

Pow!

Before he knew what hit him, he felt it. I pulled my Glock from my back and shot him in the foot. People around us screamed and began to run as the gunshot rang through the air.

“Nigga, you shot my fuckin’ foot!” he screamed as he jumped around, grabbing his bloody foot. “Are you fuckin’ crazy?”

“Insane, actually.” I smiled and eyed my handiwork. “Now, y’all get this hopscotchin’ ass nigga outta my shit before y’all piss me off even more.”

Helping their boy, I watched as they carried him out of the club. I was mad as fuck about the blood dripping on my tiled floors and knew I’d have to rope off this area to get it cleaned. Walking over to the DJ booth, I grabbed the mic and addressed the crowd as he paused the music.

“Can I have y’all’s attention for a minute?” The murmurs quieted down as they all looked to the stage. “While I appreciate you all for coming out to party with us tonight, y’all know I don’t do that ghetto shit. Don’t come into my club thinking you’re about to act a fool because, if you know me, you know I’ll act a bigger one. If

you don't know me, you know Wild. If you think that nigga is crazy, just know he gets that shit from his big brother." I paused while everyone shared a small laugh. My face was stiff because wasn't a damn thing funny about what I'd just said. "Enjoy yourself and have a good time. Just make sure you know how to act in my shit. I'm not above turning this bitch up in the way the DJ can't." Turning to him, I handed the mic back to him. "Slow this shit down, Mook. These niggas can't handle no gangsta shit back to back."

Chuckling, he did as I asked, and the sounds of Keyshia Cole started flowing through the speakers. The ladies bellowed the words to "Love" as the fellas grabbed them from behind, swaying their bodies to the beat. Making my way toward the door, I found one of my guards.

"Boss, you gotta see this." Hutch patted my chest and gestured toward the end of the dark lot. As we got closer, I saw the silhouette of a body under one of the streetlights. Once we got to it, I shook my head at seeing the nigga I'd shot in the foot. He was now in a puddle of blood, dead.

"Tried to tell the nigga..." I shook my head and turned to Hutch, who appeared to be fighting back his own tears. "You know him?"

"Y-Yeah." He sniffled as he shook my head. "That's my girl's little brother."

"Oh, so you're the one who let that nigga in my club with a pistol?" I folded my arms and glared. "You knew what type of time he was on?"

Fear flashed across his face before he masked it, but it was too late. Slowly backing away, he didn't make it far before I sent one through his dome. The shot echoed through the darkness of the night as his body dropped near his people.

"You're services are no longer required, nigga." I bent down as he peered up at me

with lifeless eyes. “You’re fired.”

“Welcome to Urban Sole. Don’t touch shit in this muthafucka if you don’t plan to buy.”

Chuckling, I disregarded my brother’s rude-ass greeting as I walked through his shoe store. Although he was crazy as hell, I was proud of Wild. We all did our best when doing things to help in the city. Shoes have always been his niche, so he decided to become a verified reseller for various brands. Between this location and Wild Kicks, his store near Mills Manor, he’s in his own lane when it comes to his profession. Not only does he sell other brands, but he also sells his own shoe designs he’d been able to produce in Portugal.

“Now, is that the way to talk to a paying customer?” I smirked as I walked over and dapped him up. Looking around the store, I nodded in appreciation. “You got this shit looking dope, man.”

As a few more customers came into the store, I chuckled as he greeted them the same way he had me. Wild was a fucking fool, and those who knew him knew that he was going to always be him.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

While he assisted them, I walked around to check out the new inventory to see if there was anything I wanted. I could very well get this shit for free, but why would I do that? Our family always supported each other—no one was looking for a handout when it came to money. Walking over to the shoes displayed on the wall, I immediately spotted three pairs I wanted.

“Seventy-five dollars for a pair of shoes is insane,” I heard a lady gripe to the side of me. “Why would I pay that for some sneakers for my kid? I don’t even spend that on wigs.”

“I can tell... I side-eyed her, causing her to gasp. “Shit looks dry as fuck. I bet if I strike a match, that shit will spread like a wildfire.”

Patting her hair, her eyes went wide as she placed the shoe back in its respective place. I couldn’t help but laugh as she high-tailed it through the store and out the door. Back to my browsing, I’d pulled down the displays of each shoe I wanted. You could never go wrong with a fresh pair of all-white Air Forces and Dunks. Making my way over to the hats and tees, I felt the presence of someone behind me.

“Hey, handsome. We meet again.”

Peering over my shoulder, I locked eyes with the chick who wanted a shot of nut at my club. Even though she had on a little more clothes than what she had on last night, she was still beautiful. With no makeup, hair in a bun, and shorts that cuffed her ass just right, she was fuckable for sure.

“Sup,” is all I said as I continued my browsing.

Wild has a few more customers now, and it was time for me to get the hell on. He had a few workers in here to help him out, but the nigga gets ignorant with the people that live on this side of town. What's crazy is that no matter how much he curses them out, they love him, and I know he loves them too. His sole reason for this particular store was to give the community a chance to buy some affordable shoes.

"You're not a man of many words," she stated as she followed me. "I like that about you, though." She placed her hand on my elbow, and her touch felt like fire on my skin. Turning slowly toward her, the smile she was sporting on her face dropped once she saw the snarl on mine.

"No matter how pretty you are, I will break your fingers one by one if you ever touch me without my permission again."

Snatching her hand back, her face flushed from shame. "I-I'm sorry. I just wanted?—"

"What you want, mama?" I raised my brow as I stepped toward her. Her breasts rose and fell rapidly as her breathing increased. "Tell me what you want? Some dick?"

Scanning my face, she dragged her eyes along my body until she reached my joggers. Her eyes bucked once she saw the print resting against my left thigh.

"Is that a bankroll?" she asked as she stepped closer. "It's so thick?—"

"I don't carry cash, love." I winked and sidestepped her as I made my way to the register. Thankfully, I was the only one in line. "Amelia, ring me up, baby. I would tell you to put it on Wild's tab, but I don't want to hear his mouth today."

"I'm going to ban you from my shit, nigga." He mugged as he helped the cashier bag my order. He saw me with the shoes and already had my size waiting. Glancing over

my shoulder, he frowned and yelled out, “Aye, shorty! You’re too still back there. Your ass better not be stealing!”

Looking back, I saw that it was shorty from the club, still staring in my direction. I couldn’t help but chuckle because she was thirsty as fuck. I didn’t even know her name, and she was willing to let a nigga fuck. The more I thought about it, the harder my dick got. Saying what the hell, I motioned her over to me. With lust-filled eyes, she was by my side in an instant.

“What’s your name, shorty?” I handed my debit card over to Wild to ring me up. We both knew I had no intention of placing my order on an in-house tab. His ass was so invested in my conversation that he’d given my card to Amelia while leaning over onto the counter with his fist under his chin. He was probably going to make himself dizzy from looking back and forth between the both of us.

“I’m Tamar,” she spoke in a whisper.

“You trying to go somewhere?”

“Y-Yes, I want you, Skip.”

“You sucking dick? That’s all you can do for me.” I leaned against the counter as my eyes dropped to her lips. “I bet you can suck a mean one too.”

Blushing, you’d think I told this bitch she was the love of my life. This is why I didn’t take these broads seriously. They don’t care about anything but dick and status.

“Girl, have some pride about yourself!” Wild frowned as he looked between the both of us. “You don’t know this nigga, and you want to suck him off?” He leaned forward and caught a glimpse of her ass hanging out her shorts. “Since you don’t mind a lil’ slurping and burping, holla at me when you’re done with that nigga. You’re just the

type I like: fine and slow.”

Chuckling lowly, I shook my head as he winked at her and handed me my shopping bag. Eyeing Amelia, who’d said nothing during the encounter, I opened my wallet and found the single hundred dollar bill that I knew I had on me.

“Dinner on me, sweetheart. I hate you had to hear that.” I gave her a wink that she happily accepted. Amelia was a good girl—a college student working for spending money. My brothers and I adored her. “Let that nigga know if you need anything else, baby.”

“Thank you, Jordan!” she exclaimed as she accepted the money, sticking it in her pocket. “I can use this to go toward my books for summer school.”

“Nah, send me the tab, and I got you.” Wild shoulder bumped her. “I told you anything you make here is for your personal use. As long as you keep those grades up, we’re taking care of your school shit.”

Nodding at them, I grabbed my shit and made a beeline for the door. I wasn’t going to the club tonight, so I was about to get some food and go home. It’s rare that I just chill with nothing to do, so I planned to enjoy the night.

“So, Jordan... are we chilling?” Tamar asked as she followed me to the curb where my cherry red McLaren 720s was parked. “I could ride with you if that’s more convenient.”

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

Throwing my stuff onto the passenger seat, I squinted my eyes as I glanced over at her. This girl really was slow if she thought she was coming anywhere near my dick.

“Tamar, baby... you’re too pretty to be out here freaked out about some dick,” I told her straight up as I closed my door. “Find another nigga to play because Skip ain’t it.”

This girl had the nerve to look hurt as she dropped her head and made her way down the sidewalk. Glancing back at Wild’s store, I shook my head at this nigga with his face on the glass, watching our interaction. Giving him my middle finger, I hopped into my ride and wasted no time zooming down the street.

Making my way home, I thought about the encounter with Tamar and laughed. This is the shit I was talking about when I told Mimi I don’t take these women seriously. A hoe will be a hoe in any setting, and I don’t mind treating them as such. The thing is, to keep from killing them when the deed is done, I leave well enough alone. Thoughts of Mimi made me realize I haven’t talked to her in a while. While I’m not used to having friends of the opposite sex, I wasn’t the type to just reach out to her for no reason. Noemi was an engaged woman now, so I respected the invisible boundary that now resided between us.

She’d call me when she wanted to talk. Until then, I’d take my ass home. If I decided to get my rocks off later, it would be with a woman of my choosing, not one that’s obviously trying to get chosen.

“Good evening, Mr. Gourneau. Thank you for joining us. If there is anything I can do to assist you, please don’t hesitate to find me.”

With my arm looped around Chandler's and a champagne flute to my lips, I rolled my eyes as the hostess batted her thin lashes at him. He tried his hardest to seem as if the notion didn't faze him, but I knew the real. He was mentally figuring out what he could move around within his schedule to meet up with her.

"I appreciate your kindness." He nodded at her curtly before looking around the room for our table. "If you'll excuse us, I need to feed my lady."

With a smile that didn't reach her eyes, Angelina finally acknowledged that he wasn't alone. If it was left up to me, he would be. The last thing I wanted to do was spend my Friday night faking smiles and having pointless conversations with some of the most arrogant men I've ever met in my life. As it wouldn't be a good look for the Chief Director of Gourneau Land & Harvesting Solutions to show up to such a prestigious event dateless, I put on the hat of a doting fiancée'.

"Oh, of course." She held out her hand for me to shake. "Nice to see you—I'm sorry, what's your name again?"

Removing the flute from my lips, I licked them slightly as I eyed the hostess. Angelina was a pretty woman. She was too thin but pretty, nonetheless. She was the type who thought her light skin and funny-colored eyes made her a hot commodity when it came to men of status. She could flirt with Chandler all she wanted, but what she wouldn't do was play in my face as if she didn't know who I was.

"Noemi Boudreaux. Head of IT Support to a billion-dollar corporation by day but will slap a hoe down for playing with her by night." I gave her a bright smile and extended my hand as her face turned a vivid red from embarrassment. "Nice to meet you."

Nervously, she shook my hand before excusing herself. Hearing Chandler chuckle lowly beside me, it took the strength of an ox not to roll my eyes. Taking my hand, he

led me over to our appointed table. As I sashayed my way through the small crowd, I could feel eyes on us. We shook the corporate world with the news of our engagement, and we have been the talk of the town since.

“Now, baby... did you have to say all that?” He kissed my temple before pulling my chair back from the table, allowing me to be seated. “Maybe she didn’t know who you were.”

“Chandler, please. Be serious.” I waved him off as he took a seat across from me. “Even without being attached to you, everyone in this room knows me.” I motioned around to the people who were still glancing our way. “Noemi Boudreaux has always been a household name, and that was before any type of dealings with you.”

To someone who was unfamiliar with Chandler and me, our actions would make them think we were truly in love. We were always hugged up in public and attached to each other’s hips. You would think that by the way this man looks at me, I am the love of his life, but this situation had nothing to do with love.

Since my brother took over running Boudreaux Enterprises, it was vital to show those who tested him that he was the wrong one to fuck with. While I’m only privy to certain things that go down with the Family, I do know there are people who are no longer here because they thought my brother was incompetent. Sadly, Chandler’s father was one of those people. He didn’t have any physical proof that Rosier was behind his father’s demise, and even though he claimed to have let bygones be bygones, the tension was still there. Hence me being romantically tied to this jackass now.

“You know... you could act like you want to be here, baby.” He smirked as he reached over and wiped salad dressing from my lower lip. These events have the worst food selection, and I couldn’t wait to leave to get the juiciest burger I could find. “Is wifey-to-be unhappy?”

Watching him lick the ranch from his thumb, I couldn't help but stare at him. Although I didn't want this man, I wouldn't deny that he was handsome. His rich chocolate skin was always moisturized, and so was his beard. His piercing eyes and beautiful smile always made the ladies stop and stare. Chandler could easily bring any woman to their knees, but sadly, he didn't do it for me.

"Does my soon-to-be hubby really care?" I raised my brow and asked as I picked up a piece of chicken from my plate. The murmurs around us could be heard as soft jazz played in the background, and the couple seated across from us paid us no mind. Taking the meat, I placed it at his lips as he eyed me darkly. "Open."

Studying my eyes for a moment, he did as I asked and parted his lips. Easing it into his mouth, I gave a subtle smile. Grabbing my wrist, he brought my fingers to his mouth, sucking gently. He held on firmly as he leaned forward and brought his lips to my ear.

"Be careful, Noemi. Just because we're in public doesn't mean I won't show my ass in here." His idle threat did nothing for me. "Act like you have some sense before I take you out of here and show you who the fuck I am."

Kissing my earlobe and then my cheek, I watched him as he leaned back in his seat and sipped his water. Chandler has threatened me time after time, but one thing I'm not worried about is him putting his hands on me. He may talk that tough shit—hell, he may even try it—but that will be his last day breathing. It wouldn't be my brothers that he would have to worry about if he ever thought his violent tone would become domestic; it would be me.

"You two are so damn cute!" I snapped my eyes over to the couple across from us. Then, I noticed it was one of his business partners, Albert Morton, and his wife, Cecilia. "Have you two set a date?"

“Not yet...” Chandler smiled as he draped his arm around me. I wanted nothing more than to push him away from me, but as much as I hated this man, I wouldn’t embarrass us. “My girl wants the works for our big day, and I’m giving her time to get things done.”

“Not too much time, though.” Cecilia wagged her fork at me and smiled. “You want to get things moving quickly. There’s no need for the theatrics. Marry the man and have his babies. There’s no better life than that.”

“Cecilia, leave that girl alone.” Albert frowned as he took a sip of his cognac. I opted out of responding because, if I did, I was going to hurt her feelings. It’s been well over six months, and if I had it my way, this man would never touch me. “They have plenty of time for that. We’re here tonight to network and not give these people unsolicited advice on procreating.”

“It’s fine, Al.” Chandler chuckled and kissed my cheek as Angelina approached the table. “We’ll be working on that family soon enough.”

You want to bet, nigga?

“Excuse me for interrupting,” Angelina spoke, fighting not to make eye contact with me. “A few of our guests would like to meet you... if you’re free.”

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“Of course.” He nodded and smiled before giving me his attention. “You don’t mind, do you, baby? I won’t take long.”

“I don’t mind at all, love. Please... takeallthe time you need.”

His eyes flashed with something dark, but it was gone as soon as it appeared. With his smile never wavering, he leaned into me and placed a kiss on my lips. It was gentle but assertive, and I fought to keep my food from rising and spewing onto his face.

Standing from his seat, I watched as he gestured for Angelina to lead the way. I giggled internally at her nonexistent hips swaying as he followed behind her. If she wanted to entice him, she had my blessing because he wasn’t getting any from me. Once they were near the bar, I looked on and watched as he placed his hand on her lower back, telling her something briefly before he began speaking to the other men.

“Excuse me for a second; I need to go to the restroom.”

I didn’t wait for either of them to respond before I was on my way. Nodding and speaking to those in my passing, I ignored the stares from the various men who seemed to be in a trance. Tonight, I was decked out in a form-fitting black gown from a local designer, so I knew I was turning heads. Even Chandler knew I was the prize in this situation, but he still wanted to act as if he was king of the castle.

In a way, he was.

Stepping into the restroom, I breathed a sigh of relief to find it empty. Tonight’s

event was mainly for entrepreneurs to network, and I was exhausted. Chandler, a Haitian native, was doing well with his land and harvesting company and always had people in his ear about investments or advice. He soaked up the attention each and every time. With that came many women who vied for his affection. Often, he'd give them what they sought.

Looking at myself in the mirror, I became saddened by the position I was in. At twenty-seven years old, you'd think I had it all. I was beautiful, educated, and wealthy. The things I craved most in this world were things that money couldn't buy. I wanted to love and be loved. I thought that maybe I would eventually have that, but now that I'm with Chandler, I couldn't have been more wrong.

"Stop feeling sorry for yourself, Mimi," I murmured as I fixed my locs. "This is your life now."

As I refreshed my makeup, I felt my cell phone buzz in my clutch. After washing and drying my hands, I found my phone and rolled my eyes at the numerous amounts of missed texts.

Rosier:

Get out of your feelings and call me.

Jules:

Be mad at that nigga Zoo, sis. Say the word and I'll turn that nigga into a pillar of salt tonight.

I giggled at Jules' message because he always found a way to make me laugh. He'd done nothing to make me angry at him, but he'd done nothing to help me out of this situation either. As I was about to put my phone up, an incoming message flashed

that caused my heart to flutter.

Jordan:

I haven't spoken to you in a while and wanted to make sure you're okay. Let me know you're good. By the way, congrats on the engagement.

Seeing his text brought tears to my eyes. Out of all the changes I've gone through lately, the budding friendship with him is what I missed the most. Between his attitude and Chan's possessiveness, I figured it was best to leave well enough alone and keep Jordan at a distance. Instead of responding to his text, I gathered myself and went in search of my so-called man.

"There you are." He bumped into me once I rounded the corner. "Something has come up, so I'm going to get you home. You don't mind ending the night early, do you?"

I placed my hand in his and allowed him to lead me back through the ballroom without responding. I wasn't in the mood for a snarky comment or a slick reply if I pushed for more information about the "something" that had come up. As we glided through the crowd, I felt eyes on me. Glancing over my shoulder, I locked eyes with Angelina. The barely-there smirk on her face let me know what the business was that Chandler suddenly had to handle. As we waited for the valet to bring the car around, I didn't have it in me to care.

This is the life that was laid out for me, and there was nothing I could do but accept it. Thanks to Rosier, I was the most miserable I've ever been in my entire life, and although I could not contest my predicament, I'll be damn if I was going to be silent about it.

"For us all to live on the same compound, I hardly ever see any of you," my mother

said before laughing and wrapping me in her arms. “Come on in. I was just about to make a couple of sandwiches for lunch.”

As I stepped into my childhood home and followed her to the kitchen, memories of the past flashed at every turn. Along the walls were various pictures and accomplishments of my brothers throughout the years. Stopping at a photo with my siblings and cousin, I smiled as I ran my finger along the frame. We were so young then, and the love that shone through our eyes was evident.

My mother giggled as she came up behind me. “It took a lot of threatening to get you into that dress. You wanted to be like those boys so bad... I just knew I was going to have to find you a tuxedo!”

“Mama, please.” I smiled and waved her off after accepting the glass of fresh sweet tea. “Aren’t you glad I grew out of that?”

“Ha! Ecstatic!” We shared a laugh as she led me onto the back patio. It was springtime here in South Florida, and the heat was already blistering. No matter how hot it was, my mother would find herself outside. “Tell me... what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?” She eyed me with a knowing look before I could dispute. “Before you try to say it’s just a friendly stop... knowthat I’m your mother and can see right through you. So tell me, Mimi... what's wrong?”

Taking a seat on the swing, I pushed my legs back and forth as I peered into the backyard. My mother has always had a thing for flowers, so her garden was like one I’d never seen. I often joke that she loves her plants more than her kids.

“Do you ever miss Dad?” I dragged my eyes over to her and found hers already on me. “Do you ever get lonely?”

Taking a sip of her drink, she nodded before sitting it down on the wicker table

beside her. “Every single day.” She gave me a soft smile. “The love I have for your father will never fade. Our relationship wasn’t perfect, but I loved that man... and I know he loved me.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“He cheated on you, Ma,” I spoke somberly, causing her to stiffen. “I don’t mean to bring up the past, but how could you be with someone who disrespected you?”

It’s been two days since I’ve heard from my alleged fiancé, and I’m not mad about it. The night after the event, he dropped me off at my condo with promises of calling me the next morning. Call it my intuition, but I knew the “work” he had to tend to was another woman. Whether it was Angelina or his secretary, I knew all about him and his extra-curricular activities.

“When your father and I met, he was young,” my mother began speaking as she snapped me from my thoughts. “He was making a name for himself in the corporate world, and women always threw themselves at him. I didn’t care because he made it clear he only had eyes for me. I fell in love with how he treated me and protected me.” She dropped her head for a second before she continued, “After I had Rosier and Jules, I found out who and what your father truly was. I refused to raise two small children on my own, so I had to come to terms with what the life I chose entailed. I knew there would be women; I didn’t see it with my own eyes, but I accepted it. My only demand of him was to not bring me a disease, outside children, or women to my door. He never disrespected me in public, and at home, I was the queen of his castle.”

“Mama, that’s not what I want...” I felt tears well in my eyes, and I kicked myself for becoming emotional. “I want a man who loves me and only me. Just because we live this life doesn’t mean we don’t deserve faithfulness and to be cherished. Why do I have to live my life in misery? I don’t want this!”

Placing my head in my hands, the levee finally broke. I couldn’t help but feel as if

being tied to a man who cheats at every turn was a life sentence I didn't deserve. Feeling the swing dip, I felt my mother wrap her arms around me. Pulling me into her embrace, I placed my head on her shoulder and cried.

"It's okay, baby girl." She hugged me tightly, and I could feel the sadness in her voice. "I know this isn't the life you saw for yourself, but you knew what being a part of this family would require. Chandler may not be the man you saw yourself with, but do you think you can learn to love him?"

"I despise him, Ma." I sniffled as I wiped my eyes and sat up. "The man speaks to me as if I should be thankful for him allowing me in his presence. Not only that, but the way he flirts with women when I'm around is so disrespectful. I know for a fact he's been shackled up with a woman for the past two days. He's blatantly doing this in front of me as if it's okay. My relationship will soon become a public spectacle because of his behavior, and I don't like that."

"I'll speak with him." We both jumped and looked toward the door at the sound of my brother's voice. "One thing I'm not going to tolerate is him parading around publicly with other women as if he doesn't have a wife at home."

Saying nothing, I watched as my brother stepped onto the back patio with a menacing look. I haven't spoken to Rosier in weeks, and if I thought there was a chance of running into him today, I wouldn't have come over here.

"I don't need you to do anything for me!" I snapped, moving from my mother's embrace. "You're the reason I'm in this mess now, so forgive me for not wanting your unsolicited help."

With worried eyes, my mother looked back and forth between me and her oldest son. Never taking his eyes off me, he bent down to kiss my mother's cheek before standing to his full height. Stuffing his hands in his slacks, he squinted his eyes and

glared at me.

“Who are you talking to, Noemi?” he said calmly, but I knew he was anything but. “Because I know it’s not me.”

“Actually, I am.” I stood from my seat and stepped to him. “You’re ruining my life, and you don’t even care! You threw me off to a man who does nothing but disrespect and cheat on me!”

Coming closer, I had no choice but to crane my neck to look up at him. The heaving of his chest let me know I was pushing buttons that had severe consequences, but I didn’t care.

He gritted through clenched teeth, struggling to hold his restraint. “Sister or not, watch who the fuck you’re talking to. You will respect me as head of this Family and the decisions that I have made. You know what the fuck it means being in a family like this, and you’ve always known an arrangement for marriage was a possibility. I know you’re angry, but you will watch what the fuck you say when you’re talking to me or?—”

“Or what?” I stepped back and chuckled. “You’re going to take me to your little zoo and feed me to the gorillas? Cut my tongue and hands off? Maybe you’ll just kill?—”

“Enough, Noemi!” my mother shouted as she stepped in between us. “I will not have this behavior between you two in my home! You will sit and talk about your differences like siblings should.”

“He’s not my brother; he’s my dictator,” I stated in a growl as tears slid down my cheeks. Turning, I reached back and snatched my purse from the table. It was time I left before I said something I couldn’t take back. The way I was feeling, I didn’t care if I did. “You’re no better than our father, Rosier, and I hope for your kids’ sake, you

change your ways before one day you end up ruining their lives too.”

My heart beat rapidly in my chest as I spewed the words that I knew would hurt my brother to his core. For a split second, I could see in his eyes what I did before it was gone. Removing his hands from his pockets, he clenched them into fists as he shot daggers my way.

“As I’ve stated, you will do what’s been required of you, or there will be consequences.” He grabbed my arm and jerked me toward him. “Am I clear?”

“Crystal.” I nodded as more tears fell. “Anything for the Family,Boss. That’s all that matters to you anyway. You can reach me on my business line when needed. My personal line is for the people who give a fuck about me.”

Snatching from his embrace, I marched through my mother’s home, ignoring her pleas for me to come back. Another minute in my brother’s presence, and one of us would end up being buried next week. As I made my way outside to my Audi, I slammed the door shut after falling inside and sobbed. I bawled for the happily ever after I’d never have, and I cried over the loss of my brother. The relationship Rosier and I once shared was long gone. He wanted to be head of the family with no regard for the big brother that I needed him to be when it came to my happiness.

Once I got myself together, I decided to go to my home on the compound instead of the condo. Chandler only had access to me there, so that’s where I spent most nights. Now, I wanted to be in my own space where I felt most like myself. I wanted to be in the only place I knew I was safe from all the sorrows and worries that had become my world. The more I thought about the agony I was in, the more my heart hurt.

Pulling into my driveway, I placed the car in park and exhaled. I closed my eyes and tried my hardest to get myself together. My heart was broken, and I was exhausted. I needed a mental break, or I was going to succumb to the stress I was under.

Bypassing the several missed calls from my mother, I disconnected every app that would allow them to track me. Before powering down my phone, my heart thumped as I went to my contacts. Finding the name of the one person I wanted to speak to, I took a chance and sent a text.

Me:

I need you.

Jordan:

I'm on the way.

After reading his response, I breathed a sigh of relief before cutting my phone off. In my moment of distress, all I wanted was him, and to know he would drop it all and come to me after not speaking for months spoke volumes. My life was in shambles right now, and Jordan was the only one I wanted to be around. Gathering my things to get out of the car, I prepared myself for his arrival. He wasn't a man of many words, but when he spoke, you listened. This time, I needed someone to hear what I had to say. He would let me vent with no judgment, and that's what I need. I didn't care about the Family and what they wanted from me at the moment.

Right now, I need someone to listen to me. I wanted to be in the company of someone who cared about me and not my duty to our family obligations.

And for that, I needed Jordan.

Exiting the text from Mimi, I pocketed my phone and continued to make my way inside the warehouse. I wasn't sure what was going on with her, but if she needed me, I was going to be there. The flight wouldn't be more than two hours, so it wouldn't take me that long to get to her. First, I had to handle my business in the Grove.

Before going to the club, I had to make a quick stop for a meeting with Money and Wild. Money, spotting me first, reached out to slap hands once I made it to where they were standing in the building.

"What's up, Skip?" He paused, getting a good look at my mug. "Why it look like you've been sucking lemons or some shit?"

"That's how this angry-ass nigga's face is made," Wild answered as he entered from the back. "What's up, middle brother?"

Mushing him as he tried to dap me up, I made my way over to our vault that housed all of our inventory. To some people, it may be weird that all of our product is in one place, but it's easier for me to keep up with it this way. The fireproof building was in the middle of nowhere, with guards on the perimeter around the clock. I wasn't too concerned about some shit going down, and if anyone ever tried some shit, it was going to be a blood bath in Milly Grove.

"Money, what's the word? How's everything on the block?" I typed in the code that only Uno and I had access to while waiting for his response. Uno and I made sure to set it so that the code would change daily. Wild made it clear to us that he would

never want this level of responsibility, so we kept him out of the loop on all things logistical.

“Everything is what it’s supposed to be.” Money nodded as he followed me into the vault and eyed the inventory.

“I have to go out of town for a day or so, and I don’t want anyone running out of work.”

Money looked from the organized bricks to me while Wild stuck his head in the vault and said, “Oh, word?”

Ignoring him, I continued counting to make sure what was supposed to be on the shelves was on the shelves. When Uno decided to take over as mayor to keep the position in the Millsfamily, he asked me to step in as head of the family’s drug operation. Even though I oversaw a few legal businesses before this, I didn’t mind stepping up when it came to the illegal side. Taking over more obligations when it came to keeping this shit as clean as possible had been trying at times, but the shit I do now is nothing different from what I did when Uno was in charge. The powershift is the only thing that changed because when there’s an issue, our workers now come to me—not him. Everything has been smooth—everyone knows two to the chest and one to the head is the only way I’m solving anything. The streets knew once I got started, it was harder to get me to stop, so everyone did their part, and I haven’t had any major problems.

“For the most part, niggas are doing their job, but examples have to be made from time to time. To be honest... I’ve been thinking about dismantling one of the teams... entirely. Some of the guys ain’t putting in the work like they should be... I need to take a closer look, but I’m sure it will result in somereleasing.”

Pulling bundles of marijuana from the shelves, I glanced over my shoulder and took

Money in. By now, Wild was fully tuned in as well. “Is there a problem?”

“Do you trust me?” Money folded his arms and eyed me. When neither Wild nor I responded, he dropped his arms and clapped his hands before continuing, “Yo, I got some shit I been looking into, aight? But I don’t want to bring it to you until I’m absolutely sure about it. Like I said, I need to take a closer look because I have some young niggas that have been putting in the work, but promotions can’t happen until I know for sure all of the niggas are solid. I ain’t trying to step on you and Uno’s toes or nothing like that, but some of these niggas previously appointed have been slacking.”

Nodding, I took in his words as I continued to browse the shelves. Weed, pills, codeine syrup, and coke lined the walls of this room. There were enough drugs in here to put us away for life if we were ever sought out. My brothers and I decided to build this place and have the vault designed like a small store. For years now, our process has been working for us, and the people we have in place have been solid.

Hearing Money say some niggas on our team are slacking pissed me off. Not only are we good to them and pay well, but we also make sure these niggas stay out of jail and from six feet under. If Money wanted me to trust that he would handle things, I’d do that for now. He’s been down with us since we were kids and was like a brother to me. I trusted him just as much as I did Uno and Wild, but that didn’t mean I would be completely aloof to this new information.

“I tell you what...” I turned, giving him the duffle bags full of work that would last him until I returned. “I’m going to let you do what you do but keep me posted. Round up the ones that ain’t performing, but make sure you have their replacements ready. We all know that once I show my face, it’ll be the last one they’ll see.”

If Money says the niggas ain’t doing their job, there’s no need for the back and forth. I had no issues permanently relieving people from positions if they no longer desired

to do what was necessary for business and the team.

“Where you headed anyway?” Wild asked as we walked from the vault and out of the warehouse. The seasons were changing, and the air had gone from cold to humid within days. “You need me to roll with you?”

“Adrian, no.” I stopped him and wiped the smirk off his face. “You only want to tag along and see if you can find some new pussy to dive into.” I shook my head in disgust. “Nigga, you ain’t scared of catching some shit?”

“Nigga, you act like I’m just out here fucking on mad bitches.” He frowned and placed his hand on his hip. “I might stick and move, but this dick is covered by magnums as well as the blood of Jesus.”

“Skip, you cool?” Money chuckled before he got to his car. “You don’t usually just up and leave. I ain’t trying to be in your business, but after the incident at the club, I just want to make sure you’re straight.”

Since the day Andre helped me kill the niggas that tried to rob me, we’ve been on high alert. I’ve put a bug in the streets to be aware of a nigga named Lew moving in, but nothing has come up. I’m starting to think those boys were either lying in an attempt to save themselves, or the Lew nigga was pussy. Either way, I was ready for whatever.

“I’m good,” I assured them as I approached my Escalade. “I’m just going to Florida for a couple of days and?—”

“So you going to see Sweets?” Wild yelled into the night. “Nigga, I wanna go too!”

“Boy, I’m going to check on Noemi!” I snapped, causing him to fake gasp and clutch his imaginary pearls. “Stupid-ass nigga.”

Since finding out she was engaged, conversation with us has been minimal. I didn't want to interfere with what shorty had going on. I didn't view her the same way I looked at the other hoes. With her having a man now, I respect her boundaries, and I can't get mad at her for wanting to do the same. We don't talk as often as we used to, but if she said she needed me, I was pulling up on her.

Wild simpered as he got into his car. "Let me find out she put that voodoo coochie on you. Out here catching flights for a bit—" I gave him a murderous glare that made him change his tune instantly. "I mean, woman, that's about to marry somebody else. That's why I fuck these hoes and send them on their way. I ain't crashing out over no pussy."

"Ava?" I asked with my brow raised. "Is she one of your hoes you sent away?"

"Watch it, sucka." He mugged me and folded his arms. "Ava is the homie, which is why I had to stop fucking with her. She's too much like me, and to keep from fighting Harley and, ultimately, your older brother... she and I decided it was best we leave well enough alone. Now, she be calling me and telling me about the niggas she be fucking?" He shook his head in disgust. "Like I'm her home girl or something. Nigga, I ain't no bitch! I don't want to hear about shrimp dicks!"

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

Laughing at his discomfort, I told him I was headed to the club. He told me he would see me later if he pulled up before I left. After watching him and Money leave, I did the same and made my way back toward the city. I'd told Uno my plans earlier so he would be on standby if needed.

As I rode toward Club Honey, I thought about how far I'd made it in life. Just turning thirty, I had yet to do the one thing I wanted most: have my own family. There was a time when I thought it was within my reach, but I was shown that even the ones you love the most will drop you if the bag is right. Shaking my head at thoughts of what could have been, I realized I'd arrived at the club.

"Bossman," my head of security, Stan, greeted me while dapping me up when I approached the door. Since killing Hutch, I got with Stan and told him unless he and his crew wanted to be added to the number, they'd better not let no shit like that happen in my spot again. It was evident that the message was received because everyone has been on the up and up since then. Looking at the outside wall, I was impressed. For it to be a Thursday night, the line was wrapped around the building.

Breaking me from my thoughts, Stan asked, "How you doing tonight?"

"Chillin' man," is all I said as I entered the club. I've never been one for small talk, so I kept it moving.

Stepping inside, I was more impressed that the vibe was right, and the crowd inside seemed to be having a good time. The DJ had all the ladies shaking ass on the dance floor while the men bobbed their heads and enjoyed the show. After ensuring the bartenders and bottle girls downstairs didn't need anything, I made my way up to the

office. I'd texted the pilot and told him we needed to leave soon, and he assured me we'd be ready to head to Florida within an hour.

Powering up my desktop, I decided to respond to a few emails and sign the awaiting inventory sheets when there was a knock on my door.

"Come in."

As soon as the words left my mouth, my club manager, Irene, walked inside. Dressed in a pair of leather shorts and a blazer with nothing underneath, she was beautiful. The issue with her is she knew that shit and thought it would allow her certain access to me.

"Hey, handsome..." she said in a purr as she propped up at the edge of my desk. "I wasn't expecting to see you tonight."

Dragging my eyes from the computer screen, I leaned back in my chair and eyed her. Scanning over her thick frame, I was a man who could appreciate a nice body. I'd never say she wasn't fine; I just wasn't moved by it.

"Being that this is my club, I figured I could come and go as I pleased." I raised my brow in understanding. "Is there something I can help you with?"

Taking that as her cue, she pushed off the desk and walked closer to me. Placing her hands on my knees, she leaned forward, causing her jacket to open. Looking down, I could see the roundness of each of her breasts.

"There's a lot you can do for me, baby." She pulled her bottom lip between her teeth as she began to rub my thigh. "You can start by giving me a little taste."

Seeing the hardness in my slacks, she took that as a go-ahead to drop to her knees

before me. Reaching for my belt buckle, I grabbed her wrist to stop her.

Eyes wide, her chest rose and fell as she looked at me in confusion. “Jordan, what?—”

“Mr. Mills,” I corrected. “Not handsome, not Jordan. I don’t know what I’ve done to make you think this will be anything other than a business relationship, but I want to make it clear when I say... I don’t want you. You don’t want me, either, baby. It’s about what I can do for you. Tell me I’m lying.”

“I just thought?—”

“You’re a pretty woman, Irene, and you’re one hell of a manager. I appreciate the work you do here. If you want to keep your job, as well as your hands, I’d advise you to do what you’re paid to do and nothing else. You got it?”

She nodded, and I ignored her tears as I stood from my seat. With an extended hand, I reached down and helped her from the floor. I didn’t mean to embarrass her or hurt her feelings, but I needed her to know nothing would ever happen between us, so the slick advancements needed to cease.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered as she wiped her eyes. “I thought?—”

“You thought a nigga was going to fuck you and possibly wife you, right? Spend some time, a little money, and make you his girl?”

I could tell by her silence I’d hit the nail on the head. It was the same with all of these women, and as much as I give Wild flack, I get why he does them the way he does. These women don’t want anything more than to be on the arm of a Mills. Uno really lucked up with Harley, and that’s the only thing I’ve ever been envious of when it came to my brother.

“I-I’m going to get back to work,” she murmured as she hurriedly stepped to the door. “Let me know if you need me.”

Shaking my head at the encounter, I adjusted my dick and continued to finish my inventory approvals. Once an hour had passed, I made my rounds once more to confirm everyone was good for the night. Irene could barely make eye contact with me, and that was all right with me because I just wanted her to do her job.

Making my way to the airstrip, I couldn’t help but think about what I was doing. Mimi was set to marry another man, and here I was, dropping everything to make sure she was okay. I wasn’t tripping, though, because Noemi was a true friend to me. I’ve grown to care for her, and husband or not, I would show up for her when she needed me. Whether a shoulder, an ear, or simply my time was needed, I didn’t mind giving it. Being there for her is all that mattered to me. Everything and anything else could wait.

“You came,” Mi softly said when she opened her door to let me in. She was just as pretty as she was the last time I saw her, but there was something about the long, sad look on her face that didn’t sit well with me. Seeing as though I’d yet to walk through the threshold, she eyed me in confusion. “What’s wrong?”

“Why the fuck have you been crying, Noemi?” I couldn’t keep the growl from my voice if I tried. “What the fuck is wrong?”

Dropping her head for a moment, I lifted her chin with my finger. When the first tear fell, I could feel my blood boil with anger. Instead of expressing my thoughts and making matters worse, I pulled her into my arms and allowed her to get it out. Melting into my chest, she gripped the sides of my shirt and whimpered.

“It’s all bad, Jordan! And I don’t know what to do!” She shook as she cried. “I hate him so much!”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“Noemi, if you don’t want me to blow up this muthafuckin’ state, I advise you to calm down and tell me what the fuck is going on.” I walked her inside her home backward and closed the door behind me. “Speak fast, baby, because I’m a man of little patience.”

Sighing heavily, she pulled herself from my chest and grabbed my hand. Leading me through her sitting room, I glanced around to see if anything was out of place. This wasn’t my first time inside Mimi’s home, but that didn’t mean I could let my guard down. Noemi and I had an understanding, and I wouldn’t ever think she would try some bogus shit, but I was still me, no matter where I went. Her home looked the same as before, though, so I took a moment to appreciate its beauty. The choices in furniture, décor, and color scheme were top-of-the-line. As always, candles were burning and smelled of sugared lemons. Casting my eyes away from the high-priced artwork on the walls, I watched as she stopped in the middle of her formal sitting area.

“I’m sorry you had to come here so late. I just didn’t know who else to call.” She fidgeted with her fingers as she glanced around nervously. “Would you like something to eat or drink?” She peered up at me with those expressive eyes. “I have some leftover pizza.”

“I’d rather you tell me what’s going on.” I took a seat on her couch and pulled her down beside me. I wanted nothing more than to pull her into my arms again, but this was still someone else’s woman. “Tell me what’s going on, Mi.”

Sitting quietly, I draped my arm over her shoulder as the sounds of a sudden thunderstorm filled the room. It was going on two in the morning, and while I could

use the sleep, I would sit here as long as I needed to if that meant it would help her in some way.

“In a couple months, I’m set to marry a man I don’t love,” she said in a strained tone, causing my heart to constrict. “Crazy thing is... I know Chandler doesn’t love me either.”

“Why marry him? Why would you want to be in a loveless marriage?” I asked in an even pitch as my fingers caressed her bare arm. She was dressed in a tank top and pajama bottoms, and I had to will my dick to stand down. She and I had never crossed any lines, but that didn’t mean I didn’t find her attractive.

“It’s not up to me...” She peered up at me with sad eyes. I immediately thumbed away the lone tear that fell. “Being in a family like this, certain things are to be expected. I don’t have a say.”

I’m not dumb or blind to what she was insinuating. Dre and I have become close, and while he hasn’t flat-out told everything his family does, I know they’re an organization. I didn’t expect Noemi to tell me all of the aspects of their family business, but that doesn’t mean I didn’t want to help her any less.

“Listen... at the end of the day, this life is yours to live, Noemi.” I hugged her tighter and kissed her temple. “If you don’t want to marry this man, then don’t.”

“It’s not that simple.” She stood from her seat and walked over to her bar. I chuckled because if there was one thing she was going to do, it was take a shot. “Rosier’s choice is final, and I hate him for it. I wish he would just?—”

“Aight, stop.” I walked over and removed the bottle of tequila from her lips. “I get that you’re angry, but don’t say something you’ll regret.” I placed the bottle on the table, grabbed ahold of her hand, and led her into the kitchen. “At the end of the day,

y'all are family. It's possible that he could have gone about things a different way but give the nigga a little grace. I know for a fact he loves you, and it may hurt him seeing you unhappy more than you hate being with the nigga." Stopping at her fridge, I turned to face her as she hopped up on the counter. "Where is that nigga, anyway? Shouldn't your fiancé be home with you?"

Taking note of no masculine presence when I scanned the common areas just moments ago, I knew the nigga wasn't here. Walking into situations blindly was never my thing, but something in my bones told me her need was bigger than my paranoia when I got her text, so I was coming in this bitch regardless of who else was here when I arrived. Her man could have very well been over when I popped up, and he would have easily been a dead nigga. Hell, he still might be one if that means taking Mimi's sadness away.

She laughed dryly at my back. "I haven't seen or heard from him in days." I could feel her eyes on me as I moved around the kitchen and warmed up some food. "There's more of a 'what's understood, doesn't have to be explained' dynamic to our relationship. I know he's out with other women and?—"

"You cool with that shit?" I slammed her refrigerator door unintentionally. Hearing that her man was fucking around on her pissed me off. "He's okay with another man fuckin' you?"

With heated eyes, I watched as her eyes slowly trailed my body. Changing clothes on the jet, a black beater and grey sweats were my attire for the evening. There was an undeniable attraction between us, and it was suffocating at times. I never acted on it because I wanted our relationship to be platonic. I didn't want to ruin the friendship with all the extra feelings and actions that came with fucking someone you cared about.

"Am I cool with it? Of course not. I want a man who's all about me." Her eyes slowly

drifted to mine before she nibbled her bottom lip. “As far as me having sex with another man...” She shook her head slightly. “He would lose his shit. That’s how things work around here. The men can come and go as they please, and the women have to just take it. I hate it here.”

Hearing the timer go off, I removed her pizza from the oven before getting her a bottle of water. Walking over to where she sat on the island, I tapped her thighs, and she immediately spread them for me. I pushed down my thoughts as I nestled myself in between her legs, feeding her the food.

“I know it may not seem like it right now, but things are going to work out for you.” I held the pizza to her lips and watched as she took a bite, her eyes never leaving mine. “You deserve a lifetime of happiness and love and to be with a man who sees only you.”

Saying nothing, her eyes stayed locked on mine as she ate. I haven’t been this intimate with a woman in a long time, but it’s a feeling that just seemed so natural with Mi.

“What about you?” she asked once she chewed and swallowed her food. “Don’t you deserve the same thing?”

“A man to make me happy, Mi?”

“Boy!” She giggled sweetly as she slapped my arm, causing me to smile. “You know what I mean. The same way you want all of those things for me, I want them for you too. Are you any less deserving?”

Instead of answering her, I continued feeding her until the two slices were gone. Love was something I used to want, but it wasn’t in the cards for me. A long time ago, I would have thought I was deserving and would still be seeking my forever in a

deserving woman. But now? Too much time has passed.

“I’m a different case, baby, and I’m okay with that.” I used a paper towel and wiped her mouth clean. She went to say something but stopped herself. I took that as my cue to cut the conversation short and let it rest where it ended. “Come on and try to get some sleep. It’s getting late.”

Taking my hand, she allowed me to help her off the counter. She cut off the downstairs lights and led me up the stairs to the room. I knew it was wrong, but I couldn’t help but zone in on the way her ass ate her pajama bottoms. Her nigga was crazy because there was no way I would have time to entertain another woman if I had her at home. I would be too busy buried inside of her to even form a thought about some other pussy.

“Skip!” she called my name louder than she should have. “Where did you go just now? I’ve called your name twice.”

“You don’t want to know, friend.” I winked at her, causing her to blush. “I know my way to the guest room, so head in.” I nodded toward her room. “I’ll see you in the morning. Get some sleep, Mimi. Tomorrow is a new day.”

Pulling her into my arms, I kissed her forehead and hugged her tightly. She melted into me, and I knew she needed it. Reluctantly, I let go because I was starting to feel like I needed it too. Turning on my heels, I walked two doors down into the guest room I occupied the last time I was here. The room was decorated with a king bed and dresser, but I loved it because it smelled like her. Closing the door, I removed my sweats, pulled the sheets back, and climbed in. I was exhausted and needed some sleep. Before I could doze off, I listened closely at the door opening.

As I lay there in the dark, I could faintly hear Noemi move through the room until she was on the other side of the bed. Pulling the covers back, she climbed inside and

snuggled next to me. I should have told her that this wasn't a good idea and to go back to her room. Instead, I wrapped my arms around her and pulled her closer to me. Kissing her nose and then her forehead, I held her tightly as we both drifted to sleep. She called me over to comfort her, and if that meant doing something as simple as holding her while she slept, I was more than happy to deliver.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“Right there, Channie, baby! Please don’t stop!”

Rolling my eyes, I pumped faster into Angelina as I tried my best not to strangle this bitch. I’ve been fucking on her since the night of the entrepreneur event, and I was bored. I would have left her at the ballroom if I knew she would also be as bothersome as she is.

As I hammered in and out of her, my mind wandered to my wife-to-be, Noemi. She drove me crazy with her independence and smart mouth, but that’s what will make it so much more sweeter when I break her down. Just the thought of ruining her to the point where she only needed me made my dick even harder.

“Oh shit!” I groaned as I placed my hand around Angelina’s frail neck. She was pretty as hell, but the bitch was skin and bones. “Take this dick, Mimi.”

Angelina tried to push me off and protest, but she was no match for my solid frame. Thrusting in and out of her, she clawed at my hand as mine got tighter around her throat. Feeling my balls tighten, I snatched out of her mediocre pussy and jacked my dick, ejaculating all over her body.

“Did you really just call me another woman’s name?” Angelina peered up at me, fighting for breath. For someone who was just thoroughly fucked, she looked anything but. “I can’t believe you.”

“It was the only way I could make myself come...” I panted as I rolled over on my back. “You need to drink more water, baby. You’re too pretty for your pussy to be so dry.” I threw my arm over my eyes, but I could feel her staring. “Go get a towel and

clean me up. I need to leave soon.”

She was quiet for a moment before she sighed and did as I asked. I couldn't care less about Angelina or how she felt. This was only a physical exchange; if she thought otherwise, she was in for a rude awakening. She was just one of many, but after today, she'd probably be excluded from the list.

As she came out of her bathroom with the clean towel, I reached over to the nightstand and grabbed my cell phone. Checking my messages and notifications, I was pissed off that I didn't see anything from Noemi. Granted, I don't know what I was expecting from her, being as though I haven't called or shown up to her place in days, but she could at least pretend to care.

“Here...” Angelina frowned as she handed me the towel. “I guess you're about to go run to your precious Mimi.”

Dropping the towel on my dick, I glared at her back as I watched her walk across the room and grab her robe. I needed to hurry up and get out of here before I killed this bitch. After cleaning myself, I looked around her room in search of my clothing. Right as I pulled up my boxers, I decided to give my fiancée a call.

“Hello,” her soft voice answered on the second ring. “It's almost midnight, Chandler.”

“Did I wake you, baby?” My lip twitched as I fastened my slacks. “I could come over and put you back to sleep.”

Noemi and I have been together for over six months, and I haven't even sniffed the pussy. We've spent the night at each other's place a few times, but it wasn't because she wanted to. I had to all but tie her down to make her lie next to me. She told me she wasn't a virgin, so I'm not sure what's taking her so long to give me what's

ultimately going to be mine. If I find out in any way that she's fucking a nigga behind my back, I'm killing them both.

"Chan... it's late, and I have work tomorrow." She yawned. "Shouldn't you be somewhere with your whore of the week?"

I chuckled lowly. Seems as if she wasn't the only one because Angelina was frowning at me. "You sound jealous. Just say the word, baby, and his dick will be all yours."

Standing from the bed, I pushed Angelina out of my way as I searched for my suit jacket and keys. It was nearing midnight, and I needed to get home. Usually, I would be inclined to spend the night wherever I fucked in case I wanted to dive back into some pussy during the night, but I knew that wouldn't be the case here.

"Chandler, I'm sure whoever you're with has it covered," Mimi finally responded in a huff. "I haven't heard from you in days, but you call and want to sleep with me?"

"Baby, I'm not with?—"

"Channie, are you leaving?" Angelina asked as she wrapped her arms around my torso once I reached the door. "Come back to bed, love."

Spinning my body around, I pushed her off me with all my might. Hitting the floor with a thud, her wide eyes showcased shock and fear.

"Chandler! Are you really calling me from another woman's house right now?" Mimi yelled, going off on the other end of the phone. "When I think you can't get any more disrespectful, you prove me wrong. Get off my line, nigga!"

Seeing my screen flash, indicating Noemi had disconnected the call, I looked back to

Angelina and saw red. Slowly, I pocketed my cell, keeping my eyes to Angelina. Taking slow, deliberate steps, I eyed her like a predator eyeing its prey. She'd fucked up, and she knew it.

“Channie—”

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” I whispered through my gritted teeth, causing her to crawl backward. “Have you lost your damn mind?”

“I’m sorry—ahh!”

Grabbing her by her hair, I could feel it rip from her scalp as I yanked her from the floor. I slung her across the room, watching her crash into the glass coffee table.

“Do you know who the fuck I am?” I roared as I stalked over to her. “Don’t you ever disrespect me like that again!”

My chest heaved up and down as I watched her bloody body wither in pain. Her cries of agony meant nothing to me. Had she stayed in her place, she wouldn’t be lying at my feet, battered and broken. Crouching in front of her, I gripped her hair once more and brought her bloody, tear-stained face to mine.

“C-Chandler, please,” she croaked. “I’m so s-sorry.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“You know... in my line of work, women and children have always been off limits.” I smirked as she shrank in fear. “You have no idea who the man is before you. With one call, I can make it look like you never existed. I could kill you right now, with my bare hands, and walk out of here to the very fiancée you think you’ve run off. I told you the first night I fucked you... you are to stay in your place. I told you that Noemi is not your concern, but you had to make yourself known. This is your first and final warning, Angelina. Next time, I’m killing you.”

Throwing her back to the ground, I stood to full height and hovered over her. As I looked her over, my mind drifted to Mimi, prompting me to call her back. She just didn’t know how good she had it with me. I may fuck around, but it was better than beating her ass and taking what she wouldn’t willingly give. Hearing my calls continuously go to voicemail, the patience I had with her was running thin. Noemi had better tighten her ass up, or she’d end up in worse shape than Angelina.

I didn’t give a fuck who her family was.

“Scott, correct me if I’m wrong, but I could have sworn I asked you to have those reports on my desk by noon.” Leaning against the doorframe of my best engineer’s office, I glanced down at my Rolex before dragging my eyes back to him. “It’s well after two.”

Confused, he typed a little on his keyboard before giving his attention to me. “Boss, I had those documents completed and delivered to your secretary this morning as requested. You sent me an email earlier saying everything should be rerouted to her. Is there a problem?”

As much as I wanted to go the fuck off, I didn't because it wasn't his fault. I wasn't sure what type of games Cindy was playing, but about my business, she could die today.

"You're good, man..." I pushed off and nodded. "I look forward to viewing your findings."

Fuming, I made my way down the hallway in search of Cindy. The look on my face must have told my staff to get the fuck out of the way because everyone scrambled to make a path for me. Running a multi-million-dollar corporation was something I hated, but since the passing of my father at the hands of Rosier, I wasn't left with much of a choice.

"Joyce, have you seen Cindy?" I asked one of my two assistants with some bass in my tone. I looked around the area where their two desks sat, not seeing Cindy anywhere. "Is she on lunch?"

"The last time I saw her, she was in your office, sir," she replied hesitantly before pointing behind her. "She went in about ten minutes ago."

Nodding curtly, I adjusted the buttons on my jacket and marched toward the mahogany doors that led to a separate waiting room, which ultimately led to my office. Pushing the doors open, I wasn't expecting to see her spread-eagled across my desk. Any other day, I would have fucked her all over this office, but today, she'd messed up.

"What the fuck are you doing?" I shouted as I slammed the door behind me, scaring her. "Have you lost your fucking mind?"

Shooting up from the desk, a look of panic passed over her. Cindy was a beautiful girl with the palest vanilla skin, large, doe-shaped eyes, and the pointy nose and thin lip

combo most Valley girls had. White girls aren't typically my thing, but the day she bounced into my office with those perky breasts on display, I had to have her. She didn't hesitate to let me stick it in all her holes on the first day on the job either. The girl was a freak, and that is what kept her around. Other than that, she was as dumb as a box of rocks, proving the legitimacy to the blonde jokes often made.

"I-I just thought that maybe we could play a little bit." She slid from the desk and covered her breast with her arms. "You haven't been to my place in a few days, and I've missed you." Her face reddened as she threw her head back, moving her blonde tresses from her face. "Have you been spending time with your fiancée? I don't know why you even bother with the idea of getting married. You obviously don't love her, Chandler, or else you wouldn't spend most of your nights with me."

Pinching the bridge of my nose, I closed my eyes tightly and took several deep breaths. Between her and Angelina, I was going to lose my mind. This is why I'd rather be back home in Haiti than here in the States. The women there know their place.

"Cindy... listen to these next words very clearly. I keep you around because I like how you take dick—nothing more." The tears welling in her eyes meant nothing to me. Stepping closer, I ran my finger down her cheek as the first tear fell. "Mention my wife again, and the ground below this ten-story building will be splattered with your blood. Do you understand?"

Swallowing a sob, she nodded before responding, "Yes, Chandler. I understand."

"It's Mr. Gourneau," I corrected before reaching behind her and picking up the black folder. "Are these the reports I've been waiting on from Scott?"

"Yes. I logged into your computer and told him to give them to me. I just wanted to have a reason to come in and surprise you."

Looking her up and down, I couldn't lie. My dick was hard as fuck looking at her thick, pink nipples. Cindy's name should've been Candy because her sweet ass stayed wet and ready for me. Instead of thinking with my dick, I pushed her to the side and took a seat at my desk. She stood waiting to be dismissed, but I was still deciding if I was going to leave her be or make her suck my dick until it spits up twice.

Skimming through the reports, I was pleased with Scott's work Cindy had hijacked. My degree in agriculture was only meant to look good on paper to please my father. Never did I imagine I would use it to help create and manufacture machines to better help our farms back home. I had a hand in the coca and weed farms we oversaw in Haiti, and my job was to ensure we produced some of the best drugs that flooded the states. Now, I was running the very business the elders in my family before me built from the ground up. Working with major state corporations to help with mechanisms for farming and harvesting was a headache I didn't want or need, but it was all for my father. With him gone, the demands had only grown, and I did my best to keep my head leveled.

Lifting my eyes to a nervous Cindy, I sighed. I wasn't in the mood for her. I signed off on the documents and all but threw the folder at her chest. "Get this to Joyce and have her send it to the correct correspondents." Eyeing her in frustration, I bent down and picked up her blouse. "And put your shit on. Standing there naked for no damn reason!"

Before she could move and do as I told her, the door opened abruptly. Joyce yelled as she tried to push past an angry Rosier. "Sir, I told you he was busy! You can't just run in here as if you own the place! I'm calling security!"

"Does it look like I give a fuck?" he spat out with venom in his voice as his eyes landed on me before dragging over to a half-naked Cindy. She was red as a fucking tomato, scrambling to put her shirt on. "Get these hoes the fuck out of here, Chandler, before I show all you muthafuckas why they call me Zoo!"

With a smirk, I stepped in the middle of my office. Hands in my slacks, I nodded to Joyce before turning to Cindy. “Get out... both of you.” Giving my attention back to Joyce, I added, “Security won’t be necessary.” I trailed my eyes back to Rosier. “I’m sure this is a friendly visit between family.”

We both engaged in a stare-off as the women all but ran out of my office, closing the door behind them. Rosier thought he was intimidating, but I could kill him right now, and nothing would be done about it. The more I thought about it, the more I agreed that I should just off his ass in this very room. It wasn’t like he didn’t deserve it.

“Would you like something to drink?” I gestured toward my bar located in the corner of the room. “Had I known you were coming, I would have made sure I had lunch for you.”

Coolly, he sidestepped me, walking over toward one of the windows that overlooked the city. Not bothering to look at me, he began to speak in a harsh but quiet tone. “When I agreed to this arrangement between you and my sister, I thought I was making it with a man... not some little bitch.”

“What the fuck did you say?” I clenched my fists, ready to beat his ass. Rosier not turning to look at me as he spoke was rude, but calling me a bitch was downright disrespectful, and I wasn’t going for it. “Who the fuck do you think you’re talking to?”

“You, nigga.” He finally turned and faced me. The fire in his eyes couldn’t be missed. “If you’re not going to do halfway right by my sister, let me know, and this shit will be null and fuckin’ void. We can go to war today, and I will kill you in time to be home with my wife and kids by sundown.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

My chest heaved rapidly as I took small steps in his direction. I hated everything about this nigga. From the way he carried himself as if he were a God to the way people bowed at his feet. Even before he took over for his family, I wanted him dead. Marrying his sister would bring me one step closer to making sure it happened.

“You have a lot of fuckin’ nerve coming into my place of business trying to check me about my fiancée’. What I do in my home doesn’t have a damn thing to do with you!”

“It does when my sister cries about how her husband-to-be is disparaging her at every turn. How the fuck does it look, you being married to her and still out here flaunting with all these bitches?” he shouted as he pointed behind me. “You think I care about the white bitch? Or the anorexic hoe you damn near beat to death a few weeks ago? I know what this life consists of, just like my sister. Doing it is one thing, but parading these whores in public is something else. That’s not what we do, and you know that shit. Either you do right by Noemi, or this arrangement is off, muthafucka!”

Standing chest to chest and nose to nose, we both waited for the other to make a move. We wanted a reason to kill the person standing in front of us. He was going to die, maybe his sister, too, but it wouldn’t be today.

“You know what?” I nodded and took a step back. “You’re right. Noemi didn’t ask to be treated like this, but understand the predicament she has me in. There’s no intimacy with us, and as a man, you know?—”

“I don’t know shit.” He held his hand up, cutting me off and frowning in disgust. “I have a wife and love the ground she walks on. I haven’t looked at a woman since we’ve been married, and I never will again.”

“Oh, so I guess you’re so perfect, huh?” I scoffed. “When you were with Ari, you fucked off with plenty of women.”

He chuckled. “I was with a hoe, and I had a thing for them, too. Just ask your sister.”

He paused, letting the weight of his words seep into my pores. I swear, this nigga has to die. Before I could shift my brain to formulate a slick reply, he continued to rub the truth in. “Star knew her place, though. She never tried to make herself known and knew better than to play with me. Seems to me like the women in your life don’t respect you, bro.” He patted my shoulder before stepping around me. “Get them bitches in check and make shit as right as you can with your fiancée’. It’s bad enough she has to marry you; I’ll be damned if you treat her as if she’s just any other broad. She’s a Boudreaux—act like you know.”

As I watched him leave my office, he stopped and glanced over to the mantle, which held a few of my degrees and a photo of my father and me. Walking over and removing the silver frame from its spot, he eyed it before turning to me.

“Old man Gourneau wouldn’t be pleased with what you’re doing here.” He smirked before placing it back down. “Running around the city, tarnishing the family name, and not keeping your women on a leash... fuckin’ white hoes on his desk. The shit is so disrespectful, Chandler. I’m sure he’s looking up from hell disappointed as fuck.”

I said nothing as the door clicked shut after his exit. Kicking over the nearby chair, I snarled as I contemplated running out of here and gunning him down before he made it to the elevator. Fuck Rosier Boudreaux and all those fucking flunkies he rolled with. He and his family would soon feel the same hurt he caused me and mine. I had to play nice and make things right with Noemi, though. Not marrying her wasn’t an option anymore. My plan would be a success if I followed through, and then everyone would bow down to me, knowing I’d defeated the Boudreaux empire.

Noemi had no choice. She may be a Boudreaux right now, but she would be a Gourneau when she and her family died.

“Claire, please hold all of my calls and visits, if you don’t mind, please. My personal line will ring if it’s an emergency.”

Nodding that she understood, I continued past her desk to my office. Business was booming at Boudreaux Enterprises, and while I worked remotely most of the time, I enjoyed being onsite. Today was my first day back in over three weeks, so I knew there would be a lot of people in my face with unnecessary conversations. I’d started my day with a phone call from Jordan, and I was too high in the clouds right now to have someone ruin my mood. The knock on my office door before I even powered up my desktop let me know it would be short-lived.

“Where in the hell have you been?” Jules all but yelled as he stepped into my office, not waiting for me to give him permission to enter. I didn’t try to hide my aggravation as I rolled my eyes at him. “We have been trying to see you for weeks, Mimi.”

So much for having a good day.

Rolling my eyes, I answered dryly as I unpacked my bag while my computer loaded. “As if I don’t know that. I have been busy and taking some much-needed time.”

“Is that right?” I snapped my head up as Rosier waltzed his ass into my office. “With whom?”

Heated, I picked up my phone and buzzed my office floor’s receptionist.

“Miss Boudreaux?”

“What part of ‘I didn’t want to be disturbed’ did you not understand?” I snarled as I eyed my brothers. Unfazed by my anger, they took seats in the sitting area and got comfortable. “That was for everybody.”

“Jules said, and I quote, “This is his shit, and unless I wanted to be dangling from the ceiling like a spider monkey, I would move the hell out of his way.”” I could hear the nervousness in her voice, and a small giggle slipped through my lips. “I don’t know what that means, and I don’t want to find out, Miss Boudreaux.”

“And Rosier?”

“Ma’am, his name is on my checks. One look from him, and I got the hell out of the way.”

Sighing because she was right, I let her know that it was fine. I placed the phone back on the receiver, folded my arms, and mugged them both. They had some nerve scaring the poor lady to death, knowing how everyone aimed to please so they wouldn’t lose their job—or worse, end up dead.

“This is our place of business, and I’m not obligated to speak on anything outside of that.” My eyes danced back and forth between them both. “If this isn’t work-related, will you please go?”

Hearing my voice crack caused their expressions to soften. With his eyes on me, Rosier stood from his seat and stepped my way. Pulling me from my desk chair and into his arms, I wrapped mine around him and cried silently.

“Nigga, I’m telling Mama on you. Got my sister in here crying and shit,” Jules stated with a hiss from behind us. “I’m telling you, Mimi... all you have to do is say the word, and I will have that nigga in a kennel with Elana.”

Snorting in an attempt to stop my laugh, I pulled away from my brother and wiped my eyes. Peering up at a stoic Rosier, I smirked at him. “Gabby is going to kill you about the mascara on your shirt.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

He groaned as he peered down at me. “Yeah, she is. Things may be easier for you if she did.”

With a heavy heart, I dropped my head momentarily before I brought my eyes back to his. At the end of the day, this is my big brother, and I would love him no matter what. However, I was, and still am, hurt by his choices for me.

“I’m sorry about what I said to you at Mama’s,” I apologized sincerely. “It doesn’t matter how I was feeling; I should’ve never let those words slip from my mouth. I love you with my entire heart, Rosier, and you’re the best big brother in the world.”

“Well, I’ll be damned!” Jules walked over to us and mused the side of my head. “What the hell am I?”

“A pain in my ass.” I smirked, causing him to do the same. “But I love you just as much.”

“I love you, too, baby girl.” Jules pulled me into his arms, kissing my forehead. “You want to talk about what’s going on?”

Looking between the both of them, I made my way back to my desk as they retook their seats. Like all the other offices in the building, I guaranteed that my office had the security defenses needed so that we could speak freely when warranted. Yet, we rarely did as we attempted to keep Family business away from Boudreaux Enterprises. Along with round-the-clock security checks, our computer’s firewall was consistently monitored hourly. We spared no expense and only hired the best to assist me in making sure our information and conversations stayed protected.

“I understand what’s required of me... even if I don’t like it,” I started with my eyes on Rosier. He had yet to say anything, so I continued, shifting my eyes to Jules. “I always hoped that this wouldn’t be the life I was destined to live. I secretly hoped that even if it was, it would be with someone a little less of a dick like Chandler.”

“What else did he do? He put his hands on you?” Rosier’s eyes darkened as he gazed at me, waiting for me to answer.

“I wish the fuck he would!” I scoffed and rolled my eyes. “That would make things easier for me because we both know where I’m sending him.” By no means did I think I was stronger than a man. I will, however, have his mother crying over a closed casket, asking God why He took her son. I sighed for what felt like the seventh time in the short ten minutes they’d been here. “He doesn’t respect me, Rosier, and I don’t know if I can live like that. I know love may not be in the cards, and I know men in his...position have multiple women, but I should not feel so uneasy with this man. He is repulsive.”

Leaning back in his chair, Rosier nodded as he listened to me. He knew firsthand from our father that the men in these families are allowed to have more than one woman. Hell, even he would have open options had he ended up with Ariana. His love for Gabby wouldn’t even allow him to sneeze around another woman. That’s what I wanted for myself: real love.

“I’ll be honest with you, sis. As a man and the head of his family, Chandler can choose what he wants to do in his house and his marriage. I have no say. Yes, you’re my sister, and, of course, I want you to be in love and be happy. With this life, however, you know love and happiness is not the first priority for most.”

“I know,” I spoke somberly, and I placed my head in my hands. “I hate it. I hate this.”

“What he won’t do is play in your face,” Rosier continued. “I know all about him

being out in public and around other women. I don't know if he's doing it to spite me or if he doesn't care. Either way, we already had a conversation, and I've voiced my concerns. If things don't get better, let me know. This marriage is to blend our families, but I'll be damned if he intentionally tortures my sister in the process."

I never asked Rosier to have a talk with Chandler because I knew it wouldn't change anything permanently. After Jordan spent a few days at my home, I was able to really have someone attend to my concerns and frustrations. Although my situation wasn't ideal, being a brat about it wouldn't change anything. Being a Boudreaux is all about making sacrifices and overcoming the obstacles that come my way. This situation is no different.

"It's fine, Rosier..." I waved to him as there was another knock on my door.

Hesitantly, Claire walked in with two dozen roses before she ran back out. Removing the card, I quickly scanned the weighted rectangle, thinking the flowers were from Chandler—I should have known better.

Remember that you're the prize, Noemi. Any man blessed to be in the mere presence of you is winning in life. Enjoy your day, Bestie.

-Jordan

"That nigga sent you flowers?" Jules asked as he sat with his nose in the air. "They look nicer than the ones I buy Bridgette."

"Because they're not from Publix, nigga." Rosier quipped as he shook his head. "From the look in her eyes, they're not from Chandler, anyway. Right, sis?"

Dragging my eyes from the card, I found my brother's trained on me.

Should I tell the truth... That I'd spent days in close proximity with another man?

"I've enjoyed this talk, but I have work to do," I said instead as I placed the card in my desk drawer and stood. "Y'all need to get out. I'm behind on work, as is."

Staring momentarily, they both stood and pulled me into their embrace before leaving. As Rosier reached the door, he turned back to face me. "I love you, Noemi, and I never wanted this for you. Make the best of it, though, baby sis, and if things get to the point where you can't or won't do it, tell me."

"But, Rosier... y'all have decided that this is necessary to bring our families together and remove whatever mess is happening between us and the Gourneau's."

"Fuck that nigga and his family!" he stated matter-of-factly with a slight annoyance in his tone. "I'm trying to do things the right way, and this may be it, but at the end of the day, you're my sister, and despite how it may seem, I love you. I never want you hurt."

"I know..." I gave him a soft smile before walking over to kiss his cheek. "I love you, too, brother."

"Call me if you need me. If I don't answer, it's because Gabby beat my ass. Between the makeup on my shirt and lipstick on my cheek, you trying to get a nigga knocked off." We laughed before I promised to call him later and returned to my desk to start my day again.

Being Head of IT was hectic, but I loved what I did. All things dealing with computers and digital technology is my niche, and I pride myself on the fact that I can get through any digital wall of defense. I was so into reviewing a new business contract that I barely noticed my newest guest until he finally spoke.

Page 18

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“Pretty flowers...” I jerked my head up at the sound of Chandler’s voice. “Mine pale in comparison.”

“Why are you here?” I asked as I leaned back in my desk chair. “Seems that I need to have a talk with Claire. She must have forgotten who she really works for.”

Leaning against the threshold with his hands in his slacks, I was disgusted at how good Chandler looked. His cream-colored shirt hugged his arms just right, and his slacks fit him as if they were tailor-made. While handsome, my body didn’t react to him as it did to Jordan.

“After not seeing me for a few days, I thought you’d be happy to see me.” He drew his eyes from my roses to the daisies in his hand and began walking further into the room.

“I guess you’ve finally resurfaced from your sexcapade,” I responded dryly as I crossed my arms. “Again... why are you here, Chandler?”

Seeing his jaw twitch, I could see what I said struck a nerve. He hates the way I talk to him, but I didn’t give two fucks. He doesn’t respect me in the slightest, so the feeling was mutual.

“Listen, we need to talk. We need to come to an understanding.” He eyed the flowers on my desk once more and handed me the ones he’d brought in. “Dinner tonight? Your place?”

After eyeing him for a beat, I gave in and accepted the flowers. Surprisingly, they

smelled nice. “Fine. See you at eight?”

“Condo?” He raised his brow as he hovered over me. “I mean... I’m not good enough for the compound, right?”

Peering up at him, the way his eyes roamed over me didn’t go unnoticed. I know I looked good today in my silk blouse and pencil skirt. This ass was hard to hide regardless of what bottoms I wore. Smirking, I watched as his pupils dilated with lust.

“The compound is for family, Chandler. You’re not family. Hell, you’re barely a fiancé’.” Adjusting his collar, I smiled as I watched his glare simmer angrily. “You can come to the hoe pad since you treat me like I’m one of many. See ya tonight, boo.”

With that, I stood and walked over to my door, waiting for him to leave. I wasn’t in the mood to argue with him today.

Nodding slowly, he ran his fingers over the flowers from Jordan before kissing my cheek. “See you soon, love.”

Once he was gone, I closed my door, locking it behind me. Taking a deep breath, I fought a headache incoming. Between this engagement to a dick and my brothers fighting their duty to our lifestyle and their love for me, I could feel my sanity evaporating.

Hopefully, dinner tonight with Mr. Gourneau doesn’t completely push me over the ledge.

“You look good, baby.” Chandler pulled me into his arms and kissed my temple. I groaned as his hands slid down my body and cupped my ass. “It smells good in here.” Pushing me back at arm’s length, he eyed me suspiciously. “You didn’t cook, did

you? If so, we can talk about our issues amicably.”

As much as I didn’t want to, I couldn’t help but laugh. I couldn’t cook to save my life, and I was okay with that. One day, I may learn, but as long as I have a ten-figure bank account, I’ll order out as much as I please.

“That would make things too easy.” I winked as I escorted him inside. “I know you love pasta, so I ordered from the Italian place up the street.” I glanced over my shoulder and found his eyes on my ass. “Is that okay?”

“Hell yeah, it is,” he murmured as he followed me into my kitchen. “Hey...” He grabbed my wrist and pulled me to him. “Give your man another hug.”

Rolling my eyes, I stood on my tiptoes before throwing my arms around his neck to hug him. He was a few inches taller than my five-three frame, so he had to meet me halfway. I couldn’t lie; it felt nice being wrapped in his strong arms, but the moment was ruined the second he gripped my ass again, rougher this time. Pushing back slightly, he scowled at my movement.

“You know we’re not on that type of time.” I motioned for him to take a seat at the table while I plated his food. “Besides... we need to discuss your love for women before I even think about letting you touch me.”

I wasn’t a virgin, but my list of sexual partners was pretty much non-existent if I’m being honest. With brothers who have eyes everywhere, it was hard for me to live my life. While I didn’t want to be a hoe, I wanted to be able to get certain itches scratched without my partner coming up missing. During my short stint on campus at the university, I was able to lose my virginity. Siah got what he wanted from me and tried to act as if I meant nothing to him. Shortly after, he went missing and was never heard from again. I didn’t mention what happened to my brothers, but I know I didn’t have to. I’m sure they were the reason behind his disappearance, although I never

bothered to confirm.

He chuckled as he thanked me for the food. “I hear you.” I watched him take a few bites before he continued, “How was your day?”

“It was fine once I stopped getting visitors.” I raised my brow, causing him to smirk. “I had so much stuff to do today that it made me consider taking a vacation. My girls are wives and mothers, so it’s hard for me to do that unless I go solo.”

I couldn’t remember the last time I went on a vacation, and it was past time I planned something for myself. With Gabby being a full-time mother and Bridgette being newly pregnant, I wouldn’t feel right asking them to go anywhere. Their husbands weren’t going to let them out of their sight, anyhow. Virginia crossed my mind, but I hadn’t spoken to her in a year or so. I wasn’t going to let her talk shit about my sisters and still be cool with her, fuck Ginny.

“Go on one, and I’ll pay for it,” Chandler interrupted my thoughts as he spoke with a mouth full of pasta. “My sister will go with you if you ask her.”

“So I can listen to her talk about how much she loves and misses my brother?” I rolled my eyes at the thought. “I think not.” That’s when an idea occurred. “Is that why you’re adamant about disrespecting me, Chandler? Is it because of how you think my brother did Star?”

Before and after his relationship with Ariana, Rosier had a thing going on with Chandler’s sister. She was head over heels in love with Rosier, but he told her time after time it would never be more than a bout in the sheets. He never courted her or lavished her with gifts, so I did not understand the disconnect. She was the true definition of dickmatized, and it was sad to see.

“Like he did, Star, huh?” He smirked as he eyed me. “You mean... treat you like a

bitch that doesn't mean shit to me?" He chuckled humorlessly. "I'm a man, baby." He shrugged as if his reason was okay. "You think you can hold out on me, and I won't get my needs fulfilled elsewhere? Like I told Rosier?—"

"You told my brother about our sex life!" I shrieked in embarrassment. "Why would you do that?"

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“What sex life?” He chuckled as he continued to smack on the pasta. I wanted nothing more than to throw it in his face. “You’re not fuckin’ me, baby. You can’t get mad when someone else is.”

Was he right? Yes, but that doesn’t take away from how I feel. He has done nothing to make me feel wanted in this relationship, so why would I give him the most sacred parts of me?

“You don’t make this easy, Chandler.” I grabbed my glass of wine and took a seat across from him. My appetite was gone, and I was ready for him to leave. “Maybe we should just call this whole thing off. I will talk to Rosier and?—”

Crash!

Jumping from my seat, I was startled to see him throw his plate of food against the wall. Pulling my eyes from the food sliding down my wall back to him, I watched as he slowly stood from his seat, his chest heaving up and down.

“You will be my wife, and that’s final. Running to your brother won’t keep you from me, Noemi. We...” He gestured between the two of us, “Are getting married, whether you want to or not.”

“Why, Chandler?” I placed my glass back onto the table. The expression on his face was murderous, but that wasn’t going to deter me from speaking my mind. His little show gave me pause, but I was not scared of this nigga in the slightest. “You don’t want me.”

He smirked as he rounded the island and slowly walked my way. “Oh, but I do. I want you more than you know. Eventually, you will want me too.” He reached out to stroke my cheek, and I stilled at the contact. “You don’t want me fucking other women... give me what’s mine, Noemi.” His eyes dropped to my cleavage spilling from my top. “Until then, I will continue to drop dick off where I please. I admit... I could be a little more subtle about it.”

Shaking my head, I tried to remove myself from his embrace, but he held me tighter. Squinting my eyes, I looked where his hand was located on my arm and brought my eyes back to him.

“Let me go, Chandler,” I spoke slowly as I snatched it from him. This time, he let me go. “You will never grab me like that again, or I can promise you... that hand will be amputated. Are we clear on that?”

Smirking, he licked his lips as his eyes dropped from mine to my body. “I got it, baby. Understand this, though... you’re mine. Your body and everything else belong to me. Rosier has no control over what I do within my marriage. The sooner you two understand that you will become a Gourneau, the better.” Putting space between us, he looked around to where the food landed. “You want to clean that up?”

“I want you to get out of my home.” I pointed to the door. “You’ve clearly lost your mind and need space to find it. I don’t care about the arrangement that you have with my brother. I don’t fear you, and I won’t be disrespected.”

The menacing glare he sent my way caused the hairs on my neck to stand, but I was going to stand my ground. I would not be bullied by this man or anyone else.

His stare never wavered toward me as mine didn’t waver toward him. He needed to know I meant every word that I’d said to him. Finally, he relented.

Pulling me into his embrace, he sighed heavily. “I’m sorry, baby. I know you don’t want this situation, and I’m not making it easier for you. I promise you... I’m going to do better.” He let me go and held me at arm’s length. “The women. My attitude. Everything—I’m going to change.”

“I’m going on vacation for two weeks, and you will sponsor it.” I crossed my arms and mugged him. “Wherever I want. I want a new wardrobe for it too.”

“One week...” He frowned and bargained. “Two weeks is too long to go without seeing the woman I’m going to marry.”

“Yet you went over a week, and I’m sure it was spent with a different woman each day.” I raised my brow knowingly. “Ten days. My final answer.”

He groaned and kissed my forehead. “Fine. I’ll wire the money first thing tomorrow.”

“Great.” I patted his arm and frowned when he walked back through my condo and located my supply cabinet. “What are you doing?” I called out to his back. “I still want you to leave.”

Saying nothing, he walked over to the mess he’d made on my floor and began to clean the shattered plate and food. As I watched him clean, I thought about the empty promises he made.

Would he really stop his ways? I didn’t know, but I had ten days away from him to get my mind wrapped around it all.

I didn’t want this man, but it was my duty to my family to see this union through. A vacation away from all this tension was much needed. The time away from all of the pressure is just what I need to clear my mind. Having a ball on his dime is the least he could do. Money has never been an issue for me, but making his pockets hurt for my

troubles may help me feel a little better, even if it's just for ten days.

“So I assume dinner and a movie would have been out of the question?” Chandler asked with his hand on my lower back as we navigated the room. “It's not too late to change your mind, Noemi.”

After the disastrous dinner last night at my condo, Chan told me he wanted to make it up to me. I wanted to tell him to fuck off because being near him was the last place I wanted to be, but I needed to attempt to make this situation a little more bearable for all of us. I may never have the life I want, but this is the one that's been laid out for me. At the end of the day, I was doing this to stop a potential war for my family. I would do anything to help them, even if it meant sacrificing my happiness.

“You act as if this is terrible.” I held his hand and led him over to our table for the evening. Tonight, I decided we would try something different and attend a paint and sip event. “If we're going to enter a marriage, wouldn't you say it's only fair that we do things I like to do?” I glanced back at him and found him frowning. For some reason, that irritated me. Dropping his hand, I exhaled heavily and stepped around him. “You're right. We can leave.”

Here I was trying my best to be less combatant, and it was still a problem. Though I didn't see a happily ever after with this man, I was still trying to put forth the effort to do what was asked of me. However, he wasn't making it easy for me at all to be near him. It would be so much easier to just tell Rosier I didn't want to marry him and go on about my life, but I didn't want the potential fallout to be on my hands.

It was his turn to sigh as he grabbed my wrist. “Noemi, sit down. I apologize for not being more enthused.” Gesturing around us, he frowned. “This isn't an environment I'm used to. I mean... come on, baby, they have us sitting on the floor. We could have done this shit at home.”

“It’s all about the aesthetic and experience.” I tried my hardest not to roll my eyes. The slow sounds of R&B were being played in the background, and a few more people were filing inside the space. People around us were starting, and I didn’t want the attention tonight. “I thought it would be something fun for us to do instead of sitting around, arguing and hating each other.”

Staring at me intently, the frown on his face began to fade before he pulled me into his arms and kissed my forehead. “You’re right, Mi. My bad. Let’s do this.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

Giving him my first genuine smile, I grabbed his hand and pulled him onto the floor pallet. I knew Chandler wasn't into rap music much, so I opted to come when slower R&B music was scheduled to play. With an eight-year age difference between us, our tastes were very different, but I figured this was something we could both enjoy.

"Thank you for giving this a chance, Chan." I shoulder-bumped him as we began to paint. The canvas was already outlined for us, and all we had to do was paint based on the colors matching the numbers. "I was hoping that we could chill tonight and get to know each other a little bit better. If we're going to be married, the least we can do is attempt to like each other."

Chandler and I may never love each other, but we could at least be cordial and respectful. I prayed about the situation, and as much as I wanted to be a brat, it was time for me to grow up and be the woman my family knew and needed me to be.

"Who said I don't like you?" he asked as he sipped his wine. "What kind of cheap—" My scowl stopped his criticism, and he changed his tone, not wanting to upset me. "I mean, damn... this is good."

"Liar!" We shared a laugh as the host walked around and asked everyone if we were okay. Telling her we were, I continued, "To answer your question, I know you don't like me, Chan. If you did, you wouldn't disregard me and talk to me the way you do. I know this isn't a marriage that neither of us wants, but we can both do our part to make it tolerable."

Sipping my wine, I swayed to the sounds of Summer Walker. As I listened to her sing about girls needing love, I couldn't agree more. All I wanted was to be loved and

cherished, but I knew I was not going to get that from Chandler. I would settle for us being friends, but he would have to show me more than what he had lately.

“I know I haven’t been the easiest man, and for that, I’m sorry.” He gripped my chin and turned my face to meet his. “Let’s start over, and I promise you... I will be a better man, Mi. Just give me a chance.”

Tracing my bottom lip with his thumb, we stared at each other momentarily before he leaned in and placed a kiss on my lips. It was our first natural kiss, and I often wondered how it would be. Sadly, I felt nothing. Pulling back from me, I stared into his eyes and hoped to see some truth in his words. I wanted to see any inclination that this was what he wanted. Yet, I didn’t see hope or admiration. I saw lies and deceit. Something told me at that moment that no matter what he said, it would never be anything more between us than business.

“Finally!” He smirked, pulling his bottom lip between his teeth. “You’re just as sweet as I thought you were.”

Blushing slightly, I went back to painting. The picture of the beautiful bouquet was coming to life before me. As I continued to sip my wine, I noticed Chandler and the lady next to us share peeks at each other. Her snickering began to annoy me, and I wanted nothing more than to put my hands on both of them. Once she reached over and placed her hand on his knee, I’d had enough. Taking my dirty paint water, I splashed it on both of them.

“Ahh!” she shrieked, hopping up from the floor, causing the room to go silent. Chandler, shocked, said nothing as he looked from me to his drenched face.

“Are you fucking crazy?” he finally spoke through a clenched jaw.

“I am.” I nodded as I peered up at her and sipped my wine. “For you to sit here and

flirt with him when you see me here is nuts. Paint stains will come out of that ugly-ass sweater a lot easier than blood will. Be careful, hoe.”

Winking at her, I down the rest of my wine and stood from the pallet. By now, the music had been lowered, and we had the attention of everyone in attendance.

A now fuming Chandler glared up at me, and I could see the murder in his eyes. “Noemi, have you lost your fuckin’ mind?” He sneered as he stood to his full height. Water dripped from his face, and his Versace shirt was ruined. “How dare you embarrass me?”

“So you flirting with Aunt Ella is cool... since it was embarrassing me, it was okay?” I chuckled humorlessly as I gathered my things. “You know what, Chandler? I’m about sick of you and this entire engagement. You’re a fuckin’ joke and a sad excuse for a man. Let one of your other hoes take you home. Bye, nigga!”

Placing my purse on my shoulder, I fought the tears as I held my head high. I could hear him calling my name behind me, but I refused to give him another minute of my time. I was beyond humiliated, and I needed to get away from him. This vacation couldn’t come fast enough. I needed time away from my reality before I did something bizarre. I was hoping for clarity and praying for my sanity. I needed the time to check my emotions because I was at the point where I’d rather be stripped of everything I had than spend the rest of my life with Chandler Gourneau.

“Damn, Uno! Ever since you got your little mayor job, wife, and kid... you never have time for us anymore.” Wild started with our oldest brother as soon as he sat at the table. “Speaking of AJ, Uncle Wild is coming to get him soon. The last time I watched the baby at the store, I had all types of bitches hitting on me.”

Today was one of the rare ones where we all had a little free time in our schedules and decided to link up for food and drinks. We could have easily kicked it at Club

Honey but decided to chill at this hood burger spot instead. We'd come in right before the evening crowd, and I was glad. Although I wasn't worried about anyone in this city fucking with us, crowded spots that didn't have our security in attendance always kept me on alert. I wouldn't have been able to enjoy my food had this shit been packed.

"Man don't be using my nephew to mac on those skeezers," I said causing us all to chuckle.

The waitress came over and placed our orders on the table. Her eyes lingered between each of us before they landed on me. She pulled her bottom lip between her teeth and nibbled on it before switching away.

"Gone and get her number so we can get some free shit, bro." Wild elbowed me and smirked before giving his attention back to Uno. "Like I was saying... I need my boy to come through so he can help me find him an auntie."

Aiden Josiah, or AJ, was the light of our family. When Harley told us she wanted him to have Wild and I's initials, you couldn't tell us shit. Between all of our parents, plus us, we were always fighting to spend time with his little ass. Now that he was nearing the age of one, he was the boss of us all.

"Harley is going to kill you." Uno waved him off and chuckled as he got comfortable in his seat across from us. "What's the word, though? Y'all boys all right?"

"I'm still fuckin' these hoes and getting this money." Wild wiggled his brows as he sipped his beer. "Since you're no longer on the market and your boy here acts like a monk, there's plenty for me to choose from."

"Man... I swear you care nothing about your health." Uno chuckled as he sipped his own drink. Dragging his eyes to me, they lingered before he continued, "How's

business? We haven't spoken much since your impromptu trip to Florida. You want to tell us what that was about?"

Glancing between my brothers, I said nothing as I continued to eat my fries. I've never been one to speak on my personal life, but this was my family, and I trusted them. Plus, these past few days, I've been in my head about a lot of shit, and I needed help on sorting it out.

"Mimi was going through some shit, and she needed me to come through. I kicked it with her for a few days to help her get her mind right."

"Meaning you went to Florida and fucked that girl?" Wild raised his brow at me as he bit into his burger. "Didn't Dre say she's engaged?"

She is engaged, but she didn't love that nigga. I couldn't explain the pull I have to Noemi, but I felt the need to fix whatever wrong needed to be right when it came to her. Her being engaged meant nothing to me when she didn't want any dealings with the man. However, I didn't say any of this to my brothers.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“That don’t have shit to do with me,” I replied out loud. I leaned back in my seat, draping my arm over the back. “It’s not what it seems, and she’s upset about it. She’s torn up over that shit and needed someone to just listen to her. If she needs me to be her ear, I’m going to be that.”

Running to women and being their knight in shining armor isn’t something I regularly do. Time has shown me that these women only want you when it’s beneficial for them. When they feel like you’re not useful or no longer serve them purpose, they discard you like trash. Me being the nigga I am, I’ll never let a bitch play with my feelings again. With Noemi, it was different. She doesn’t want a damn thing from me but conversation, and that alone makes me respect the fuck out of her.

“You like that girl, don’t you?” Uno eyed me skeptically. “Do you think that’s a good idea? You know her family?—”

“Hold up...” I held my hand up and chuckled as I leaned forward on the table. “I don’t give a damn about her family. They’re the source of her pain, so fuck all of them niggas. Granted, I won’t cause trouble for us because of all they’re doing for the city and helping you with the rebuild. Dre is my boy, too, and I fuck with him heavy. But know that if I wanted Noemi, she’s as good as mine. There’s nothing her so-called nigga or brothers could do to stop that shit. Don’t none of them niggas put fear in me.”

My brothers stared at me without saying anything. I understood they were coming from a good place, but they didn’t have to worry about me. Nothing was going on between Mimi and me, but if she needed a friend in her corner, she could for sure count on me.

“All I’m saying is I don’t want you to start some unnecessary beef, especially about a woman you don’t have any ties to. At the end of the day, we have a business relationship with them. On the personal tip...” He shrugged before he ate a few fries. “You know I got you for whatever. Just make sure the shit is what you want before we have to get active.”

Nodding, I let the subject die because it wasn’t up for debate. Wasn’t nobody about to tell me that Noemi and I couldn’t be friends—my family, her family, or that nigga she was so-called engaged to.

Feeling my phone vibrate in my pocket, I smirked at the incoming message from Noemi.

Mimi:

Jordan, do you have any good vacation recommendations? Nice weather is a must. Oh, and water! I love a good beachfront villa!

Me:

I know damn well you’re not asking me for recs when you’ve been to almost every island in the Caribbeans. *Smirk Emoji*

Mimi:

You’re right. *eye roll emoji* How about I come to Milly Grove and stay at Grove’s Isles? I heard Dre say it’s really nice this time of year.

Me:

It doesn’t get any better, baby. Pull up, and I got you.

Closing out my messages, I placed my phone on the table and found four eyes on me when I looked up.

“The fuck y’all niggas looking at?” I mugged them both. “Y’all got some more unwanted shit to discuss?”

“Chill, man.” Uno threw his hands up in surrender as Wild smirked. “I don’t have shit to say.”

As we ate our food, we got lost in conversation. We talked about everything from the latest in the sports world to planning a family trip. Mother’s Day was coming up, and it would be a nice gift for not only our mother but Harley and her mom as well. We haven’t done anything as a whole family yet, and I knew the ladies would enjoy that.

“Oh shit, I almost forgot!” Wild’s dumb ass yelled and caused the eyes of the nearby patrons to stop all chatter and stare at us. “What the fuck y’all niggas looking at?”

“Adrian, shut the hell up and say what’s on your damn mind!” Uno scolded him. “I’m telling Mama how embarrassing you are, and you know she doesn’t play about her mayor-son.”

“Bitch-ass nigga.” He mugged him and grumbled before he turned his sights to me. “You’ll never guess who came by the store today.”

He stopped talking and stared at me as if he really expected me to guess. That shit pissed me off because I wasn’t about to play any games with his stupid ass.

“Muthafucka, who?!”

“I gotta stop coming out in public with you niggas.” Uno shook his head and chuckled. “Just don’t know how to damn act.”

“Since you want to be a dickhead, I shouldn’t tell you.” Wild mugged me before he began to smile. “But since I know you’re crazy as fuck, I am.” He paused again before pushing out the name I despised with my entire being. “Gia.”

Bitch.

Feeling my mood change instantly, I stared at him as his smile got wider. Uno cursed under his breath before waving the waitress over for shots. He knew how much I hated the mere mention of that hoe’s name. I don’t know why she was back in town, but if I ever caught her ass in my city, it was lights out.

“She came by looking for you...”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“The only thing that hoe better be looking for is a plot for her final resting place,” I said coolly, feeling anything but. “I’m telling you now, Mr. Mayor... you better get ready for smoke in the fuckin’ city if that bitch comes near me. I’m killing her and anyone with her.”

A nigga was in his feelings and didn’t give a fuck if they could hear it in my harsh tone. Gia had my heart at one point but decided that I meant nothing to her. I wanted to marry this girl. I wanted to start an entire family with that bitch, and she shitted on me in the worst way.

Being a Mills, women were constantly attempting to attach themselves to us for status. I never completely understood why because there was no silver spoon in my fucking mouth. I had to put in work just like everyone else as a jit—we all did. My last name didn’t guarantee me a fortune, and I didn’t want it to. Just because my father had it didn’t mean we did. Nothing was given to us; we had to earn everything we owned today. I thought Gia understood that and was down to ride for me, but she showed me differently.

I came home early the day we ended to surprise her with a new crib I’d gotten for us. I was the one who ended up surprised after hearing her on the phone with another man saying how much she loved him. All I saw was red, and I wanted to kill her. Instead, I stripped her butt naked and put her out of my home. She tried to scream that pregnancy shit, but I made her leave my condo with everything she came with: a synthetic wig and TracFone.

“I love it when Skip gets that crazy look in his eyes.” Wild clapped as he bounced in his seat. “I love this type of carrying on.”

As I listened to Uno curse him out about acting like an idiot, I lost myself in thoughts of Gia. I should have killed her years ago for playing me, but the love I had for her wouldn't let me. I don't know her reasoning for coming back to my city, but she'd better stay out of my way. The Jordan that loved her hoe ass is long gone. The nigga I am today will blow her shit back without a second thought.

It's been a couple of weeks since Money brought it to my attention that our workers on the Eastside were doing a piss poor job of selling our work. Being as though those guys had been with us for a minute, I tried giving them the benefit of the doubt. I took it upon myself to stake out the house they were over and confirmed everything Money had said. They show up late, if at all, they always have women over, and sometimes, they'd throw small parties. In the line of business they've chosen to work in, it's certain shit you can't do. These niggas have been around long enough to know we don't play that. They didn't know they worked for me directly, but they're going to find out today.

"Talk to me," I answered my cell as I whipped through the lifeless streets. I'm a creature of the night, so I handled most of my business once the sky darkened. "Speak up."

"Well, aren't you just a ball of sunshine," Mimi's soft voice flowed through the speakers, and I couldn't help but to smirk. "Why haven't you returned any of my calls, best friend? Let me find out I've been replaced."

Gripping the wheel, I chuckled as I listened to the accusatory tone in her voice. Noemi was always fishing to be in someone's business. I admit I hadn't spoken to her in a few days, but I'd been busy. Also, Wild saying Gia was in town had been on my mind.

"I haven't replaced you yet, so you're good," I assured her, causing her to kiss your teeth. "There may be someone coming for your spot, though."

“You’ve met someone?” I could picture those wide eyes now, ready to ask a million questions. “Who is she?”

Approaching the block, I parked a few houses down from the one the guys trapped out of. This particular spot was supposed to serve until two in the morning. Seeing that it was a little after midnight and all the lights were off didn’t sit well with me. Cutting the engine to the unmarked Malibu, I got comfortable in my seat to have a quick conversation with Mi before I went in here and killed these niggas.

“Do you remember me telling you about my ex? The one that tried to play me?”

For a minute, she said nothing. If it wasn’t for her heavy-ass breathing, I would have thought she’d disconnected. Hearing her shuffling in the background, I heard a switch flick before she answered, “Sorry, I had to run downstairs to get a drink for this.” I chuckled as I heard her throw a cap from a bottle onto the counter. “Now, Skip... I know damn well you’re not going to spend the block with her trifling ass. Tell me what happened.”

“Ain’t shit to tell.” I shrugged as I took a quick pull from my blunt, eyes still trained on the quiet house. “Wild said she came into his shoe store looking for me. I’m not sure why, but what I do know is when I see her, I’m knocking her shit loose.”

I wasn’t one of those people who let time heal my wounds. Instead, I let the shit fester until I exploded. Not seeing Gia for years didn’t take away the hatred I had for her. If she thought she was coming back to town to rekindle what we had, she might as well leave the city before she ended up losing her life.

“Wow...” Mi echoed into my ear. “I don’t know what to say to that. It’s been years, and I can only imagine what she wants. For her sake, I hope it’s worth coming back to town for. I know you don’t put your hands on women, but I wouldn’t be mad if you smacked a hoe after what she did.” We shared a laugh because I knew she was

serious. “Where are you? It’s too quiet, and I know you’re not at the club.”

“Handling business,” is all I said. I wasn’t going to say too much, but I know she could read between the lines. “It’s late... why are you up?”

After telling me she wanted to visit Grove’s Isles, I went to work, making sure my spot was fresh and clean. We all owned our own houses out there, but I hardly ever went to mine. I confirmed it was cleaned weekly, so I wasn’t worried about that. I just wanted to guarantee everything was in place so she would have a good and comfortable time.

“Since I’ll be on vacation soon, Chandler called himself wanting to spend time with me.” She sighed heavily before I heard her gulp. This girl drinks at the slightest inconvenience; I didn’t speak on it, but I also didn’t like it. “We went to see a movie and grabbed dinner.”

“Did you enjoy yourself?” I grabbed my favorite Draco from the passenger seat. “You don’t sound like it.”

“Any-fuckin-way.” I shook my head at her answer. Family or not, I don’t think I could be with someone I despise. I’d be killing everybody. “I just wanted to call and see if you still loved me since I haven’t heard from you. Remember... I’ll be there in a week. Make time for me. Tell them hoes that you have to split your time with a real one. Love you, bestie! Be safe!”

Not giving me time to respond, she disconnected our call. I pocketed my phone and made my way across the street. The conversation became a distant memory with each step I took.

Creeping up the steps to the front porch, I placed my semi-automatic weapon at my side as I eased the front door open. These niggas didn’t even lock my shit, and it

pissed me off even more. Stepping inside, I closed the door behind me and walked further through the living room. It smelled of old takeout and cigarette smoke in here, and now, I was tempted to just blow up the fucking house with these undisciplined niggas inside. I know Money explained to them the rules on business and housekeeping. To disregard his wishes was the same as disregarding mine.

Making my way through the house, I became aggravated when I didn't see anyone. The entire house was a mess, and part of me wanted to burn it down for real. After I didn't find anyone on the main level of the house, I opened the door to the side of the kitchen, and that's when I heard the music from the basement. Easing down the small and barely-lit stairwell, the sounds of Plies filled the air. Once I rounded the corner, the scene before me was the reason so many niggas died these days.

Leaning against the wall, I relit my blunt and watched as four of my men engaged in their very own orgy with three women from the hood. Skin slapping and moans could be heard over the music as they not only fucked the women but each other. Instead of blowing up their spot and letting them know how they had me fucked up, I let my bitch talk for me.

Tat! Tat! Tat!

Not giving a fuck about the women, I sprayed the entire room. With my blunt still tucked between my lips, I swiveled from side to side, letting all thirty rounds loose. Once the smoke cleared, the bullet-riddled bodies were laid out on all the couches and the floor. Walking over to the minibar, I opened the Hennessy and took a few gulps. Seeing an unopened sub sandwich platter, I strolled over and grabbed a couple. As I ate, I leaned against the wall and eyed the mess I had made. Pulling my phone from my pocket, I dialed Money.

"Boss," he answered on the first round. "Everything good?"

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“Yeah,” I answered and nodded as I chewed the last bit of my sandwich. “Get someone to come clean the house on the Eastside—it’s filthy. Also, you might need that new crew. Something tells me the old one won’t be in tomorrow.”

“Mr. Mills! The truck is out back, ready to unload. I’ll be there if you need me.”

Nodding my acknowledgment, I watched Irene as she sashayed to the back. The club was closed every Monday for housekeeping, inventory, and stocking, so I didn’t have a full crew.

“You know that girl wants you, right?” I dragged my eyes to Jerome. He came in on a packed night when I only had one bartender, pushed her aside, and went to work. I was amused and impressed with how well the customers took to him. He was flirtatious and complimentary when it came to the ladies and a jokester in a way that the men weren’t easily offended. Somehow, the man bullied his way onto my payroll, and I admit it was a great choice.

“That don’t have shit to do with me.” I shrugged as I sat on the bar stool with my iPad in hand. I’d been looking over invoices and sales all morning, and the shit was making my head hurt. “You got everything you need back there? What bottles are you missing?”

“Once she accounts for the liquor and brings me the bottles I’ve requested, I’m good.” He flung hair that wasn’t there from his face as he leaned over the counter. “Are you seeing anyone, Skip?” I paused my swiping and mugged him. He threw his hands up and chuckled. “I don’t want you, love, so no need to shoot. I’m still heartbroken that my sister landed fine-ass Dre.” I chuckled at him, feigning hurt as he

palmed his chest. “I was just asking. The girls here say you’ve never taken them up on advances. They said you’re either with someone or gay.”

Shaking my head, I continued what I was doing because the shit didn’t deserve an answer. I love pussy, and I get it when I want it. My employees will never know what this dick is hitting for.

“The next time the ladies feel the need to gossip, let them know if they want to keep their jobs as well as their lives, don’t worry about who’s getting this dick. Not to mention, I don’t want the drama it will bring.” I smirked as he hung onto my every word. “This shit is Grade-A and deadlier than the nukes in Russia.”

“Trust me... he is not lying.”

Hearing her voice behind me caused the hairs on my neck to stand as the blood in my veins turned cold. Slowly, I stood from my seat and came face to face with Gia. For a moment, I said nothing as I stared at her. Still thick as cold grits, she was beautiful. Her breasts were full and spilled over the top of her dress while her black panties played peek-a-boo from the bottom. Her ass was so fat, I could see it from the front. Her Hershey-colored skin was blemish-free, and her almond eyes held love with a mix of fear. She had the right to be afraid because I was moments away from blowing her head off her shoulders.

“You got about three seconds to get the fuck out of my place of business before I shoot the fuck out of you.” I pulled my Glock from my waist and held it at my side. “One?—”

“S-Skip, wait!” she stammered as she slowly backed away. “I-I just want to talk?—”

“Two.” I lifted and aimed it at her forehead, eyes squinted.

“P-Please!” she cried as I walked her backward. Those tears didn’t mean shit to me.
“I-I didn’t mean to h-hurt you, but I have nowhere else to go!”

“Three.”

“I have your daughter!”

Pow!

I shot inches away from her ear as she dropped to the ground and wailed. My chest throbbed as I hovered over her.

Did I hear her right? Did this bitch just say she had my daughter?

“What the fuck did you say?” I gritted my teeth as I stared down at her. The few workers I had here came rushing to the front to see what the commotion was, but I wasn’t worried about that right now. “Lie again, bitch. I haven’t seen you in six years!”

“S-She’s five!” she shouted as she peered up at me. “She’s five years old, Jordan, and she looks just like you. Please, if you just let me explain?—”

“Get out.” I dropped my gun to the side of me and stepped back. “Get the fuck out of my club before I blow your brains all over the fuckin’ floor.”

Without a second thought, she hopped to her feet, but not before going into her purse and pulling out a card. “T-This is the number to the hotel we’re staying in. C-Call me.”

“Girl, give me the damn card and get your ass out of here before this damn man shoots you.” Jerome came up beside her and grabbed the card. He placed his hands

on her shoulders and ushered her to the door. “Standing there looking goofy like one side of your head wasn’t almost blown off. Gone on, nye! Get!”

Seeing her being pushed out the door and it clicking behind her snapped me from my murderous thoughts. Sweat formed all over as I shook with anger. If that bitch really had my kid, I was going to kill her with my bare hands.

“Everybody get the fuck out.” I turned and faced the three other employees as they eyed me with sympathy. “Now!”

I watched as they scrambled in different directions, gathering their things to leave. Irene took slow steps toward me before placing her hand on my arm. “I’m so sorry, Jordan. I’m here if you need me.”

“You’re going to need a medic for the hole you’re going to have to match hers if you don’t get your hand off me.” She snatched back instantly. “That’s the second and last time I’m going to tell you about touching me. Next time, they’ll be zipping up your body bag.”

Tripping over herself, she ran to the back for her things before reappearing and running out the front door. I stood in the middle of the club, with my mind running a mile a minute. I didn’t know what the fuck I was going to do.

“Listen, boss... I don’t want to overstep, but we can’t leave here today without restocking if you’re going to open tomorrow. I got the front—you take the back. Here...” Jerome handed me the card. Hesitantly, I removed it from his hand. The smooth card felt like fire between my fingers, even though it was nothing but paper. “Despite how you’re feeling, I know you want to know. Now, come on! You dun scared all the people out of here, and you’re about to work the shit out of me. I’m too pretty for manual labor longer than two hours.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

Unintentionally chuckling, I placed the card in my pocket and got to work. I made a mental note to give Jerome a bonus for how he saved the day and, ultimately, saved Gia's life. I could have very well killed her before knowing if she was telling the truth about having my daughter or not. That's how disgusted I was to even be in her presence.

The more I thought about her having my child, the faster my anger turned to nervousness. If she indeed gave birth to my child, why wait this long to tell me? Why would she come back now? Was she plotting another ploy against me? I didn't have the answers to any of my questions, but child or not, I wasn't going to let her play me a second time.

As much as I didn't want to, I knew the only way to know for sure was to meet with her. Part of me wanted her to be on somebullshit. I wanted another reason—another chance—to send that dirty bitch to hell where she belonged.

"I'm sodamn mad you didn't think to invite us on this little trip. You act as if you have friends outside of us."

Snickering at Bridgette's dramatics, I looped my arms around my girls and led them through the mall. I was doing some last-minute shopping for Grove's Isle and decided to make it a day with them.

"Bridgette, you know damn well Jules isn't letting you out of his sight for more than an hour," Gabby stated, and I nodded in agreement. "You might as well tell my husband to put you on payroll as much as you stay at the office. That man gets you up every morning and dresses you for work right along with him."

“He just wants to spend time with me and the baby.” Bridgette stopped walking and placed her hand on her hip, causing her maxi dress to shift and her little bump to show. “And I know you’re not talking, Gabby. When was the last time Rosier let you shower alone?”

Right in the middle of The Galleria, the girls had a brief stare-off. Nicky and Luca eyed us questioningly, and that caused us to erupt into a fit of laughter. Listening to them speak about my brothers’ clinginess was funny and refreshing. They are such hard asses in public but putty when it comes down to their wives. I loved that for the girls, and I wanted that for myself.

“Let’s go over there and get Chinese.” Gabby hauled us over to the food court. “I know the guys are tired of looking at bikinis and candles.”

After placing our orders, we found a table away from the crowd. We always thought it was smart to come here in the middle of the day, but it didn’t seem to matter because it was forever packed. Luca and Nicky were annoyed with the constant stream of people around us, so Luca sat close at a nearby table while Nicky took our bags to the truck.

“So Mimi, how’s the wedding plans coming?” Gabby asked as she stuffed her face with orange chicken. “You haven’t mentioned fittings or anything.”

Sipping my lemonade, I sighed heavily as I glanced at them. I hadn’t seen Chan since our movie and dinner date. The date was supposed to be him making up for the disastrous paint and sip event we went to, but the movie date was no better. The nigga ended up falling asleep during the first thirty minutes, and the only reason I stayed was because I was able to watch the rest of it in peace. Then, at dinner, I had to watch Chan force himself to keep his eyes on me and not on the various women who were either patronizing the steakhouse like we were or working there. We ended the night with me expressing how pathetic he was and instructing him to leave me the hell

alone until I was ready to start planning the wedding.

Since then, he's been calling and blowing me up for days, but I was done trying. I had officially declared the marriage to be strictly an arrangement. There was no way I was going to even like this man as a friend at the rate we were going. It took everything in me not to call my brothers to kill his ass for his consistent disrespect. At this point, I was ready to murk his ass my damn self.

"I haven't spoken on it because I haven't put any thought into it." I shrugged and eyed them both. On a day we were supposed to be enjoying each other and relaxing, talking about Chandler and a wedding I didn't want to participate in was the last thing I wanted to do. Still, I knew it was inevitable, so I continued.

"That's one of the reasons I'm going on vacation. I need to take a breather and wrap my mind around all of this." I felt the tears pooling in my eyes, but I vowed I wouldn't cry over this anymore. "It's tough because I want what y'all have..." I motioned between them as they watched me sympathetically. "I want the husband, the kids—I want my man to sit on the toilet while I shower or even join me because he can't stand being away from me. I want to sit on the back patio while our dog and baby girl chase the butterflies in the flower garden that Mama planted. I deserve that."

Sighing deeply, I shook my head in despair. "Instead... I'm stuck with a womanizer that embarrasses me at every turn. I'm trying, y'all. I swear, I am. I don't want to be deemed intolerable or not being a team player when it comes to the Boudreaux family, but that man is making it difficult."

"Sis, I know you don't see it now, but you will have everything you've prayed for." Bridgette reached out and grabbed my hand. "I haven't met a Boudreaux, yet that hasn't set their mind to something and not gotten it. I know the situation is messed up and not one you wanted for yourself, but I know that if there's anyone who will

figure out a way to make it work, it's you."

"I agree with Bridgette," Gabby chimed in with a soft smile. "You're smart, headstrong, and as crazy as the men you share blood with." We shared a laugh because those were facts. "You will make the best of your situation and make it work for you... I know you will."

Taking a deep breath, I nodded because they were right. Rosier gave me options, but I needed to be sure I was making the best one for me. I know what marrying Chandler will entail. I also know what not doing it may mean as well. I never wanted to bring drama to my family, and not going through with the duty set before me would most likely cause a war. I didn't want that, and despite how unhappy it would make me, I wouldn't let that happen.

"Anyway..." I shook off the misery that was creeping in. "I'm excited about my vacation. I'm going to Grove's Isle, and I read a lot of great reviews about it. Dre is in the city for a little while, too, so I'm going to link with him."

"Is he the only one you plan to see?" Gabby gave me a knowing look as she finished her food. I wouldn't call her out on it, but the way she's been putting her meals away, I'd bet she was pregnant again. "From what I saw at Dre's house, a certain Mills brother couldn't keep his eyes off you."

Thank goodness for my skin tone because if I were any brighter, I'd be cherry red. "Jordan and I are just friends. Nothing is going on."

As much as I hate to admit it, I like Jordan more than I should. He's so attentive and sweet—I couldn't help but to be drawn to him. He has an energy that exudes from him, drawing you in and making you want to bare your soul to him. He's dangerous, and common sense would tell me to stay away. Sadly, common sense wasn't common.

“All I’m going to say is, be careful,” Gabby said as we stood from the table. It was a good thing we were done shopping because that food had a little bit of melatonin in it. “You know what type of family you’re in as well as the type of man you’re engaged to. Certain things won’t be tolerated, sis.”

Rolling my eyes, I said nothing as I grabbed my purse and led us toward the exit. We made small talk as we walked through the sea of people, only stopping when someone called out to me.

“Noemi Boudreaux! I thought that was you.” I turned as Angelina approached me with a smirk on her face. “I haven’t seen you since the night of the event.”

“I see you know my name now,” I replied flatly. I wasn’t here for her sarcasm, and she knew it. I wanted to beat her ass for trying to make herself known the night Chandler was at her home, but I wouldn’t give her my energy. Besides, I couldn’t afford to beat her ass in public. “There’s no need to be seeing me anywhere because I should never be in the same room with someone like you. Enjoy your day.”

“You, too, boo!” she called out behind me. “By the way, tell Channie I said, “Hello.” Her words paused me. “He’s been in my bed since the night I picked him up from that ghetto date you dragged him off to. Matter of fact, can you give this to him for me? It’s one of his favorites.”

The girls and I eyed her as she went into her purse and removed a black silk tie. I knew it was his because of his initials monogrammed at the end. Dangling it between her fingers, she stepped toward me, causing the fellas to move in as well.

“He left it on my dresser and—ugh!”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

Grabbing her by the throat, I listened as my sisters called out for me to let her go. I watched as her eyes bucked in fear. She had the wrong bitch on the right day, and I was going to let her know it was never a good idea to try me.

“Listen here, and listen good...” I squeezed her neck tighter, causing her to claw at my hand. “Don’t you ever approach me in public about you being a man’s whore in private. I hope the dick was worth you dying over because this will be the last time you challenge me on some woman-to-woman shit. You’re not Barbara, and I’m sure as shit ain’t Shirley. I will murder you, bitch.” Snatching the tie from her, I watched as she fell to the ground and gasped for air. Stepping over her, I held my head high as people stared and moved out of my way. No one said anything as we filed into the awaiting Escalades.

“Noemi, your brother wants to speak with you.” Nicky and I made eye contact in the rearview mirror. “He said you’re not answering your phone.”

“Take a right at the light, please.” I ignored him and the buzzing of my cell. Rosier and Chandler were blowing up my line. “Park by the meter in front of Chandler’s building, Nicky.”

Doing as I asked, he parked and turned the hazard lights on. Stepping out, I heard a door close behind me, and I knew it was either him or Luca. Entering Gourneau’s Headquarters, I bypassed the front desk as I took the elevator to Chan’s floor.

“Mimi, I know you...” Luca spoke evenly to the side of me. “If that nigga puts his hands on you, I’m killing him. Then your brother is going to kill me, so make sure y’all put me away real nice.”

Rolling my eyes to keep from laughing, I walked out of the elevator as soon as it dinged. His secretary wasn't at her desk when I passed, but I didn't expect her to be. Without knocking, I pushed his door open and couldn't help the howl that escaped my lips.

"Good to know our talk from the other night meant something to you, muthafucka." I startled them both as they scrambled to put their clothes on. As he zipped his pants, I laughed, watching her try to stand from her knees, but my Beretta put a halt to all movement.

"Baby, w-what's going on?" Chandler asked hesitantly as his whore began to weep. "Put the gun down."

"I don't care about you or anything that you do, you slimy pig." I clenched my jaw as I stepped closer to him. "I could care less about the bitches that you fuck." My eyes dropped to the one on her knees. "I hope he washed last night's slut from his dick before you decided to fuck him, or maybe, he made you clean her juices with your rank-ass mouth."

"Noemi—"

"You can fuck a million women, Chandler, because it will never be me." I threw the tie at him, hitting him in the face. "Make that the first and last time a bitch approaches me about fuckin' you. I hope you enjoyed your night with her. The last time was the last time."

Raising my brow, I gave him a knowing look before eyeing his secretary one last time. I laughed at her tears before I turned on my heels and walked out of the office the same way I came in. I may have been playing it cool on the outside, but internally, I was hurt. No one wanted a woman approaching her about a man she had dealings with. It didn't matter if she wanted him or not because the feelings were

irrelevant—it was the principle.

“Let me see your phone, Luca.” I held my hand out as we rode the elevator downstairs. “I need to make a quick call.”

Handing it over, I dialed my brother’s number. It didn’t take long before he answered, “Luca, talk to me. Is my sister okay?” Jules answered the phone almost immediately.

“Peachy,” I answered as we reached the lower level and the doors opened. “I need you to do something for me.”

“Name it, baby girl.”

“Angelica Rue.”

“Done,” he responded almost happily as the call disconnected.

Stepping back outside, the spring sun hit my face. With my head upward, I closed my eyes and inhaled the fresh air to calm the rage simmering within me. After a few seconds, I gathered myself before I returned to the truck with the girls waiting for me.”

“Are you okay?” Bridgette asked as soon as I slid inside. “What do you need from us?”

My goal was to never alarm them, but I was tired. My emotions were drained, and this last stunt regarding Chandler had depleted me. I grabbed their hands as a grin slowly formed across my face. The look of confusion they displayed was comical.

“The only thing I need you ladies to do is come to the house and help me pack. My

vacation starts now.”

Taking a deep breath, I inhaled the scent of the salty waters below. I lifted my head and allowed the beaming sun to kiss my skin. This was my second day on Grove’s Isle, and it was the most peace I’ve felt in a long time. As I peered into the clear blue ocean and watched the waves crash into the shore, my troubles awaiting me back home were an afterthought. Well, that was until the steady ringing of my phone. Sighing, I waltzed over to the wicker table to answer it.

“Chandler,” I answered in an exasperated tone. “This isn’t much of a vacation if all you’re going to do is blow me up. Shouldn’t you be somewhere with one of your concubines?”

After seeing what I saw the day I popped up in his office, I wouldn’t allow him access to my condo or the compound, and I wasn’t answering his calls. He’d been trying to see me and plead his case, but there truly was no need. He was acting desperate—he’d even gone as far as going to my brothers to get me to speak with him. I had to beg Jules to not turn him into a toad. Rosier was ready to kill him, but he said things were in a good place as is with the organization and didn’t want to make it worse. I told them I was fine and just needed time to decompress.

“I want to apologize to you, Noemi,” he said somberly, causing me to roll my eyes. Not for a minute did I believe him. “I was wrong, and I know that. Please... just give me one last chance to make it right. Tell me where you went on vacation, and I will come to you.”

Knock. Knock.

Peering over my shoulder, a slow smile formed at who would be popping up on me this early.

“Look, Chan, there’s nothing to discuss. Please... let me enjoy my vacation, and when I return home, we will have a conversation.” I smiled as the knocks became more rapid. “In the meantime, you should probably think about if a marriage between us is something that we can bear—I know I am.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“Is that someone knocking? Wait, who is that?—”

With my mimosa in hand, I disconnected the call. My floor-length robe trailed behind me as I made my way to the door. My heart thumped in my chest as I placed my hand on the knob and guided it open.

“Good Morning, Jordan.”

With his hands tucked in his sweats, he leaned against the door frame as his eyes began to roam my frame. Skip was handsdown the finest man I’d ever seen, and he knew it. Standing at six-four, he was perfection. A man who is equally fine in a tailored suit or T-shirt and ball shorts is dangerous. His tattoo-covered skin gave him a bad boy look, and I often think of how bad he could really be.

“That’s how you answer the door, Noemi?” He pulled me from my lustrous thoughts as he began to speak. “Go put some clothes on and come holla at me.”

Rolling my eyes playfully, I downed my drink before wrapping my robe around me and doing as he asked. Since I’ve met Jordan, he’s always had this commanding energy around him that made you want to do everything he said. Since I’d already showered, I dressed in a simple tank and shorts in no time. Walking back into the sitting room, I frowned at him sitting near the bar.

“You know... it’s usually me who’s up at the crack of dawn with a drink.” I held up my empty champagne flute before fixing myself another mimosa. “Would you like breakfast? I have some food left over.”

Seeing as though he had yet to answer, I glanced back over at him and found him in deep thought. Swirling his drink in his hand, he eyed the glass before throwing it back and pouring himself another shot.

“Are you going to tell me what’s wrong, or are you going to pretend you’re a fish and drink all of my liquor before noon?”

Slowly, he dragged his eyes up to mine. It was then that I saw a hint of a smile. “You know this is my beach house, right? So, technically, this is my liquor.”

Waving him off, I took the glass from his hand and led him onto the balcony. The weather was so nice and warm out that I wanted to spend as much time as I could outside. He was right about the beach house being his, but that wasn’t the point. His drinking this early in the day was a tell-tale sign that something was bothering him.

“Talk to me and tell me what’s on your mind, Jordan. I called you yesterday, and you left me hanging.” I led him over to the small wicker chair and took a seat beside him. “Tell me what’s wrong and how I can help you fix it. I’m more than a pretty face, you know?”

Smirking, he licked his lips in a way that made me hot all over. I had to be careful around this man, or I was going to find myself in a world of trouble these next few days.

“There are some things about my past that I don’t openly talk about. Not because I don’t trust you, but because it puts me in a dark place, Mi.” His eyes lingered on my legs for a moment before he grabbed ahold of them, pulling my feet into his lap. My breathing caught in my chest at his sudden gesture, and when he began massaging my feet, I melted. This wasn’t his first time touching me in this manner. He always said that after a long day of being in heels, I deserved to come home to a massage.

Looking up from his hands kneading my feet, I gave him my undivided attention once he exhaled, letting me know he was ready to dish.

“You remember me telling you about the girl I dated who was on some fuck shit?”

“Gia?” I spat with more malice in my tone than I intended. The arching of his brow caused me to giggle. “I don’t know the specifics, Skip, but I told you I did background checks on you and your family. I know a lot, but not enough. Tell me more about her. You want me to find her and shoot her?”

“Nah, not yet.” He chuckled as he pressed into my heels with his knuckles. I could feel myself sinking deeper into the chair. “After six years, she popped up on me at the club a few days ago.” He dropped his head for a moment before he continued, “She said she has my kid.”

Sitting straight up, I pulled my feet from his lap and slid closer to him. I couldn’t help but throw my arms around him. He didn’t waste any time in returning the embrace.

“Oh my gosh! Jordan... are you okay?” I hugged him tightly in shock. “Have you met her? What are you thinking? How do you feel?”

I know I was shooting questions at him back to back, but I was concerned. Jordan wasn’t the type of man who expressed himself, and the last thing I wanted him to do was keep his feelings bottled up and crash out about this.

“I don’t know how I feel, Mi.” He exhaled again as he tucked me under his arm. I gazed up at him as he stared out into the ocean. “What am I going to do if I have a child in this world? She said she’s five. What if the kid thinks less of me because I haven’t been around?”

I gasped as I sat up a little. “I can’t believe this... you’re scared.”

“Noemi, I’m not?—”

“You are.” I stopped him and laid my head on his chest. His fingers immediately found my scalp and began to massage. “You’re used to control, and this situation is one you didn’t see coming. If there’s one thing I’ve learned about you... I’ve learned you tackle every issue you encounter head-on. This situation is one you weren’t expecting, but I know you’re going to do the right thing, especially if this child is yours. It has nothing to do with the mother...” I placed my hand on his chest and felt his steady heartbeat. “But with you. If this kid is yours, you’re going to be a great father. You’ve had the perfect example, and I don’t expect anything less. It’s not in you to fail. Don’t get too much caught up on the time lost. If there’s, in fact, a child, focus on where you go from here. Go see Gia, Jordan. Have a conversation. Don’t wait too long.”

Although he didn’t respond immediately, he didn’t have to. Jordan was a man of action. The moment he finds out the kid is his, he’s going to spring into action and do the right thing. I made a mental note to look into his so-called ex. I’ll be damned if I sit around and let her cause chaos in his life.

“You know... I might keep you around a little longer.” His chest rumbled as he chuckled lowly. “You’ve been cooped up in here for two days. Come on... let me take you out.” Pulling me up from our seats, he eyeballed my attire. The darkening in his irises caused my heart to flutter and me to blush. His eyes finally found mine again, and he winked. “Go change your clothes and leave your wallet here. I feel like tricking on my best friend.”

“You got me fucked up if you think you’re about to drag me from store to store like I’m some simp-ass nigga.” I giggled as I listened to Jordan complain about shopping. “You could have asked my mama to come with you, and I’m sure she would have been more than happy.”

“You don’t like spending time with me, friend?” I looped my arm in his as we walked through The Galleria. Mills Manor not only had beautiful homes but also one of the most luxurious malls I’ve ever stepped foot in. “It’s not like I know anyone else out here since Dre and Denim aren’t in town yet. Plus, I want to go in here.” I stopped and nodded toward the boutique. “Since you’re a man, I figured you knew what men like. I was hoping you’d help me.”

Nibbling my bottom lip, I peered up at him with the biggest puppy dog eyes I could muster. Truth was, my confidence had taken a hit, and I was subconsciously too stubborn to admit it. Chandler disrespecting me was one thing, but his failure to even attempt to be faithful to me had me wondering what was wrong with me. It was even more irritating that I was supposed to be on vacation but could not keep my thoughts off of the dick head who didn’t even deserve me.

So why does it matter that he won’t do right by you and try to have a traditional marriage?

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

Shaking me from my internal dialogue, Jordan asked, “You want me to call Jerome and tell him to pull up?”

He mugged me as I ignored him and pulled him inside the lingerie store. Seeing the mannequins dressed in skimpy attire was enough to make me blush instantly.

“I’m a man that likes ass and titties, Mi. This ain’t some shit I need to be doing with you.”

“Please, Jordan!” I pleaded, feeling pitiful. “You think I want to have you do this with me?” I gestured around the store and felt so out of place. “I would much rather experience this with a man who wanted me—someone who finds me attractive. I’m set to be married to a man who would rather cheat on me at every turn before he considers finding me sexy enough to be faithful to. I just thought?—”

Dropping my head, I tried my best to stop the tears from falling. I knew I was a beautiful woman, but since being with Chandler, I’ve second-guessed everything about myself. From my locs to the way I dress, I felt like I wasn’t good enough or maybe not his type. Seeing the kind of women he cheats on me with makes me feel really self-conscious about myself.

“Aye...” He lifted my chin and brought my eyes to his. “If you want me to sit here and watch you model these scraps, I don’t mind. Just don’t say shit when my dick gets hard.”

“Oh my gosh!” I groaned as I looked around. Women were gawking at him, and I could feel my face grow hot. “Jordan, why would you say that?”

“Shit, it’s the truth.” Grabbing my hand, he led me over to the bra and panty area. “Now, if you want my help, let’s start here.” Picking up a red, laced thong, I groaned at the sight. “Let me see what you’re working with.”

Rolling my eyes, I snatched the pieces from him and went in search of a dressing room. The place had a sensual ambiance to it, and suddenly, I was nervous. This was not my first time in a lingerie store, but having Jordan with me made me feel things I shouldn’t be feeling for a friend. I was uneasy, but I also felt a hint of something that I couldn’t put my finger on.

Locating an empty dressing room, I glanced over my shoulder and found him texting on his phone before we entered the waiting area. The worry lines on his face were so cute, but I knew he was stressed since his ex-girlfriend had popped back up in town. That was another reason for getting him out of the house and forcing him to shop with me. I wanted to take his mind off things.

“I need to get my ass in the gym.” I groaned as I shimmied my denim shorts down my thighs. I’ve always had wide hips, and that could be another thing that turns Chandler off since it’s been a string of sticks being his whores. “I can’t do shit with this ass.”

“Seems to me that nigga can’t either.” I squealed when Jordan quietly entered the dressing room. “I knew you was dragging a wagon, but damn, girl.”

“Uh, sir... you can’t be in there.” I heard an associate speak on the other side of the curtain. “I’m going to need you to step out, please.”

“Come get me out of this muthafucka,” he responded, never taking his eyes from my body. Stepping closer, he placed his hand on my hip, giving it a rough squeeze. “I don’t know, friend. You sure your nigga ain’t gay.”

“W-What do you mean?” I panted as I watched him through the mirror. While his left hand was planted on my waist, his right was tracing my body. I followed as he dragged his finger across my collarbone to the middle of my chest, all the way to my navel. “I don’t understand.”

“You are hands down the finest woman I’ve ever seen.” He finally brought his eyes to meet mine in the mirror, and I stopped breathing. “If you were mine, there wouldn’t be a day that goes by that I didn’t tell you how fuckin’ fine you are. These...” He pinched my nipples, and I felt the liquid gush from my pussy. “Would never leave my mouth. This ass...” Smack “My Lawd, this ass. I’d mount you and bounce on this soft muthafucka like a trampoline.”

The more he talked to me, the more turned-on I became. Jordan and I have never crossed a line with each other, but at this moment, I would be down to do whatever he wanted to do. As he ran his finger below my navel, I couldn’t help but moan and shudder.

“Jordan,” I panted as he continued to trail south. “Please...”

“Then there’s this...” He trailed the outside of my panties, shaking his head in disbelief, “I know once a man dives in between those thighs, he would kill any man that ever looked at you. One taste of you, Noemi, would drive the most sane man crazy.” Pulling my panties to the side, he rubbed my clit before pushing his middle finger into me. I threw my head back and grunted at the intrusion. The feel of someone else’s digits would never compare to your own. Pumping in and out of me a few times, I could have cried once he stopped his assault.

“Open up for me, Noemi.” I reached behind me to spread my cheeks. His dick was so hard that I just knew he was going to break me in half. Chuckling, he licked his lips before tapping my mouth. “Your upper lips, baby. Open.”

Ashamed of my whorish ways, I parted my lips, and my eyes widened when he eased his fingers inside, allowing me to taste myself. Sucking his fingers gently, his glare keenly on me as I licked them clean. His breath hitched before he opened his mouth to speak.

“You see how easily you responded to me?”

I panted as I nodded. “Yes.” We were still eyeing each other in the mirror. “That was?—”

“How your man is supposed to make you respond, and if he ain’t like this...” He wound his hips into my ass, and his dick was hard as steel. “You don’t need him. There isn’t a damn thing wrong with you, and I better not ever hear you say nothing even close to implying that it is. Your nigga is a bitch for making you feel otherwise, and if I didn’t care about you, I’d fuck you in this dressing room and not give a damn about who was out there listening .” Turning me to face him, he gripped my chin and planted a kiss on my lips. It was soft yet assertive. If it wasn’t for him holding me, I would have fallen to my knees.

“I want you?—”

“Get dressed, baby.” He eyed me once more before stepping back. “We’ve got some more tricking to do.”

Winking, he left the dressing room, leaving me wet and confused. Hearing him ask the associate what the fuck was she looking at, I snapped from my thoughts and back to reality. I have never in my life wanted someone as much as I wanted Jordan at this moment, and I didn’t know what to do about it. I didn’t want to ruin this friendship because of a weak moment. The more I thought about it, the more embarrassed I became. Lost in my thoughts, I went through the motions of getting dressed.

“We can go now,” I stated quietly as I exited the room with the garments still in hand. I couldn’t look at him, so I made a beeline to the cash register. He said nothing as he took the lingerie from me and placed it on the counter. “What are you doing?”

“You thought I was going to let you spend your money while you’re in my city?” He frowned at me. I couldn’t help but giggle. This man seemed to walk around with a permanent mug on his grill. “I hope you’re about done because I want to go to Wild’s shoe store and get a bite to eat. Plus, you owe me a movie.”

I stood to the side of him as I watched him move around as if he hadn’t just rocked my world. Maybe it was for the best that I left well enough alone. Jordan was already detached, and I don’t think I could handle rejection or the way he would be once we’ve succumbed to pleasure. I couldn’t bear it.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“You ready?” he asked with the bags in his hands. He looked so handsome as he waited for me to answer. I mentally told my pussy that this was our friend and nothing more. “What’s wrong?”

Looking into his eyes, I wanted so badly to speak my mind, but I wouldn’t. Not only did I value him as a friend, but I was engaged to someone else. Even if I wanted him just once, I knew he wouldn’t be cool with that. He spoke so ill of his ex, and I never wanted him to think that way of me.

“Nothing.” I gave him a soft smile and looped my arm back in his as we left the store. “Just thinking about how I’m about to drain your pockets dry.”

He stared at me for a moment, just taking me in. I knew he didn’t believe me, but instead, he said nothing. Blowing a sigh of relief, I tried to push what had transpired to the back of my mind so we could enjoy our day. My time in the Grove was supposed to be spent with me clearing my mind, not getting my back broken.

What happened back there couldn’t happen again—no matter how badly I wanted it to.

“Chandler, I don’t know why you agreed to marry that bitch in the first place. You can have any woman you want, but you agree to marry the whore whose brother killed my husband. Have you lost your fuckin’ mind?”

Sitting in my mother’s den, I swirled my glass of Courvoisier as I stared at the photo of my father on the wall. Charles Gourneau wasn’t the best man, but he was a hell of a leader when it came to this family. While I had no proof Rosier killed him, I know

he was responsible for his death.

“She’s going to be my wife, Mother,” I responded without looking at her. She was sitting in the recliner beside me, and I could feel her scowl. “It’s about time we all came to terms with that.”

It had been two days since I’d spoken with my wife-to-be, and I could feel my sanity slipping with each passing day. I’ve tried my hardest to locate where she went on vacation. Hell, I even went so far as to reach out to her brothers. I could have killed them with my bare hands as they laughed in my face without telling me what I needed to know. I was sick and tired of them treating me as if I was some bitch-ass nigga, and I think it was time they see I’m extremely serious about making this union happen. For Mimi to agree to it, I have to make her believe me when I say I want this. Not only that, but I have to show her that I am not a man she can run over with her alpha female ways.

“To terms with it?” My mother hopped from her seat. Taking a deep breath, I tugged my eyes over to her, pacing the floor. The frown she sent my way as she beat her feet into the plush rug meant nothing to me. Mother or not, she knew not to play with me, but that didn’t stop her from ranting. “Chandler, you will not bring that bitch into this family. If you do, I will?—”

“You’ll what?” It was my turn to hop up from my seat. Stalking over to her, I shouted, “What the fuck are you going to do, Ida, besides piss me off? Respect me as head of this family?—”

“Respect you?” She laughed as she threw her head back. “You’re pathetic.” She placed her hand on her hip and looked at me with disgust. The scowl on her face and the anger in her eyes did nothing but enrage me even more. “You’re weak... I told your father you wouldneverbe able to lead this family. Rosier treated my daughter like a slut, and he took away my husband. Not once have you done anything to

avenge his death.” She looked me up and down in repulsion as she continued, “If you put more effort into leading this family than sticking your dick?—”

Whap!

Without a second thought, I backhanded my mother and watched as she dramatically slid across the floor. Walking over to her, I hovered as she cried and scrambled to her feet.

“I am sick and tired of you not respecting me and the position I hold.” Snatching her from the floor, I bent over until we were at eye level. “Out of respect for Father, I allowed you to stay here in the States to live the life you’re accustomed to. Make no mistake, I will send your ass back to Haiti with nothing but the clothes on your back.” Pushing her off of me, she whimpered silently as blood trickled down her lip. “Go clean yourself up so we can eat dinner.”

Rushing from the room, she kept her head down as she passed my baby sister, Star. To keep a sense of normalcy since the passing of our family’s patriarch, we ate dinner together every Wednesday night. Most dinners were calmer compared to tonight, but since I’d revealed my plans to marry Noemi, my mother and sister had been difficult. Tonight, I was in no mood to deal with their shit. I refused to have my mother and sister treat me even close to the way Noemi had been since she learned of our engagement months ago.

Looking from where our mother ran off and back to me, Star scrunched her face in confusion. “What the fuck is wrong with her?” she asked as she waltzed into the living room. “I thought we were having a peaceful dinner tonight. Should have known that shit wasn’t possible with you two.”

Glaring at my sister as she took a seat on the sofa, I was appalled and disappointed in her at every turn. At the age of thirty, you would think that by now, she would have it

together. A career, a husband, hell, even kids, but all she wanted to do was whore herself out and spend money she hadn't earned. I blame my father for spoiling her to no end. At the age of thirty-five and the new head of our Family, I wasn't going for any of that shit. The way she carried herself was now a reflection of me.

"I need to talk to you while you're here." I placed my hand in my slacks and watched her. She paid me no attention as she continued to scroll through her phone, pissing me off further. The more I stared at her, the more irritated I became. "Star!"

"Why are you yelling at me, Chandler?" She huffed as she finally looked up at me. "I'm not your child!"

Chuckling lowly, I wiped the tip of my nose as I walked over toward her. The closer I got to the couch, the more her resolve began to crumble. Between her and my mother, I was unsure of who the fuck they thought they were playing with, but it wasn't me.

"Star, you've been trying my patience a lot, and it seems to me you need a reminder of who the fuck I am."

"Chandler—"

Whap!

"Shut the fuck up and listen to me when I speak." I hissed as I shook my hand from feeling the sting of two impacts in such a short time frame. I hovered over her after recovering and grabbing her cheeks as she cried silently. That shit didn't move me one way or the other. "You and your mother may have spoken to Father any type of way, but that shit will not fly with me." I gripped her chin as the tears slid down her face. "I sit back and watch you whore yourself out to man after man, and yet, you wonder why any won't take you seriously. You'd think you'd learn your lesson with Rosier, but I see you haven't. Would you like to get paid to fuck, little sister? I

mean... if you're going to slut yourself out to every man you see, you might as well get paid for it, right?"

Her silent sobs did nothing but make me angrier, and it took everything in me not to beat her ass. In the corner of my eye, I could see my mother slink her way back into the sitting room, but she knew better than to interfere. With Star's pleading eyes on me, I glared at her and waited for her to answer my question.

"I-I'm sorry, Chandler," she stated as she dropped her eyes. "I don't want to embarrass you or this family. It's just that I'm lonely, and I know sex is the only thing I have going for myself. Rosier told me that's the only way men would be near me."

Grinding my teeth, I pushed her face away from me before standing to my full height. Taking deep breaths, I walked over to the bar and poured myself another shot. I down it quickly before pouring another one. The nerve of him to tell my sister she was nothing more than what was between her legs.

"Go get cleaned up so we can eat" I spoke without looking at either of them. "Mother, you set the table. I don't have all night."

With my mother sprinting to the kitchen and my sister trekking the hall to fix her face, I stood near the mantle and thought of what I could do to get back at Rosier. I didn't want my hands on his business or their money. That wasn't good enough for me. I wanted him to suffer, cry, and bleed. I wanted him to feel the same hurt I had when he took my father. Pulling my phone from my pocket, I took a chance and called Noemi again.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“What, Chandler?” she answered in frustration. “How am I supposed to enjoy my vacation if you keep blowing my phone up?” Pulling the phone from her ear, I strained as I listened to her speak to someone in the background before I heard muffled giggling. “Listen, I have to go, and?—”

“Wait a fuckin’ minute!” I yelled as I gripped the phone so hard in my hand that I could have sworn I heard it crack. “Who the fuck is that in the background? Where the fuck are you? I swear to God... if you’re around another man?—”

“You’ll what, Chandler?” She sassed back at me. “I’ve been having the time of my life away from the chaos and the hell that is waiting for me back home, and you can’t even give me ten days of fuckin’ peace without being a dick. The more time I spend away, the more I realize that I can’t be tied to you for the rest of my life. When I get home, we have to talk, and this time, you will listen to me.”

Chuckling to myself, I rolled my neck to keep my fury at bay. Noemi was really trying me right now, and it was time I let her know the real.

“You listen to me, and you listen good, you little bitch. I have tried to be civil with you, but I see now that’s out of the question. You and I will marry, and there isn’t a fuckin’ thing you can do to stop it from happening. If you think you can, try it.” I smirked at her heavy breathing. “I will not only kill you but your mother too. Your brothers aren’t always around, and your team isn’t as solid as you think. I could easily have her throat slit when she goes to her spa appointments with Bridgette’s mom. They still go to the one on Collins every Tuesday, huh?”

“Chandler—”

“I don’t want to hear shit!” I roared, cutting her off. “When you get home, you better be ready to plan a fuckin’ wedding, and you will do with a smile or so help me God... I will kill all the women in your family and watch the men suffer before doing the same to them. Do you want to test that theory? Huh? I didn’t think so! Bring your ass the fuck back home, Noemi, and if I think you’ve been around a man, I’m going to make your life more of a hell than you think it already is.”

Hanging up in her face, I pocketed my phone. Noemi and her smart-ass mouth were going to be the death of her, but not before I made her my wife. Walking into the kitchen, my mother and sister stood from the table with their heads bowed, waiting for me to take my chair at the head of the table. Once I was seated and began to eat, they followed suit. As we began to eat our meal silently, my mind went to Noemi, and how fucking defiant she was. I couldn’t wait to get her ass back home.

“Um, son...” my mother spoke timidly. “Have you and Noemi settled on a date yet? I have an upcoming trip, and I want to ensure the dates do not conflict.”

As much as I wanted to call bullshit, I didn’t. Eating the smothered chicken, I peeked at her before dragging my eyes to a saddened Star. Feeling my stare, her head shot up, and she straightened her face instantly. Giving my attention back to my mother, I sipped my drink before responding.

“When she returns home from her reception, we will be married immediately.” I nodded my head as I made up my mind. “I don’t care if I have to drag her down the aisle as I put a bullet in her brother’s head... Noemi will be mine, and there’s nothing left to be said about it.

I groaned as I loosened my tie and entered the lobby of the Boudreaux Hotel. “I don’t have time for this shit today.”

After a long day of sitting in the office, the last thing I wanted to do was sit down in a

meeting with Rosier and the heads of the other families. It'd been a few days since I've stuck my dick inside of something wet and warm, and I had plans tonight. I had been calling Angelina for over a week, and something told me she was no longer among the living. I beat her ass so good when Mimi popped up at my office after she stepped to her. Soon after, there were whispers that no one could get in contact with her. My thoughts were that the Boudreaux family got to her.

"Excuse me, can I help you?" I was greeted as soon as I approached the front desk. One thing I will say is Rosier had some fine bitches working for him. What I wouldn't do to stick my dick in the one right in front of me.

"Hello, gorgeous." I smiled as I leaned forward onto the counter. Her breasts were peeking through the top of her button-down. "There's a lot of shit you can help me with. We can discuss it over dinner, if you'd like."

"Chandler, you don't believe shit stank, do you?"

Glancing over my shoulder, I locked eyes with Rosier. His hands rested in his slacks pockets, and his face was neutral, but his eyes held nothing but wrath.

"What's up, brother?" I smirked as I stood to my full height. "I was just making small talk with the pretty lady here." Turning to face her, I winked. "Isn't that right, baby?"

Looking between Rosier and me, the desk manager said nothing as she answered the ringing phone. My eyes squinted as I followed her moves.

"Strike two..." I heard a low voice from behind me. "Let's head to this meeting so you can get the fuck out of my shit."

Bumping my shoulder, my fists tightened as I spun and watched Rosier head to the elevator that led to his private basement. I shut my eyes tightly before making my

way over. Once inside, neither of us said anything until the doors closed.

“You know, I’m about tired of you trying to handle me like I’m not a man.” I turned to face him. It pissed me off that he didn’t have the decency to face me. “You think I’m scared of you, nigga? Keep that shit up, and I’ll have it to where I won’t let your sister have you over once we’re married.”

The elevator dinged, and the only response I got was a yawn. Dragging his eyes to me, he stared for a moment before stepping off. Pulling my Glock from my waist, I placed it at my side. I looked around the room and found all eyes were already on me.

“Once you start acting like a man instead of a bitch, I’ll treat you like one,” Rosier said as he took his seat at the conference table. “Until then, I’m going to treat you like the hoe-ass niggayou act like. Sit the fuck down.” He pointed to the seat opposite his. “And if you ever pull a gun on me, bitch, you better use it.”

“You know... one of these days, I won’t be around to stop you two from killing each other.” Mr. Laurent sighed as I took a seat beside him at the conference table. The remaining heads were seated, as well as some of Rosier’s people. “Hopefully, when this marriage takes place, the bad blood will be no more.” He looked between Rosier and me before he continued, “When is the date, by the way?”

“Noemi and I just recently discussed that it will be finalized when she comes home from her vacation.” I shimmied from my suit jacket as I eyed Rosier. “She’s finally coming to terms with everything and is getting excited about it.”

“Which Noemi are you talking about?” Dre asked as he sat in the corner of the room. “I know you’re not talking about my cousin. She don’t like you, nigga.”

Chuckling, I said nothing as I brought my eyes back to Rosier. He was staring at me, twirling an ink pen between his fingers. I know the last thing he wanted to hear was

me talk about marrying his sister, but oh well. I couldn't help but fuck with him even more.

“Y’all sure about that? The little date I took her on last week said otherwise.” I smirked as I leaned forward. “I can still taste her, and it was the sweetest thing I’ve ever had.”

His jaw tightened as he continued to twirl the ink pen. He angled his head to the side and nodded. “You know, your father sat in that very seat when I stabbed him for talking to me recklessly. He was mad because I discarded your sister in this same pile as the condom I used when I fucked her.” The smirk I was sporting slowly faded. “Keep playing with me, Chandler, and I can promise you that you won’t have to worry about my sister, your sister, or the tension between our families.” He stood from his seat, causing me to do the same. “I will fuckin’ clear your entire bloodline. I’m giving you my sister’s hand in marriage because that’s what my father would do. Make no mistake—I’m not him, but I can see you’re like your father—a bitch that doesn’t know his place.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“Muthafucka—”

“Sit down.” Mr. Laurent grabbed my arm as I rounded the table. “That’s not what we’re here to do today.” He looked over to Rosier, who seemed not to have a care in the world. “You, too, son... have a seat.”

Engaging in a brief stare-off, we both took our respective seats. Everyone looked between both of us, waiting to see what the next man was going to do. A few minutes went by before Rosier decided to speak.

“My apologies for that.” He placed his hand on his chest as he surveyed the men, who nodded their acknowledgment. “Let’s get down to business.” He dragged his eyes over to Mr. Laurent and said, “Let’s start with you. Do you have any questions or concerns? How’s business?”

“Business is well, son.” He smiled and nodded. “You have been doing a phenomenal job taking over these past three years. I’ve been around a long time, and I know your father would be proud of you right now.”

He smirked and nodded. “Thank you, sir.”

I barely stopped myself from rolling my eyes like a bitch. Looking around the table, he asked each of the men the same questions. I frowned as each answer mimicked the previous one. There was no way everyone’s life was fucking perfect now that he was over the Family.

“Gourneau.” Rosier scoffed, causing me to snap my eyes to his. “Do you have any

business you'd like to discuss?"

Rubbing my chin, I pondered over if I wanted to strike shit up with this nigga or not. Looking around the room, the numbers weren't on my side. Deciding to keep my personal feelings out of the matter, I draped my arm over my seat before replying.

"As a matter of fact, there is." I popped my toothpick into my mouth and nodded. "Why are the tariffs on my shit so high? I mean, ten percent is a bit much, don't you think?"

Furrowing his brows, he looked at me in confusion. "You think taxing you ten percent when you're bringing in millions through my vessels is too much?" He chuckled before continuing, "Tell me, Chandler... what do you think is fair?"

"Nothing." I smirked, standing from the table. "Once Noemi and I are married, I want that to be part of the stipulations that's added. You see... I've been doing my own research, Boudreaux. The bylaws state combined families can only profit from separate businesses. Once Noemi and I are married, she will be part owner of my legal and illegal businesses. Therefore, it would be as if you're taxing your sister. That's against the rules."

Seeing the way his face transformed, he knew I was right. Crossing my arms, I felt like I'd just had a major win. The twinkle in his eye should have told me I was wrong.

"While that is true, that's not happening in this case. You see, you've already signed documents with my sister, which entails to keep things separate for the next five years." He smiled. "You remember... when we went to dinner and spoke on her terms of your marriage? All of them were listed, including not combining assets. So, the ten percent stands. Sorry."

Dismissing me, he continued on with his meeting as if my words meant nothing. I wanted to blow his head off of his shoulders, but as I glanced over at Andre, he shook his head no. I knew before I could get a shot off, he would slit my throat. Sliding back into my seat, I zoned out for the remainder of the meeting. Once it was over, I stayed behind to have a word with Rosier.

“When your sister gets home, we’re getting married right away,” I reiterated to further push his displeasure. “I was thinking we could get together and plan an engagement party for her. We haven’t done anything to solidify us coming together as families, and I think it would be nice.”

He gave me a hardened look, but I could tell he was thinking it over. It was better to play nice with Rosier for the moment, but I was already thinking of multiple ways to ruin him. His time was coming, but the first thing on the order of destruction was marrying his sister.

“You want to surprise my sister with an engagement party?” He chuckled, patting me on the shoulder as he passed me. “Sure. Let me know the details, and I’m there. If bullets get to flying, you’re on your own.”

Simpering, I said nothing as I stepped onto the elevator. Little did he know, if bullets got to flying, it was him who needed to duck. They were in for a massive shock, and I couldn’t wait to see their faces when their world came crumbling down.

“Now, Skip... when we get in here, I want you to act like you have the good sense God gave you, baby. I raised you right, so act like it. In other words, don’t get in here acting like Wild.”

Gripping the steering wheel so tight that my knuckles turned white, I said nothing as I drove my mother and me to the Motel 6 that Gia was staying in. I had a few of my guys check into the surrounding rooms to scope out the place before I got there. Gia’s

not the woman I used to know, and if she was on some “setup” shit, she wasn’t going to live to talk about it.

The day Gia came by the club claiming to have my kid, I went straight to my parents. Call me a mama’s boy, but I needed someone with a clear head to help me think. Wild and Uno happened to be there, and they didn’t want to waste any time about coming to see about the bitch and the baby. I needed time to think about all of this so I could move appropriately. I hated what this could mean for Gia being in my life again, but there was no way in hell I was going to turn my back on a child that could potentially be mine.

“Mama, I promise you that if there is a child up in here, I won’t kill Gia in front of them. That’s the best I can do.” I pulled the car into the lot of the motel. She would pick the most unpleasant one near Grove Heights. “Come on, and let’s get this over with.”

Exhaling, I got out of the car and patted my hip. Looking around at the lingering faces, I spotted the men who were on Money’s team and essentially mine. I didn’t want to bring my mother to this side of town, but I knew she was the only one who would keep me off this girl today. Plus, my mother said she could look at a child in an instant and know if it was her grandchild or not. Wild has given her plenty of practice.

“Well, isn’t this the safest place to have a child,” my mother murmured as I walked over to the passenger side and helped her out of the car. “You’re going to move them somewhere else if this kid is yours.”

Holding her hand, I said nothing as I led her to the room Gia was staying in. I wouldn’t be spending a red cent on that bitch. I would make accommodations for the kid, but the mother could die.

“Who is it?” I heard Gia yell from the other side of the door as I knocked. I took a deep breath to keep from voicing my irritation. It’s not like she didn’t know I was coming.

“Man... open this door before you piss me off.” My mother elbowed me and frowned disapprovingly. “We don’t have all damn day, Mama.”

“I have some of the rudest boys.” She sighed and shook her head slowly. “Just damn mean.”

Hearing the chain removed from the door, I held onto my mother’s hand and pulled her back slightly. Slowly, the room door opened, and the smell of marijuana hit me in the face, instantly pissing me off. Not only that, but she answered the door in a T-shirt and a pair of panties.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“Young lady, where the hell are your clothes?” my mother asked as she pushed past her and walked into the room. I grabbed her little ass back to me before she could walk further inside. “And where is the child you’re trying to pin on my son?”

“E-Evelyn,” she stammered as she tried to pull the hem of her shirt down her thighs. “W-What are you doing here?”

“Where is the kid?” my mother asked once more. I said nothing as I heard the impatience in her tone. My eyes were locked on Gia’s before shifting to take in the filth of this room. “Is there even a child in question?”

“Mommy, it’s hot in the bathroom. Can I come out now?”

Hearing her little voice, my heart stopped. My feet were planted to the ground as my mother let my hand go and walked over to the bathroom. My eyes widened at the sight of the little girl who rounded the corner. With a beat-up teddy bear in her hands, she looked around the room with worried eyes.

“Hey, pretty girl.” My mother dropped to her at eye level and smiled. She rubbed her finger gently against her chubby cheek, causing the fear in the little girl’s eyes to dissipate. “I’m Evie. What’s your name?”

“Gianna.” She gave my mother a small smile as she rocked back and forth. “You’re pretty too.”

“Thank you so much!” Mama pinched her cheek as she looked her over. “Did I interrupt your bathtime?”

Looking over the little girl's attire, she looked as dirty as the hotel they were staying in. She was beautiful, true enough, but her clothes were torn, her hair was matted, and her face was ashen. Dragging my eyes to Gia, I could tell she was embarrassed.

"Mama said monies is tight, and I have to go without things sometimes. She said that she can get nice things because she works for it and?—"

"Gianna!" Gia yelled at her, causing her to flinch. The little girl practically jumped into my mother's arms. "What have I told you about telling my damn business?"

Deciding to make myself known, I said nothing to Gia as I made my way over to my mother and little Gianna. Once I hovered over them, she cowered into my mama with her little arms wrapped around her neck. That one notion caused my heart to flutter. I never wanted her to be scared of me—mine or not. Looking her over, I couldn't find any bruises or markings on her. Outside of her appearance, she seemed healthy.

"Jordan, look at me, baby," my mother stated as she rocked Gianna. "Jordan!" she shouted to gain my attention. I locked eyes with my mother and watched as her mouth moved to say, "She looks just like you when you were younger. I think she's your daughter." She wrapped her arms around the girl even more tightly. "Call them in."

Nodding, I ignored Gia calling my name as I pulled out my cell and texted Uno. He knew of someone who could do a paternity test and have the results to us in less than a day. If she were truly my child, I needed to know sooner rather than later.

"Now, wait just one minute..." Gia stepped up to me as I opened the door to let the lab technician in. "Just what do you think you're doing?"

"You called me over here because you think this is my child, right?" I mugged her as I stepped to her. "What? You thought you were going to pin a baby on me, and I was

just going to take your word for it? You must think I'm a muthafuckin' fool."

With clenched fists, I glared down at the girl who once had my heart. I would have done anything for this girl, and she played me. The past was the past, but in the present, I wanted nothing more than to choke her with my bare hands.

"You know me, Jordan." She stepped to me and placed her hand on my chest. "Ow!"

"I don't know shit about you, and this is the last fuckin' warning." I sneered as my mother called out to me. Twisting her wrist, I tried my hardest to break it. "Touch me again, and father or not, Gianna will for sure grow up without a mother." Pushing her away from me, she held onto her arm and wept quietly. Closing my eyes, I pinched the bridge of my nose and took several deep breaths. "Now, go and put on some fuckin' clothes." This girl was bringing out the worst in a nigga, and I needed to get a fucking grip.

Feeling something tug at my pant legs, I snapped my eyes open. "Jordie, you have to be nice to girls." I smirked as the seemingly small version of me chastised. "No matter what they do to make you mad, you can't be mean to them. Okay?"

Nodding, I gave her a small smile. "Okay, baby girl. Come on."

Taking her hand in mine, I felt as if a current of energy had passed through us. Something inside of me pulled at my heart and told me she was mine.

"This nice lady right here is going to use her Q-tip and swab the inside of your mouth. It's going to be quick and painless." I gave her a reassuring smile, but I could tell she was still nervous. "I'll go first."

Sitting beside her on the bed, I gave the tech the go-ahead to do her thing. After seeing the test was a breeze, Gianna sat like the big girl she was and allowed the tech

to do her thing.

“Is that the mother?” The tech, Ann, peered over at Gia. “We need her sample too.”

“You’re not getting anything from me, and I don’t consent to you testing my daughter either.” She crossed her arms and mugged me. “I brought you over here to meet her, and this is the thanks I get?”

“Listen here, baby.” My mother stepped to her as she placed her purse in the chair. “I’ve sat here and listened to you act a fool from the moment I walked through these doors. That little girl...” She pointed at a quiet Gianna who was now latched onto my arm and didn’t want to let me go, “Looks exactly like my son. Either you take this test willingly, or so help me God, I will break your jaw and get the sample myself. You choose.”

With tears in her eyes, Gia plopped down in her seat, opening her mouth so she could be swabbed. In a matter of ten minutes, I’d done the hardest thing I’d ever have to do. The only thing left was to wait.

“Now what?” Gia asked, defeated.

“I will take this back to the lab and run the tests myself,” Ann assured us as she zipped all the bags and labeled them. “I will be in touch with you as soon as I get the results.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

Watching her leave, none of us said anything. The air was thick with unanswered questions, but now wasn't the time to discuss it. Before I could tell Mama that it was time for us to go, I heard Gianna's little stomach grumble.

"You hungry, little mama?" I glanced down at her and asked. Her bright eyes told me all I needed to know. "What would you like to eat?"

"Can I have pizza and ice cream?" She beamed as she held her bear tighter. "I promise, I will be good and eat it all."

"You can have whatever?—"

"No, she can't have shit." Gia hissed as she stomped toward us and pulled Gianna from the bed. "I will feed my child when I get ready. You have embarrassed me enough for one day. You can go. You'd better hope I stick around for the results."

Slowly, I turned to face my mother, who had already rolled up her sleeves. Taking slow steps in our direction, she walked over toward Gia and snatched her by her arm as if she were a child. Dragging her into the bathroom, I knew my mother was going to knock some sense into her.

"Jordie..." I glanced down as Giana had her little arms wrapped around my leg. "I hope you're my daddy. I don't want to be with mommy anymore."

Hearing her say that did something to me. Bending over, I picked her up and pulled her into my arms. As her small frame melted into mine, I felt a sense of peace, and the urge to protect this little girl with everything in me flooded my soul. I knew those

tests were going to say she was mine—I felt it.

“As long as you have me, you’ll never have to worry about anyone hurting or mistreating you ever again,” I promised her. My heart broke at her little sobs. “Would you like to go stay at a better hotel? This one stinks.”

Lifting her head from my shoulder, she awarded me with her first genuine smile. I couldn’t help but return it because the little girl was missing more teeth than a little bit. As I helped her find some bottoms to put on, a crying Gia and my fuming mother resurfaced from the bathroom.

“Get me the hell out of here, Jordan,” my mother whispered as she came and stood beside me. “You can’t leave this child alone with her for another second.”

Without me having any claims to the child, I knew I couldn’t just take her. Texting Wild, I asked him if he would find me a hotel closer to our condos, and he was more than happy to help. After making sure Giana and her mother had all of their belongings, I placed them into the car with Mama and me.

“Where are you taking us?” Gia asked in a worried tone as we pulled away from the motel. I’d secured them a location at a different one, and my brother was already setting it up with what they’d need for the next few days; food and clothing for Giana were the main priority. “We can’t just go home with you.”

“And you never will,” I assured her, causing her to scoff. “I’m taking you two to a better hotel where you can be more comfortable until we get this figured out. You won’t leave my sight until then.”

Peering at Gianna in my rearview mirror, I gave her a wink as she hugged her little bear closer to her body. Still smiling, she did her best impression of winking back. Feeling my mother place her hand on my shoulder, she gave it a small squeeze.

“It’s going to be okay. You know that, right?”

Approaching the light, I nodded before placing a kiss on her cheek. I don’t know what I would have done without her being here today.

“I know, Ma. Thank you.”

On the outside, I may have been playing it cool, but internally, I was sweating bullets. I didn’t know the first thing about being a father, and I didn’t know if I could be the one Gianna deserved. Once I locked eyes with that little girl in the backseat, I knew that whether I was ready or not, I was going to be the best I could for her. If she was truly my daughter, nothing or no one would stand in the way of me loving and providing for her, especially her rat-ass mother.

“Now, when you go to school, you let those pissy-ass boys know your Uncle Wild ain’t the one to mess with. I will dunk their heads in a toilet and make them eat poop before they ever tease you again. Tell them lil’ niggas I fight daddies too!”

Listening to Wild speak to my daughter and watching her smile and soak up his foolishness was the highlight of my day. It’s been less than twenty-four hours since the DNA test resulted in me being her father, and while I was nervous, I was over the fucking moon.

“Uncle Uno, are you really the mayor?” Gianna turned and asked him with innocent eyes as she sat between him and my brother. Since finding out she was a Mills, they haven’t wanted her to leave their sight, just like me. “I can’t wait to go to school and tell the girls who are mean to me about my clothes that this is my uncle’s city, and he can kick them out!”

“I sure as shit can, baby girl!” He tickled her, causing her to fall backward in laughter. “Your Uncle Uno will send all of those little heifers out of here on the first

thing smoking.”

Speaking of heifers, I glanced around the room until I found the corner Gia had been in since we got to my parent’s house. The day I pulled them out of the rundown Motel 6, I took them to one of my penthouses downtown. Although I wanted to put Malany out at the nearest gas station, I needed to see what her mothering looked like because what I’d seen so far had me ready to kill her twice. I stayed with them in the penthouse for two nights and slept on the couch. Gia wasn’t too happy about that because she wanted us to share her bed. I didn’t know what type of ideas she’d conjured in her head to think I would share intimate space with her. Our conversations had been nonexistent because there wasn’t a damn thing I wanted to say to her, let alone share a bed with her.

Gianna, on the other hand, hadn’t stopped smiling since arriving at the penthouse. It was a joy for me to see her so happy and carefree since it was evident life hadn’t been smooth for her thus far. One thing I learned quickly about the little girl is when she’s comfortable around you, she will talk your head off. I was letting her speak her mind for now, but eventually, I was going to have to ask some hard questions that I knew her mother wouldn’t answer.

“Jordie, Uncle Uno said he’s gonna take me to buy new teddy bears with clothes and everything on them.” She smiled excitedly as she ran over and jumped into my lap. “He’s my favorite uncle.”

“Well, I just be damned!” Wild shouted as he entered the room with bags of clothes, shoes, and other toys. “I’ll just take my shit back to the store. Get that nigga to buy it. Matter of fact... run me those Crocs.”

Dropping the bags, we watched in amusement as he came barreling over toward my daughter. Holstering her on his shoulders, she laughed and kicked as she tried to keep him from removing her shoes. Poor thing was so tickled, she had tears streaming

down her face.

“Okay, Uncle Wild! Okay!” she panted, still hanging upside down. “You’re my favorite!”

“That’s what I thought.” He chuckled as he pulled her back upright, still holding her in his arms. “Now, how about we go on the back patio and eat some of your grandma’s fried chicken while I tell you about coming to work with me. I’m going to need your help with the ladies.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

Standing to get my daughter from her uncle, my father placed his hand on my shoulder, telling me he would go out back with them. “You two need to talk, son,” he said as he motioned over to Gia, who was staring at me. “At the end of the day, that’s her daughter, too, and you guys are going to have to figure out how you’re going to co-parent.”

Patting my shoulder, he walked through the kitchen and out the door, where my daughter and brother were. The way she threw her head back and laughed so lighthearted warmed my heart. As long as I have breath in my body, it will always be this way.

“We need to talk, Jordan.” Gia walked over and sat beside me on the sofa. “Please.” Slowly, she glanced across from me at Uno. “Can you tell him to leave?”

“Trust me... with the way my brother is looking at you, you may want me to stay.” He leaned back and threw his arm over the back of the couch. “Plus, I want to hear why the fuck you ever thought I would go for a shady bitch like you.”

Looking between the two of us, her head dropped as she twiddled her fingers nervously. She could fidget all the fuck she wanted; she wasn’t leaving this room until we figured this out.

“Why didn’t you come to me when you found out you was pregnant?” I bounced my leg as I asked the one question that bothered me most. “Why did you wait all these years to pop up at my door with a kid?”

“You wouldn’t have wanted her, Jordan.” She looked up at me with tears in her eyes.

“The day you broke up with me, you told me you’d kill me if you ever saw me again.”

“Yet, here you are.” I leaned toward her. “You thought it would be a good idea to keep my child away from me for five years and then pop back up as if nothing had happened. Five years I’ve been away from my child. Five birthdays. Five Christmases. I’ve missed so much time with her, and now you come along and expect what? To be a family?”

“Yes!” She jumped from her spot on the couch. “I stayed away because you wouldn’t have wanted my baby!”

“No, bitch! I wouldn’t have wanted you!” I leaped from my seat and got in her face. “I loved you, Gia! I would have done anything for you! You thought I was some young nigga that would have been an easy lick. You never gave a fuck about me, and the only reason I didn’t kill you is because even after all that, I loved you! I still wanted you, but I knew you were nothing but a conniving-ass bitch that wanted nothing more than to suck dick for a few dollars.” The tears streaming down her face didn’t stop the word vomit. “Where the fuck have you been at with my daughter?”

I know the important thing in all this was that I had my daughter home, where she was going to stay regardless of what this bitch had to say. I didn’t care how she felt; Gianna wasn’t going anywhere. I needed to know where she’s been living, though, so I can get someone to look into it. If the conditions were anything less than perfect, I was killing this bitch.

“I’ve been staying with my mother in Texas. You left me with no choice after you stripped me of the little things you’d given me.”

“Little things...” Uno chuckled from the side of me. “Girl, my brother kept your account laced. You never wanted for anything. Hell, you didn’t even have to work.

Against the wishes of everyone in this family, he went to bat for you and brought you home. You had it good, but instead, you wanted to be a hoe.”

“Excuse me if I expected more!” she shouted as she turned and faced him. “Jordan was good to me, I won’t lie about that, but he didn’t have the power that I needed in a man. I wanted the boss—the head man in charge. Yes, his little club was up and running, but Uno, you owned the city, and everyone knew it. I even pushed him to work beside you, pushing drugs and—ugh!”

Grabbing her by the throat, I cut off what she was about to say. She never knew anything about our illegal business because I made sure to keep it from her. Her lips were a little too loose for my liking, and I was about to shut her up permanently.

“You know... one thing I always hated about you is the fact that you talk too fucking much.” I squeezed her neck and watched the tears fall down her cheeks. “You always thought you had the answers and everything figured out. I don’t know what you think you know, but you got the wrong nigga.”

“Bro, let her go before you kill her.” Uno walked over and placed his hand on my shoulder. “You don’t want Gianna to see you like this.”

Gia was getting weaker by the second as her clawing my hand slowed down. Her skin was losing its color, and as badly as I wanted her to die right here in my mother’s living room, I wasn’t going to do it around my daughter.

“T-That was the last time you will ever put your hands on me.” She gasped from the floor as she clutched her throat. “You’re not the man I fell in love with.”

“Correct. That nigga died the day you thought it was cool to call another nigga in my house and plot on me.” I smirked as I stepped back from her. I needed to put some space between us before I ruined Mama’s new floors. “How is that nigga, Stewart, by

the way?”

When I took Gia off my phone line, I had someone trace the calls on her cell to figure out who she was speaking with. It took me no time to locate and kill the man she thought she was going to play me for. There were no words that were exchanged. I simply walked into his single trailer on a Wednesday night and painted the tin can with his brain matter.

“Fuck you!” she shouted as she hopped up from the floor. “I don’t have to take this shit!” She walked over to where her purse was located and snatched it from the mantle. “I’m taking my child, and we’re leaving.”

“Sit the fuck down.” I pulled my Glock from my hip and aimed it at her. I glanced toward the patio, and Gianna was still playing with her uncle and grandparents without a care in the world. “You’re not taking my daughter anywhere.”

“She’s my fuckin’ daughter—not yours!” she cried. “It’s me who went through fifteen hours of labor alone. It was me who lost countless nights of sleep, not knowing how I was going to pay for her milk and daycare. It was me that gave up everything to provide for her. It was me?—”

“It’s me that doesn’t give a fuck.” I walked toward her, placing the gun to her head. “You know damn well had you told me about her, I would have been there for her in a heartbeat. She wouldn’t have gone without anything!”

“What about me?!” she hollered. “I needed you too!”

“You?” I eyed her in disgust. “I could give a fuck less about you and what you need. My only concern would have been my baby. My only concern now is my baby.” I lowered my gun but kept my eyes on her. “Now, here’s what it’s going to be. You can go wherever you want, but Gianna is staying here with her family.”

“We can co-parent.” She roughly wiped the tears from her eyes. “You can give me money to help us relocate and pay child support to me. I don’t want to work, so I’ll need?—”

“This bitch is crazy.” Uno chuckled as he stood beside me. “Was she always this slow?”

“Having my nuts drained daily by a human vacuum clouded my judgment, I guess.” I scratched my head with the butt of my gun. “Gia, have you lost your fuckin’ mind? I’m not giving you shit. The most I can do is let you stay at that penthouse until I get her a new birth certificate with my name added to it. Other than that, you can get the fuck out of my face. I’ll bury you alive under a slab of cement before you ever get a penny from me. Get your shit; I’ll take you back to the penthouse. A good night’s sleep will do you some good because you clearly need a refresher on who the fuck I am. I suggest you not confuse the love I once had for you as a weakness. You don’t mean shit to me now.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

Looking back and forth between Uno and me, she snatched her purse from the floor and stomped to the front door. She didn't even bother telling our daughter goodbye which was red flag number four if I were keeping count.

"You think Gianna is going to be good with staying the night without her mother?" Uno asked as he grabbed his keys. "And that bitch being in your condo... you think that's a good idea?"

With my arms folded, I watched Wild chase my daughter around with a water gun as my mother shouted at him not to hurt her baby. Seeing him trip over his own two feet with her doubling over in laughter was all the confirmation I needed.

"Yeah, bro. I ain't worried about Gia or that penthouse. I got so many security camera around that bitch." I nodded as we made our way through the living room. I knew my brother like the back of my hand; he was going with me to drop this broad off. Glancing his way before I got in the car, I smirked and added. "And Gianna's good. She's home."

"Where are you going, Jordie? I was hoping we could watch a movie."

Lacing up my shoes, I glanced over my shoulder and smiled at the view of my baby girl. We've been staying at my parents' house until I found one I felt was suitable for us to live in. Since I gave Wild the house I purchased for Gia and me, I lived in one of the penthouses downtown. I could have moved her in there with me, but there was no way I was going to have my child living somewhere not suitable for her. Downtown Milly Grove was not for people with kids, and the people there that had kids were ghetto as fuck. Gianna deserved more than that.

“You remember I told you I work at night?” She rubbed her eyes and nodded as she walked into the living room. “Well, I wanted to go check on a few things before it got too late.”

“Those aren’t your work clothes, silly.” She giggled as I scooped her in my arms. “You look like you’re going to play basketball.”

Chuckling at how observant she was, I glanced down at my gym shorts and sneakers. I hated I had to lie to my baby and tell her I was going to work, but there was no way I could tell her I was going to find Mimi because she had me fucked up. I haven’t seen her since the day we left from shopping. We spent the entire day together, and it took everything in me not to fuck the shit out of her. I’ve always been attracted to her, but I never wanted to act on it like I did when I saw her damn near naked in the dressing room. Chandler was a fucking fool, and if he wasn’t careful, his girl was going to be good and taken.

In all honesty, she’d called me, and I kind of ignored her. It wasn’t on purpose, though. I’ve been so caught up in spending time with Gianna while also trying to figure out how Gia and I were going to split custody. I wanted nothing more than to take my baby and cut her mother out of her life, but it wouldn’t be fair to her. At the end of the day, I had no plans to bring chaos into Gianna’s life. I want to make it better and give her the best one possible, so I was going to attempt to work with Gia on a reasonable agreement.

“How about this...” I walked her into the room downstairs that had been transforming into her space over the last few days. My mother or I slept down here with her most nights because we didn’t want her walking up and down the stairs alone. “We can start the movie together, and when you wake up tomorrow, we can go to Kiddie Kingdom.”

“What’s that?” she asked with those expressive eyes that can get anything from me.

“Is it a fun play place? I’ve never been to a fun play place before.”

I know she didn’t mean to do it intentionally, but the more she talked about the things her mother deprived her of, the more I wanted to kill Gia. I don’t know what the fuck Gia has been doing with my baby for all these years, and maybe it was best I didn’t. If I found out she was abusing my child in any type of way, Gianna would be growing up without a mother.

Turning on *The Princess and the Frog*, I snuggled with my baby girl as the movie began to play. She told me that it was so many Disney movies she hadn’t seen, and she wanted to watch one every night before bed. The funny thing was, not even twenty minutes into the movie, she always passed out.

As if on cue, her light snores began to sound off as she wrapped her arms around my torso. Running my fingers through her soft curls, I couldn’t help but wonder how I was so lucky to be blessed with something so perfect.

“It feels good, doesn’t it?” I snapped my head up and locked eyes with my mother as she walked into the room. I chuckled at her dressed in her Princess Tiana nightgown to match Gianna’s. “She’s a blessing that we didn’t know we needed.”

“I don’t deserve her, Mama.” I kissed her forehead before laying her down and tucking her in. “I don’t know anything about being a father. What if I mess up? What if I’m a worse parent than Gia? Hell, she hasn’t even called to check on her child. All she wants to know is if I’ve decided on a child support payment amount.”

After having Gia blocked from my phone for a few days, I decided that was a bitch move to make. At the end of the day, she was still her mother. She blew my line up, and I was thinking it was because she wanted to see her daughter. I called her everything but a child of God when she started asking me about money instead. That was another reason I’d prefer to have sole and physical custody of my baby girl. Her

mama was proving to not only be an ain't shit girlfriend but also an ain't shit mama.

"You're more than deserving to be her father." My mother smiled as she sat on the other side of the bed. "You have so much love to give, Jordan, and I prayed to God that He would send someone your way to receive it." She rubbed her hand down my baby's cheek. "She couldn't have a better father than you."

"Thank you, Ma," I said, kissing her cheek before grabbing my keys. "You sure you don't mind staying in here tonight? I don't want to hear Antonio's mouth about not waking up to his wife in the morning."

Without my parents and my brother, I don't know where I would be. Before learning about Gianna, they were always there for me, but now I can count on them to be the same support system for her. Even Wild drops everything when it comes to his Gi Baby.

"Trust me... your father is out like a light," she said with a wink, causing me to frown. "He won't regain consciousness until daybreak."

"Ma, why y'all be so nasty?" I shook my head and left the room. "I'll see you later."

After leaving my parents' house, I tried my luck and called Noemi's phone once more. I couldn't help but chuckle when I got her voicemail for the fifth time today. She had to realize that I wasn't that nigga of hers; I would pull up and show out on her ass. Whether she knows it or not, I've been having Money follow her all day, and right now, he told me she's having the time of her life at Urban Oasis, a hookah lounge downtown. I hope she has had the time of her life thus far because the fun is coming to an end.

Forgoing finding a spot, I pulled up to the front of the club. They didn't offer valet service, but I didn't give a fuck. I wasn't going to be here long.

“Excuse me, but you can’t park there,” the punk-ass bouncer had the nerve to say.
“Not to mention, you’re out of dress code.”

Peering down at my ball shorts and sneakers, I adjusted my hat as I eyed him. Crossing my hands at my waist, I stepped to the curb and stood toe to toe with him.
“What’s your name?”

“Joe.” He scoffed as he stopped a few of the other guys from entering the club. “But my name has nothing to do with you not going in. You aren’t dressed for this club, and you aren’t parked correctly. Get in your shit and move. Don’t make me tell you again.”

Grinning, I dropped my head and stepped back from him. Turning my hat backward, his eyes widened once my full face came into view.

“Listen... don’t be the reason your mother has to go on the news and plead with strangers to come forward with the whereabouts of her son. Get the fuck out of my way, and everything will be smooth.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

It didn't take him long to lift the rope, allowing me access to the busy lounge. Stepping inside, I groaned at all of the people that floated about. While the vibe was nice with the soft sounds of jazz playing in the background, this shit had nothing on Club Honey.

"Excuse me, handsome, but can I help you with something?" A hostess stopped me as I roamed the lower level of the lounge. Money told me she was in the building, but I had no idea where. My patience was already wearing thin, so I had nothing left in my social battery to deal with this chick. "You don't appear to be dressed for the occasion."

"I'm looking for someone." I pulled my phone from my pocket and showed her a picture of Noemi. "I know it's crowded in here tonight, but the sooner I find her, the sooner I will leave your shit."

Peering from me to the picture with pursed lips, I could tell the last thing she wanted to do was help me. She didn't have to; I'd much rather air this motherfucker out and wait for Mi outside.

"I think I saw her on the second level." She nodded toward the stairs. "Be advised that if you cause a scene..."

"You ain't gone do shit... move." I pushed past her and went in the direction she pointed. My mother would be pissed if she knew I was out here being rude to innocent women, but I've never portrayed myself to be the nicest person. I'm not one with an immense amount of tolerance, and Noemi was working my last nerve.

Reaching the second level, I found it to be more upscale than the lower one. While downstairs had a plethora of booths and tables, the upper level was spacious and private. The small sections gave you room to relax and enjoy the vibe without the chaos of being surrounded by a large crowd. Looking around, I was starting to get pissed, thinking I was lied to about her being here, but over the soft sound of music, I heard her harmonious laugh.

“You’re too pretty to be here by yourself.” Some Trey Songz-looking-ass nigga smiled as he leaned into her space. “How about we get out of here and get to know each other a little better?”

“Or, you can get the fuck out of her face before I blow your shit back.” I mugged him as I startled them both. Wedging myself in between them, her eyes went wide from shock to being slanted in anger. “Hey, pretty girl.”

“Jordan! What the hell are you doing here?”

Draping my arm on the back of the couch, I made myself comfortable. Gazing at her attire, I’ll be damned if she didn’t look good. The yellow halter dress looked amazing against her chocolate skin. I didn’t know what type of moisturizer she used, but the way her thighs were shining under the lights, I wanted to dive in between them. Her bare face was on full display, and her locs were pulled into a high bun. Even though she was mad at me, she looked pretty as hell tonight. It might have been fucked up for me to be out here lusting over another man’s woman but fuck that nigga. At least I was being nice about the situation and not sticking my dick in her. The way she responded to me in the dressing room let me know if I wanted the pussy, she would’ve served it up with no questions asked.

“Why haven’t you been answering my calls, Noemi?” I eyeballed her. “I’ve been calling, and you keep sending a nigga to voicemail. I don’t like to be ignored.”

Doing just that, she leaned over me and resumed a conversation with the greyhound-looking-ass nigga. Twisting my neck from side to side, I could feel my crazy activating. I told myself I was going to act like I had some sense tonight, but I'd clearly lied.

"Y'all muthafuckas really gone sit right here and play with me." Grabbing the bun at the top of her head, I pulled her head back and brought her eyes to mine. It wasn't enough to hurt her, but just the right amount of force to get her attention. "Why you playing with me, Noemi?" I placed my lips to her ear and whispered. Licking her lobe, I felt her shudder against me. "Do you really want me to show out in here?"

Placing my hand on her knee, I kissed her neck as I slowly began to trail it up the inside of her thigh. The music around us was still playing, but the air had thickened, and it wasn't due to the smoke. I could feel the goosebumps begin to form on her skin as she began to pant.

"J-Jordan, what are you doing?" she said in a raspy tone, licking her bottom lip. "People can see us."

"Imagine me giving a fuck." I chuckled as I reached her center. Baby girl was soaked, and I knew it was because of me. Hell, it better have been. Pushing her panties to the side, I groaned at her clit being hard as a rock. "Who is this pussy wet for, Mi? Huh? You say the wrong thing, and I promise you... that mutt-looking friend of yours will die in this muthafucka tonight."

"Oh my gosh!" she whimpered as she grabbed my wrist and started humping my hand. "I want you so bad." She began to shake as I rubbed her faster. "Please, baby, make me come."

If we weren't in a lounge full of people, I would bend her over and fuck her right now. One thing she never had to do with me was beg for anything. She was deprived,

and I knew that, but this was the best I could do. As bad as I wanted to stick my dick in her, I couldn't. While I wouldn't fuck her, I never said I wouldn't make that pussy cry for me. I was working my fingers overtime to make sure she knew no other nigga would ever make her feel as good with just the flick of his wrist—only me.

“I think you're little friend is enjoying the show, baby.” I placed a kiss at the corner of her mouth before gently biting her bottom lip as the nigga watched us from the next booth over. “Let that nigga see what only I can do to this pussy. Come, Noemi. Now.”

She didn't have to be told twice as she dropped her head and shook like a leaf. It was a good thing these couches were leather because as I looked down to where my hand had disappeared, there was a puddle of her essence dripping down the edge.

“Fuck...” she huffed as she came down from her orgasm. “I've never had that done to me before.” She smirked before her eyes went wide with horror. “We're in public, Jordan!”

“Too late to care.” I simpered, fixing her dress. “Grab your shit, and let's go. We're leaving.”

Peering up at me, I could see the moment she realized it wouldn't be smart to defy me. Sighing heavily, she grabbed her clutch and my extended hand. Before we left the section, I walked back over to her little friend, who was staring at us. He glared at me in confusion as I took his untouched cup of water and cleaned my hand in it. Dumping the remainder on his head, I shrugged once I heard Mi gasp behind me.

“I figured after the little show we gave him, he needed to cool off.”

Clearly, the nigga was pussy, so I wasn't expecting him to say or do anything to me. He proved me right as he jumped from his seat and all but ran out of the section.

Noemi slapped my chest, and I couldn't help but laugh at her fake-ass anger as I led her out of the lounge.

She giggled once we stepped outside. "Did you really park at the door? You really think you run this city, huh?"

"I do." I nodded at the bouncer. "Ain't that right, Joe?"

He said nothing as he gave us a tight-lipped smile. That was smart on his part because I was still itching to shoot somebody tonight. Opening the passenger door for Mi, she hesitated before getting in.

"I drove the rental here." She pointed to a Mercedes across the lot. "I can't just leave it."

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“Don’t worry about it. It’ll be at the beach house by morning.” I stepped to her and kissed her lips. “Now, get in, and let’s go. I need to let you know how you got me fucked up.”

She eyed me for a beat before sliding into the seat. Once inside and secure, I made my way to the driver’s side, and we were off. As we left the lot, I pulled her hand into mine. Coming to a red light, I did a quick glance over at her. She seemed so content in this moment, and if I could keep her like this forever, I would. I was entering dangerous territory with Noemi, and I was afraid of crossing lines we wouldn’t be able to comeback from. She was set to marry someone else and dealing with an unavailable woman on an intimate level was something I wouldn’t normally do.

I was starting to realize that while I was making excuses for not making Noemi mine, I had already laid claim over her. The only thing left for me to do was to take her. There wouldn’t be shit Chandler, or her brothers could do about it once I made her mine. I just had to make sure what I thought I wanted was what I actually needed.

Time will tell.

“Damn,baby, if you wanted to get paid for sex, all you had to was tell me.” I jumped at the sound of Skip’s voice. “So this whole time, you were playing a nigga?”

“B-Baby,” I stammered as I disconnected the call. “I-It’s not what you think.”

My heart hammered in my chest as Skip eyed me in anger. I’d fucked up, and I can only hope I can leave here with my lifetoday. Not only was he upset, but I could see the hurt in his eyes too.

“What was that shit about?” He kept his eyes on me as he dropped his keys on the glass table. “You thought you were going to rob a nigga and run off happily with my shit?”

“B-Baby, it’s not like that. If you let me explain—ahh!” I ducked just in time as he threw a glass vase over my head. Tears streamed down my face as I shook in fear. “S-Skip, it’s not what you think!”

“Not what I think?” His chest heaved up and down as he clenched his hands into fists. “So, you weren’t just on the phone with another nigga telling him that you should’ve been fucking my brother? So this shit was never real with us, right? You was just fuckin’ a nigga because of the money, right? Tell me I’m wrong.”

As I shook in fear, I didn’t know what to do. I had feelings for Skip; hell, I even loved him, but I loved money and power more. He was a good man. He never cheated or so much as raised his voice at me. This man really loved me, but none of that mattered to me.

When I met him, I thought he was my ticket to a happy life. Fresh out of college, I knew he would start rolling in dough. He didn’t need the degree since he came from a family with money, but I commended him for it. I wanted to stick around for it, but the money wasn’t coming in fast enough for me. I could never prove it, but I knew his family was involved in more than just various businesses and politics. Skip was just an easy lick for me, but I knew I had to gain his love and trust to reap the real benefits. I stayed down with him for years, and he never awarded me the life I deserved.

“Just hear me out!” I cried as I slowly backed away from his murderous glare. “It was n-never supposed to be like this. I fellin love with you, and I no longer want to hurt you. I want this. I want us.”

“Too bad, bitch, because I don’t want you no more,” he coldly stated, causing me to gasp. “Strip.”

I wanted to object, but the look in his eyes told me he wasn’t kidding. Since I was getting ready for bed, it didn’t take me long to ease out of my nightgown and robe.

“You know... I was going to marry you.” He smirked as he eyed my body. “I came back to the crib because I’d forgotten the key to the house I purchased for us last week.”

The tears continued to flow as I wrapped my head around what he was saying. Was he telling me he was in the process of giving me everything I wanted?

“Even when my mother told me she could see right through you... even when my brothers told me you were just a hoe looking for a come-up—I was still happy to call you my girl. I would have done anything for you. I would have given you the world.”

“You still can, Skip.” I took a chance and placed my hand on his chest. He didn’t try to move me as he scowled down at me. “I was wrong, and I’m sorry. I will make it up to you.”

“The nigga you were on the phone with...” He nodded toward my buzzing phone on the floor. “You been fucking him? I mean, I’m sure you have since you love him.”

I dropped my head instead of answering because I didn’t want to lie to him more than I already had.

“That’s what I thought.” He chuckled, stepping back. “If you wanted to use your pussy to get some bread, you should have told me. I know some niggas on the West Coast that would have loved you.” He slapped my ass before walking over to the door. “If you want to use me as a personal reference, I got you. Until then, get the

fuck outta my shit.”

Shocked, I looked at him as if he were joking. He had never talked to me the way he was right now, and I didn’t know how to feel about it. Gawking at me, he gestured toward the door once more. Exhaling, I bent over to get my clothes off the floor, but he stopped me.

“Nah, you gonna leave this muthafucka with the same shit you came with.” Removing his Glock from his waist, he tapped his leg impatiently. “Hurry the fuck up before I go with my second mind and treat you like the grimy bitch you are.”

Thinking about my past with Skip, I couldn’t help but think about how foolish I was to play him. My love for money outweighed my love for him, and I kicked myself for it every day. The only strand of hope I had was his daughter. I should have reached out to him years ago, but I knew once he knew I kept her from him, it wouldn’t be good for me. The last time I’d seen or spoken to Skip was the day he caught me plotting on his brother. I knew his disdain for me was already at its maximum limit.

Now, I was sitting here at an indoor kiddie park, waiting to have a long overdue conversation with the one person I knew would kill me without a second thought. He knew about our daughter now, and I was slightly relieved to still be alive. I had to wait until the right moment to tell him, and now that I had accomplished that, I was hoping he would spare my life indefinitely.

“What’s up?” he greeted me dryly as he sat down at the table across from me. “Sorry, we’re late, but GiGi wouldn’t come unless her Uncle Adrian came too.”

Looking in the direction that he nodded, I spotted my daughter jumping on a trampoline with her idiotic uncle. She looked more vibrant than she did when she was with me. Her hair was combed, her clothes were cleaner, and she smiled with her eyes. Knowing that Adrian was the one making her happy pissed me off. Wild had

always hated me, and the feeling was mutual. Seeing him around my daughter angered me to no end, but I knew there was nothing I could do about it.

“She couldn’t come over here and speak to her mother?” I frowned as I watched him push down a little boy who tried to talk to her. “Why did you have to bring her anyway? He could have just kept her while we talked.”

Being as though he didn’t respond, I shifted my eyes to him. While his face was neutral, his eyes held all of the hate he had for me. After all these years apart, he still couldn’t stand me.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“Gia, before I came here today, I gave my mama my word that I wouldn’t show my ass in front of all these kids. Most importantly, in front of my daughter.” Leaning forward, he placed his elbows on the table, squinted his eyes, and dropped his voice eerily low. “Make no mistake about it; I will take you into that ball pit and suffocate you. You’re only sitting across from me right now because of that little girl you despise so much. Perk the fuck up when you’re speaking on my daughter. Now...” He leaned back and folded his hands on the table in front of him. “Tell me what we’re going to do about shared custody. If we’re being honest, that’s the only thing we have to talk about.”

I hated to admit how affected I was by the way he was talking to me, so I blinked back the tears that were trying to escape. The man in front of me wasn’t the one who told me he’d always love me. The man before me looked at me as if I were his greatest adversary. Sadly, that may be true because he had finally awoken the bitch in me.

“There’s nothing to talk about,” I said, shoulders back. If he wanted to treat me like a bitch, I was going to act like one. “She’s my daughter, and I have sole custody of her.” Smirking, I added, “Play nice, and I may allow you to have visitation. What we need to figure out is the child support. Raising a Mills won’t be cheap. There are certain standards she and I both need to make sure we’re living good.”

A part of me coming back to Milly Grove was so Skip could get to know his daughter, but the most important thing to me was money. I loved my child, but I could do without her. At this juncture in my life, I knew she would be more beneficial to me than anything else, which was why I waited five years to reveal her existence. I knew he nor his family would allow their precious addition to go without anything. I

also knew his mother would not allow him to kill me, so while I was scared of Skip, I felt secure in knowing his actions toward me would always be second-guessed now that Gianna was in the picture.

“Crack? Fentanyl? Opiates?” he spewed, breaking me from my thoughts. He placed his head on his closed fist and stared at me. “Shit... maybe even CTE.”

“What?” I asked, confused. “I don’t understand what you mean.”

“You’re either on some good drugs or have some type of mental disorder if you thought for one second I was going to give you anything but a bullet to the dome. What the fuck I look like letting you keep my child—a child that was dirtier than her rotten-ass mammy when I first met her—and pay you a monthly amount of money? Act like you know who the fuck I am, Gia. I’m sitting here trying to have a cordial conversation with you, and you want to play on my fuckin’ intelligence.”

Tapping the table, he brought my attention to a folder I hadn’t noticed he had with him until that moment. As the noise of the hollering voices around us faded, all that could be heard was the pounding of my own heart. I watched as he slid the folder over to me. Staring at it for a few moments, I opened it with shaky fingers. The more I scanned the document, the more enraged I became. Slamming it shut, I leaped to my feet.

“Are you fucking kidding me!” I screeched, causing those around us to stare. “You’re filing for full custody of my daughter? What gives you the fucking right?”

Peeping around, he wiped the tip of his nose before he placed his Glock on the table. “Sit the fuck down before I shoot you,” he said calmly. The hairs on my arms stood instantly as I realized that maybe his mama didn’t give a fuck about me being Gianna’s mother. This niggas was really okay with killing me. With that reality, I did what I was told without a second thought. “You don’t have a job, Gia. You have no

income or a stable place to stay outside of my penthouse. Why the fuck would I let my daughter stay with you when it's obvious to see you can't provide for her? The better option for her is to stay with me."

With tears streaming down my face, I reopened the folder and resumed looking over the documents. He'd even gone as far as having his name added to her birth certificate without my consent. What angered me the most were statements from my own mother saying Gianna was better off with him than "a mother who puts her own selfish needs before her child." I was selfish, but I had kept Gianna alive all this time, even if it was for my future personal gain. I slammed the documents shut and eyed him.

"How much will you pay me if I let you keep her?" All thoughts of us ever being a family were long gone. I knew that angle was a long shot, but once I saw how fine he still was in his club, I had to give it a try. The truth was, I didn't want the family dynamic either. If Skip wanted the brat, he could have her. It was going to cost him, though.

"Gia... I'm going to say this one time and one time only." He closed his eyes, sighing heavily as he rubbed his temple. "You must have a praying grandmother and a million guardian angels because there's no way you should be breathing right now after the shit you just said." Opening his eyes, I could have sworn they'd darkened. "You will not receive a dime from me. You're a conniving, low-down bitch, and you don't deserve to be in the same room as my daughter. But I know Gianna now, and she'll eventually ask about you, so I'll let you spend time with her when you want to see her. That's too much if you ask me, though, because you clearly don't give a fuck about your child. I couldn't find any records of dental work, shots... nothing, when it came to the health of my baby girl, and you think I'm going to let her ever live with you again? If you want to fight me on this, do it. Just know... your body will be on a slab before we ever get a court date. The ball is in your court, baby mama. How do you want to play?"

After his words, we both gawked at each other with nothing but hate. If he thought for one second he was going to strong-arm me and not pay up, he had another thing coming. Instead of going back and forth with him, I decided it was best I leave.

“Fine.” I stood from my seat, snatching my keys. “If this is how you want to play with me, game on. Just know, you’ll never be able to forget me Skip. Gianna will always be part Gia.”

Nothing else needed to be said as I made my way through the sea of kids and out of the building. I didn’t even go over to speak to my daughter as I locked eyes with Wild. If they wanted the brat, fuck them and her. However, they’d better be ready for my wrath. If it was a war they wanted, it was a war they’d get.

“Skip had the nerve to present me with custody papers today.” I seethed as I plopped down on the dusty sofa. I begged my man to find us a nicer hotel after I had a glimpse of comfort staying in Skip’s penthouse downtown, but he told me our money was low. He assured me we’d be able to get something else once we got some money. “I told him I wanted child support for Gianna, and you know what he did?”

“How much did he give you?” Elliot’s eyes lit up. “Shit... between that and the dope, we should be set for a minute. I’m going to get the boys to hit his spots and?”

“He didn’t give me shit!” I shouted as I jumped from the couch. Walking over to the counter in the outdated kitchen, I grabbed the bottle of Hennessy and took it to the head. “He pulled a gun on me and told me I’d better be glad he hasn’t killed me.” I took another sip. “Fuck him!”

The more I thought about Skip, the angrier I became. I didn’t know if I was mad at him or the situation I’d gotten myself into. I could have had a good life, but I chose the love of money and loyalty over being patient and letting my scheming lead me to some stability. I knew Skip could have given me the life I deserved, but it wasn’t

happening fast enough for me back then. I needed instant gratification, and for some reason, I thought my best chance was with the man I was currently staring at.

Elliot, or Big Lew as he likes to be called, has been my man for years. While Milly Grove wasn't our home, the Mills name has always rang bells in my city. There were always rumors about them and how they were getting money, but it was never proven that they were involved in anything illegal. Lew has always wanted to be the man, but he never had the money or opportunity to make it happen. One weekend, we decided to come to the city and scope things out for ourselves. When our eyes landed on the Mills clan, we knew that they were exactly who people thought they were.

I've always been a pretty girl, and I've used it to my advantage. No man could resist a pretty smile and a nice body, and I knew the Mills weren't an exception. Adrian was never my type. He was always wild and too reckless, so I knew I would never make him fall for me. Ken was never an option for me because of the position he held on the city council, and I knew I was too urban to be anyone's First Lady. I wanted to date a boss, but one of the streets, so Jordan was my only hope.

Locking in with him was tough because he wouldn't give me the time of day at first. I was persistent, though, and showed him he could trust me. Along the way, I can genuinely say we really did fall in love with each other. I just knew once it happened, he would tell me all of his secrets. Unfortunately, I was wrong because he didn't tell me shit. I was showered with gifts and cash, but it wasn't big money like I knew he had. I was positive they were into illegal shit, and I wanted to give Lew his chance to be king by taking whatever it was that gave them power, money, and status. The issue was that I had no proof, just like the muthafuckas back home that could only gossip about the Mills. Had I not gotten caught on the phone with Lew's friend Stewart that day, we probably wouldn't be here now. Shit, I knew I wouldn't be here right now. Skip had said it himself.

Gianna was another layer that was never a part of my scheming. Having her was

never my plan, and I wanted to abort her more than once. Lew convinced me to keep her because, one day, she could be used as leverage or either my way back in. To know I raised that little brat just for her father to take her and discard me pissed me the fuck off.

“You should have gone after Uno like I told you.” He peered at me as he snorted another line of coke. “Had you listened, we could have been on by now. No worries—I have a plan.” He sniffled and grunted as he stood from his chair. My eyes stayed on him as he walked my way. “His little empire will soon crumble, and it will be ours.” He licked his lips as he eyed me. “Don’t worry about Gianna either. Fuck her and her father, baby. We can make another one.”

Giving him a small smile, I leaned in and kissed him on the lips. One peck turned hot and heavy, and I was in the process of removing my jeans when there was a knock on the door.

“Who is that?” I frowned as he pulled away from me to answer the door. Not too many people knew where we were staying, and I wanted to keep it that way. If word got back to Skip, he would kill us before I had a chance to get what was mine.

“Why does it always smell like ass and burnt bacon grease in here?” Irene frowned as she walked in. Glancing over at me, her frown deepened. “What are you doing here? I thought you were going to meet with that fine-ass baby daddy of yours.”

Irene was Lew’s sister, and I couldn’t stand her. For years, she turned her nose up at me and the choices I’ve made when she was no better than me. On the outside, she may have appeared to have it all together, but at the end of the day, she was a shady bitch, just like me.

“Shouldn’t you be somewhere serving beer and chicken?” I rolled my eyes as she took a seat on the raggedy sofa. “I don’t see how you’re helping us if you’re over

here.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

When Lew suggested his sister apply to work at one of the Mills' many businesses, I thought it was a good idea until I found out she would be working at Skip's nightclub. Although he and I had been done for some time, I still had love for him. I knew firsthand all of the things he would do to her body if given the chance. That alone fueled my dislike for her.

"Man, don't start that bullshit today?" Lew yelled as he mugged the both of us. "Irene, do you have something for me or not? It shouldn't take that long for you to find out about that nigga's dope house if you're fucking him."

"She's not." I giggled lowly as I scrolled through my phone. I was tempted to text Skip and start some shit, but I didn't want to test my luck. "My baby daddy is very picky about the women he sticks his dick in." Glancing up, Irene was already shooting daggers my way. "She doesn't fit the bill."

"While I haven't been able to get anything from Skip..." She rolled her eyes at me before giving her attention to her brother. "I was able to get some intel from Hutch before he was murdered."

Lew's jaw clenched at her words. Hutch and Lil' Tim were some of his best soldiers he brought to the city to help take over Skip's businesses. Between them and the young guys who died when they tried to rob him in his club about a year or so back, Lew was losing men left and right. His team was falling like flies, and time wasn't on our side. If we were going to make a move, it needed to be now.

"He has two trap houses. One on the East and one on the West. The one on the Eastside is the weakest. Not to mention... he just put a new team out there. From

what I heard, the guys that work for him don't even know it. They answer to some nigga named Money. I've met him a few times, and he's just as unfriendly as Skip."

"Fuck that nigga!" Lew roared, causing us to jump in surprise. He had this wild look in his eyes, and I knew the drugs were about to kick in. "That nigga ain't shit, and it's time I let him know it's a new sheriff in town, and I'm coming for everything he's got! Irene, I want you to keep an eye on him. In the next couple of days, I'm going to make that nigga feel me. I plan on killing him and anybody in my way." Turning to me, a twisted look spread across his face. "If you want your daughter, you better make plans to get her. When bullets get to flying, she's not exempt from catching one."

Watching him stomp through the house, I jumped once he slammed the front door, knocking it off the hinges. Lew was becoming more erratic and impatient. I hoped he would be able to come through for us soon because with the way he was acting and the track record his boys had with Skip, the odds weren't in our favor.

I heard what he'd said about Gianna. A good mother wouldn't have put her daughter in a position to be hurt. A good mother would get her child and head for hills to keep her out of harm's way. Too bad I wasn't a good mother. As my man said, we could always have another child. If Skip didn't want me or to pay me for the child, fuck them and that little girl. He and his brat could die together.

The majority of my time in Milly Grove has been spent with Skip, and I hated to see our time together come to an end. The reality of what was waiting for me back home was anxiously sitting in the back of my mind. Yet, I knew what was expected of me. Chandler had been blowing my phone up, so I knew there would be more bullshit to deal with once I arrived back in Florida. For now, I was continuing to ignore him and my conscience. I wasn't back home yet.

"You want to be from the Grove so bad." Jordan chuckled as he came from the back

room. “You might as well pack up and move here.”

“If only...” I sighed as I continued to look over my outfit in the mirror. I thought I looked cute in my team jersey, denim shorts, and sneakers from Wild Kicks. My face was bare, and my locs were pulled into a messy bun. The Milly Grove Shooters basketball team had a home game tonight, and I told him I wanted to attend. He didn’t complain like Chandler would have. The only thing he asked was if I wanted to sit in the press box or get floor seats. “I don’t want my vacation to end.” Turning to face him, I wrapped my arms around his neck. “I think I might miss you, best friend.”

Since the night he pulled me out of the lounge, we’ve been almost inseparable. The time he wasn’t spending with his daughter or at work was with me, and I loved it. While he and I haven’t had sex, he’s been working the hell out of me with his fingers. I wanted him to fuck me so badly, but he refused. He’s told me more than once that he wouldn’t fuck me knowing I was set to marry someone else. While I respected that, I couldn’t care less. My coochie was willing and ready.

“Is that right?” He chuckled, slapping my ass. “If you want an indefinite vacation, I can make it happen. All you have to do is say the word.”

Not giving me time to answer, he kissed my nose and took an incoming call from his daughter. I’ve yet to meet her, but he’s shown me pictures. Jordan couldn’t deny her if he wanted to. She was his twin through and through and was a gorgeous little girl. While I waited for him to finish his call, I had an incoming call of my own.

“Hello, Rosier,” I answered the call from my brother with a smile. While I was still pissed about the predicament he’d thrown me in, I could never stay mad at my brother forever. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“I’m saying, sis... do you still work for me or not? I mean, a direct deposit just hit your account a few days ago, but I don’t recall the last time you worked.” We shared

a laugh because I've always done what I wanted to do at that job. "I was just calling to let you know I was in the city and was about to pull up on you. I'll be there in about five minutes."

Disconnecting the call, my heart damn near jumped out of my chest. I peered over to the other side of the room and watched Jordan as he talked on his phone. He was so handsome in his black and green jersey with the matching sneakers that were a replica of mine. His hat was pulled down low over his eyes, and the diamonds in his ears twinkled brighter than the stars in the sky. The tattoos on his arms and neck were so damn sexy that I wanted to lick all over them. As I gazed at him, I began to think about all the nasty shit I wanted him to do to me until the knock at the door reminded me why he had my attention in the first place.

"Oh shit!" I jolted as the knocking continued. "You have to hide!"

"The fuck you mean?" he asked as he stuffed his phone in his pocket and mugged me. "What the fuck are you talking about, Mi? This is my shit."

Speed walking to the door, I stood on my tiptoes and looked out the peephole. Rosier and Dre were on the other side of the door with frowns on their faces.

Why the hell were they here? Rosier had hung up before I could protest his stopping by, and he didn't even mention Dre.

"What I told you about answering doors, Mi?" Jordan grabbed my wrist and pulled me backward. "Watch out, baby. Go finish getting ready."

With sweat forming over my brow, I took slow steps back as he opened the door. My brother and cousin looked from him to me before slapping his hand and coming inside.

“Well, what do we have here?” Dre trailed his eyes to me as he dug into his bag of Hot Cheetos. “Y’all look cute dressed alike and whatnot.” Rosier eyed me and had yet to say anything, but Dre was on a roll. “Y’all got a lil’ date or something?”

“Something like that.” Jordan closed the door behind them as they walked further into the beach house. “Y’all cool? If I knew y’all were coming to the city, I would have planned something for all of us. You can be a third and fourth wheel if you’d like. Either way, I’m taking Noemi out tonight.” Nodding toward me, he winked. “We gotta leave in thirty, baby girl.”

Giving him a small smile, I turned on my heels to head to the room but stopped. Glancing over my shoulder, Rosier and Dre’s eyes were still on me. Walking over, I hugged and kissed both of them on the cheek, saving Rosier for last.

“I just want to have a little fun before Doomsday, brother,” I whispered in his ear. “Don’t be mad at me.”

His face showed no emotion, and for a minute, I thought I’d fucked up until he gave me a small smirk. Kissing my forehead, he pulled me into his embrace. Feeling as if I could breathe again, I left the guys in the room to chat because they clearly weren’t here for me.

As I walked into the room, I could hear my vibrating phone on the dresser. Seeing that it was Chandler, I rolled my eyes before answering. “Chandler, what do you?—”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“You think I’m something to play with, don’t you?” He gritted his teeth into the receiver, and I held my laugh in. “You’ve ignored me the entire time you’ve been gone, and it ends now! You will come home in two days, and you will step into the role of being my wife. If you don’t, so help me God....”

Seeing as though the line went quiet, I glanced down at my phone to see he had disconnected the call. Clicking on the incoming text from him, my eyes watered at the attachment.

Keep thinking shit is a game with me. We’re both down a father, but only one of us will be left with a mother.

In the attached picture, he was smiling and speaking with my mother. The look on her face was one of kindness, so I knew she was oblivious to what was happening. My heart pounded in my chest at what harm he would do to her.

With shaky fingers, I dialed him back, and he answered immediately. “Ready to see things my way?” I could hear the snideness in his tone. “I knew you would.”

“What do you want from me?” I whispered. I could still hear my brothers in the living room, but they were wrapping up their conversation. “You don’t want this marriage, Chandler.”

“That’s where you’re wrong, baby. I do want to marry you, and whether you want to or not, you’re going to marry me too.” I could hear a female’s voice in his background, but I didn’t care enough to call him out on it. “Just know this, I don’t care where you are or who you’re with... you’re mine, Noemi. If I ever find out

you've been with anyone behind my back, I'm killing not just him but you too. See you at home, wife."

Placing my fist into my mouth, I screamed as loud as I could. Chan had a way of frustrating me to the point where I was ready to lash out. I was no longer crying about the situation with us but the potential harm that could happen to my loved ones if I continued to refuse to do things his way. Before I let him hurt anyone in my family because of my own selfish ways, I was going to do what I needed to keep them all safe.

"Mi, you cool?" Rosier knocked on the door to the bedroom, causing me to spin in surprise. "I've been calling your name for three minutes."

"I'm good," I lied, giving him a crooked smile. "Just checking emails and messages."

The look he gave me let me know he didn't believe me, but he said nothing. I wanted to tell him about Chandler, but I didn't want to cause more problems than I already had.

"Dre and I are going to get out of here." He stuffed his hands in his jeans as he leaned against the door. "We're done with business and headed back home. You know we can't sleep without the girls."

"Don't I know it?" I chuckled, still uneasy about the call with Chandler. "It must be nice to have someone waiting on you after a long, stressful day."

Moving around the room, I grabbed my Brahmin bag and reapplied my gloss. Regardless of what's transpired, I was going to enjoy my last couple of days here with Jordan. I would deal with the backlash later.

"Let me ask you something..." Rosier pushed off the door and walked further into the

room. Standing near the patio door, he placed his hands behind his back and zoned in on the waves of the ocean before glancing over his shoulder at me. “You like that nigga Skip? Before you lie to me, don’t.”

Dropping my purse back on the ottoman, I crossed my arms and raised my brow at him. “Yes, I like him. So, what? Before you say it, I know nothing will come from it. I just want to let my hair down for once and have a little fun before I enter the hell that awaits me. Jordan has been my saving grace in all of this, and I love him for that. We’re friends, nothing more. Okay?”

“Okay...” He smirked and walked back over toward me. “Enjoy your date night with your friend.” Wrapping me in his arms, he kissed my forehead before letting me go. “I love you, sis.”

Whistling, I watched my brother waltz out of the room as quickly as he came. I just knew he was going to blow up on me about parading around with another man, knowing I was set to marry. I guess he decided to let me enjoy my last weeks of freedom in peace, and for that, I appreciated him.

“You ready?” Jordan looked over me as I reentered the living room. “You Boudreaux’s don’t respect a nigga’s time for shit.”

“Come on, with your grumpy ass.” I giggled and looped my arm in his. “Just be ready to pay up when your sorry-ass Shooters lose.”

Tonight was my last night in Milly Grove, and I was sad about it. I’ve enjoyed every single moment with Jordan, so going from him back to Chandler was enough to make me cry. Instead of being completely heartbroken about it, I decided to make the best of the time left.

“How was dinner?” Jordan asked from the side of me. “I can’t believe you ate all of

that shit.”

“Big Mama don’t play.” I giggled as I snuggled closer to him. He’d hired a driver for the evening, and I was more than happy about it. He’s been adjusting to fatherhood as well as running his businesses, so he needed to cut loose just as much as I did. “I eat everything on my plate.”

“Me too.” His raspy tone caught my attention, and I watched as his eyes roamed my body. “You keep looking this good, and I’m going to fuck around and show you.”

I’ve been trying everything in my power to get this man to fuck me, but his restraint should be studied. From dropping towels to walking around half-naked to even groping him, he’s never made a move past second base. While I admire him for respecting me and the situation with Chandler, I didn’t want to be respected. I wanted Jordan to send me back to Florida with a swollen pussy and rearranged uterus.

“I wish you would...” I murmured as I lay my head on his shoulder.

Between the wine and the wind from the open sunroof, I was getting sleepy. I needed to shake the shit off, though, because we were headed to Club Honey. One thing I love about Jordan is that he doesn’t mind doing whatever I ask him to do. I wouldn’t be able to pay Chan to step foot inside a club if it wasn’t about business. The only way he’d do it is if he was guaranteed a new bitch to fuck at the end of the night.

“You really want a nigga to fuck you, huh?” he said through a smirk as he ran his hand up my thigh. The short skirt I wore tonight was very much intentional. If he changed his mind and finally agreed to fuck me, I’d made sure nothing was in the way that would allow him to change his mind. “You think you can handle that?”

“It’s only one way to find out,” I moaned as his fingers traced the lining of my panties. The partition was down, and I didn’t care if the driver could hear us. In fact,

it turned me on even more to think he could. “Do you feel how wet I am, Jordan?”

“Fuck!” he grunted as he pushed my panties to the side, easing a finger inside of me.

“You’re tight as fuck, Mi.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:22 pm

“Imagine how it would feel with your dick inside of me.” With my eyes still closed, I took a chance and placed my hand on his lap, reaching for his dick. Finding what I was looking for, I groaned at the feel of him. His dick was so long and thick that I just knew it would break me in half. “I want you to hurt me in the worst way.”

“Be careful what you ask for...” He pulled his fingers out of me, causing me to pop my eyes open and mug him. “Once I put this dick in your life, you’ll never be the same, baby. You wouldn’t be able to feel that lil’ fiancé of yours. That pussy would be tailor-made for me and me only.”

Watching me closely, he brought his fingers to his lips and cleaned off my juices as my breathing turned into pants from observing him. It was the first time he’d tasted me, and if he wanted it directly from the source, I was more than willing to make it happen. Once he was done, his eyes turned to slants as he angled his head and gaped at me. He didn’t say anything for a long time, and that shit bothered me.

“Jordan—”

“We’re here.” He looked over my body once more as the car came to a stop. “Come on, and let’s enjoy the night.”

Sighing, I fixed my bottoms and accepted his hand as he offered to help me out of the truck. Looking around, I couldn’t help but smile at the crowd that was waiting to get inside his club. I’ve been wanting to come back here since the first time I visited Milly Grove, and I was happy to see that business was still booming.

“I’m so proud of you, Jordan!” I practically bounced as he gripped my hand and led

me to the entrance. “Is there a special guest in the house tonight?”

“You.” He turned and winked at me, causing me to drop my head and blush. “The crowd is like this all the time, to be honest. Honey is my baby, and I’m thankful for the success. Tonight, I wanted you to experience some shit you’ve never had before you go back home. I made sure the baddest women in my city were working the poles tonight.”

Dapping his bouncer up, he escorted me inside past security, and I was in awe at how different it looked since the last time I came. Somehow, the inside looked erotic, and you could feel the sexiness as soon as you walked in. Black marble floors greeted us under soft flashes of gold and purple lights that pulsed to the current beat of Rihanna’s “Pour It Up.” I hadn’t heard the song in a while and had forgotten how sexy it could be, especially in this environment. Each wall was painted black, with white, gold, and purple murals that replicated spots all over Milly Grove. I noticed the nod to honey as the columns throughout the space had a dripping illusion, as if the paint was melting off in the rich, yellow color.

The place was packed from wall to wall with beautiful black women and attractive black men. Everyone looked like a ripple of ocean waves as they either moved with the rhythm of Rihanna crooning or danced with one another as if they were fucking on the dance floor. The smell of expensive perfume and cologne engulfed me, and I had to stop myself from Googling how to capture a scent because I was intoxicated from the first sniff and knew I could bottle this shit up to sell.

I looked at the women working as they layered the club, some in gold-barred cages while others hung from ropes dangling from the columns. The crystal chandeliers hung from the high industrial-looking ceiling, casting a glow on the women below who wore white. I noticed the second floor didn’t look as congested as where we were currently standing, so I figured that was where the VIP sections were located. From here, I could see the white leather booths with gold stitching and trim. The

tables held gold buckets that I assumed were filled with ice and complimentary alcohol. The sound of bottles popping from all over sounded like the Fourth of July, and my chest warmed with excitement. The energy was flirtatious, and the women and men who walked past didn't hide their want for either Skip, me, or us both.

"These women are fine as hell!" I shouted as I continued to take in the aura. Whether their bodies were paid for or not, they weren't shit to play with. I turned to Jordan, whose eyes were trained on me. "They're going to make a killing tonight off looks alone, huh?"

He shrugged before nodding toward the bar, taking my hand, and leading us over. I beamed at seeing Jerome, letting off a squeal.

"Hey, Rome! I've missed you!" I yelled over the music just as the DJ started spinning "Danger" by Mystikal.

Hurriedly serving his customer, he pushed the money into his coworker's hands and ran around the corner to embrace me. I could tell by the look on her face that she didn't appreciate it all. Shifting her eyes from me to where Jordan's hand and mine connected, she frowned up her face, and I think I knew why.

"Noemi, my baby!" Jerome shrieked over the music as he squeezed me tightly. "It's good to see you, girl." Juggling my boobs in each hand, he whistled. "Still fine as hell too!"

"Aye, man!" Jordan snatched me back, causing us both to laugh. "Don't get fucked up in here, nigga."

"Still the nicest man I've ever met..." Rome rolled his eyes and brought them back to me. "How long are you in town for?"

“Excuse me!” the girl from behind the bar hollered over to us. “Jerome, I don’t pay you to fraternize with the patrons. Come do your job or clock the fuck out.”

Looking behind and to the side of him, he placed his hand on his slim hip and palmed his chest in confusion. “Who are you talking to, Miss Ma’am? Because it sure as hell ain’t me. Be so for real, you don’t pay me at all—Mr. Mills does. And last time I checked, I do get paid to fraternize with the patrons.” Rolling his eyes, he kissed my cheek after hugging me once more. “Let me go back over there before Skip’s mean ass fires me after I bust that bitch in the head with a Patron bottle.”

Watching him sashay behind the counter, he mugged who I assumed was the club manager. It didn’t take her long to sashay her way over to us. She was now standing with her arms crossed in front of Jordan and me, and I was on the same time as Jerome because who the fuck was she trying to check?

“Is there something I can help you with?” I didn’t wait for Jordan to ask. His facial expression wasn’t giving anything away, and it pissed me off that I could never read him. “I’m here for a good time, and I’d like to get my night started.”

“You come into my club and disrupt my crew.” She waved around us, and sure enough, some of the girls working were staring. “Who are you?”

Staring at her for a moment, I couldn’t help but laugh. I was bent over internally because if Jordan hadn’t addressed her by now, why should I? She was either someone he fucked or wouldn’t give the time or day to. While that made me feel a way, there wasn’t anything I could do about it.

“Who I am is the bitch you’re not but obviously wish you could be.” I could see the smoke seep through her ears at my words. She could try me if she wanted, but I would give her the ass-whooping of a lifetime in front of all these people. “Jordan...” I peered up at him, his eyes already on me. “You promised me a good time.”

He smirked before he kissed my temple. “Come on, girl... hope you got your ones ready.”

“Oh, I’m spending your money tonight!” I laughed as I looped my arm in his. Glancing back at the manager, I leaned closer and read her name tag. “Irene, is it?” I fake-pouted as I brought my eyes back to hers. “As the manager, it’s your job to ensure that each patron has the best experience possible when they set foot in this establishment. Unfortunately, I’m not feeling the love at the moment. Make it up to me by sending the baddest female in the building to my section. And please... don’t make me wait, darling. I’d hate to have to speak to the owner.”

Giving her a wink, I held on to Skip as he led me to the second level of his club. Just as I’d assumed, the second floor was for his VIP customers. The booths and tables were spacious, and the lighting here was dim, adding to the privacy in each section. The color scheme worked well because the space felt bigger, even though it was sectioned off into multiple separate spaces for VIP patrons. It was probably the same square footage as the lower level, but it felt more vast. Whoever helped Jordan with the interior planning earned every dime he paid them.

Taking a seat on the cream sofa, I watched him as he went over to grab us some drinks from the single bar up here. “Are you staying up here with me?” I asked as he took a seat beside me. “I saw your brother come in as we were walking up. Plus, I figured you wanted to do damage control.” I giggled at my brashness with his manager.

Handing me the Tequila and Red Bull, he took a seat beside me on the plush couch. Taking a few sips of his drink, he draped his arm around me. “Wild is good. He does his own thing when he’s here.” He nodded toward the lower level, and I could see him entering his own section off to the side, which I hadn’t noticed before. “As far as damage control, this my shit. I don’t answer to a soul in this muthafucka, especially not to a bitch that don’t even know what my dick tastes like.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

Nothing else was said on the matter as we took shots and enjoyed the music. The DJ was playing all the right music that resonated with the millennial crowd. I was ready to take Jordan to the beach house and put him to work when Pretty Ricky's hit song flowed through the speakers. Looking him over, I couldn't help but wonder what it would be like if he were my man. Being able to go out and enjoy each other's company was something I craved in a relationship, and I knew I would be able to do that with him.

"What are you doing, Mi?" he asked as I moved from my seat to his lap. "You think that's a good idea?"

Swaying my hips to the sounds of R. Kelly's "Feelin' On Yo Booty," I closed my eyes and got lost in the words of the song. He said nothing else as he gripped my hips, but he didn't need to. The hardening of his dick said what his mouth didn't. Moving his hands up my side, the finest woman I'd ever seen waltzed into our section. She stood before him and me as she ran her fingers through her curly tresses, moving side to side.

Taking in her body, she reminded me of Jhonni Blaze. From her thick ass, smooth skin, and pretty smile, I knew she ran the men in here crazy. As she turned her back to us, I grabbed the bills beside us and smacked her ass before making dollar bills fly everywhere. She moved her hips and made her ass shake in a way that should have been illegal. Peeking over her shoulder, she winked before turning to face us, removing her top. Her pierced nipples glistened under the lights. Turning around, I wanted to see Jordan's reaction, but his eyes were trained on my ass as I continued to grind out to R. Kelly pronouncing every 'O' in booty.

“She’s fine as hell, huh?”

“Hm,” is all he said as he pulled his bottom lip between his teeth. Finally glancing up, he peered over my shoulder and nodded. “She’s cool... but she ain’t you.” Gripping the front of my neck, he pulled me toward him and tongued me down. This was our first real kiss, and I could have nudded here and now—Luther Vandross style. Moving his hand up my thighs, he found my pussy was wet for him once again. He continued kissing me as he found my clit.

“Ugh,” I moaned as he strummed me slowly. Nibbling on my ear and neck, I turned and locked eyes with the stripper as she took us in. I had temporarily lost the ability to hear because when my ears tuned back in, “Don’t You Say No” by Kells was playing, and it was the exact opposite of what I was feeling at the moment.

“Y’all are so fucking sexy,” the Jhonni Blaze look-alike purred as she dropped to her knees before me. “May I?”

She didn’t wait for me to answer before she eased two fingers inside of me, causing my walls to suck her in further. Never have I been this horny to let lust cloud my judgment, but right now, I don’t care. I just wanted to feel good, and my God, was I feeling good. As she worked her digits in and out of me, Jordan continued his assault on my clit. He now had my right breast in his hand, twisting my nipples, and my senses were heightened to a new level.

“It’s too much,” I cried as I began to shake. “I-I’m going to come, Jordan!”

“Do that shit then.” He chuckled as he nipped my earlobe. The rumbling of his chest was so damn sexy beneath my back. “Show me how only I can make you feel. Give me that nut, Noemi.”

Kicking my legs open wider, he sped up his strokes with the stripper matching his

tempo. Before I could tell her to move, my orgasm came crashing down, spraying my essence all over his lap and into her face.

“Oh my gosh!” I panted as I shook uncontrollably. “Fuckkk!”

“That was sexy as fuck.” The girl giggled as she licked my juices from her lips. “Let me get a taste?—”

“Get the fuck back.” Jordan leaned forward and mushed her head before her tongue could touch me. “That’s enough for one night.” Reaching over, he grabbed the full plastic bag of ones and dropped it at her feet. “Appreciate you. If I hear about this on the floor, I’m cutting your tongue out and will have my chef in the back make a buffalo dip with it to send to your grandmother.”

With eyes wide, she smiled and nodded as she accepted the five thousand in ones and all but ran out of the section. Settling my breathing, I lay my head against his chest, still reeling from what just happened.

“You ready to go?” He peppered kisses on my shoulder. “Or do you want to stay?”

Peering up into his dark eyes, I saw all the lust he had for me. Something else resides in his eyes, too, but I wouldn’t dare say what I thought I saw out loud. Nodding, I fixed myself the best I could and removed myself from his lap. I needed to get out of here before I fucked him for everyone to see. That was when comprehension smacked me upside the head—we were exposed in this club.

“Oh my gosh!” I groaned as I placed my head in my hands. “What if someone saw?—”

“Too late to worry about that now.” He chuckled, grabbing my head. “The window is a one-way, baby. I’ll make sure I erase the security tape tomorrow.”

Nodding, I made a mental note to erase it after I saved a copy for myself. It was a memory I wanted to keep and relive every chance I got. As we made our way back downstairs, he crossed paths with his brother, who stopped and embraced us both. I stood back as they spoke, bobbing my head to the music.

Looking around, I locked eyes with an angry Irene. Not only her but the woman she was with had murder in her eyes. Never had I been one to be intimidated by a bitch, so I gave them a smile and finger wave as I gripped Jordan's arm tighter. Subconsciously, he wrapped his arm around my neck and pulled me in closer as he continued to talk to his brother. I don't know what their deal was, but I was the least of their concern as they were mine. My personal hell loomed near, and I was leaving the man I wanted most behind. They could shoot their shot once I was gone. Tonight, he belonged to me.

"Hello," Jordan answered his ringing phone as we climbed into the back of the blacked-out SUV. The door wasn't closed good before I was all over him. "Is everything okay, baby girl?"

Hearing the words and tone caused me to pause. With a raised brow, I crossed my arms and waited for him to continue his conversation. Smiling, he placed his phone on speaker. When the little voice came through, I couldn't help but smile too.

"Jordie, I miss you. Can you come home?" Gianna whined from the other end. "I want to have a tea party."

"Baby girl, It's almost one in the morning." He beamed as he rubbed my thighs. Hearing him in daddy mode was so sexy. "How about we do it tomorrow? Is that okay?"

The phone went silent before her light sniffles came through the phone. His rubbing on my thigh stopped immediately, followed by his sitting up. "Baby girl, are you

crying?”

“Yes.” She sniffled a few times. “Real bad.”

Placing my hand over my mouth; I didn’t want her to hear me laugh. She was so cute, and she knew the game already. I loved how she was finessing the hell out of her dad.

“Okay, Gianna. Daddy will be there soon.”

Page 42

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“Thank you, Jordie! You’re the best daddy ever!”

Without a whimper in sight, she disconnected the call. Looking at each other, we both burst out into laughter.

“Man, I’m in trouble.” He chuckled as he pulled me into his chest. “You don’t mind cutting the night short?”

“Of course not.” I yawned and snuggled into him. “I’d look at you funny if you didn’t.”

“Bet.” He leaned over the seat and gave the driver directions to his parent’s home. “I hope you like tea, Disney Channel, and cookies. If I have to party hard with Gi Baby, so do you.”

“Jordie, is Mimi coming with us today? I want to see her.”

Glancing at my little twin through the rearview mirror, I couldn’t help but smirk at her. Every day that she was in my life was a day I thanked God. I loved her more than words could express. The only thing I appreciated when it came to her rat-ass mother was her having my Gi Baby.

“Mimi had to go back home.” She pouted, folding her arms in the process, and that shit broke a nigga’s heart. “She told me to tell you she was going to FaceTime you as soon as she was settled, though. Maybe we can take a trip to Disney World and go see her.”

“Oh my gosh! Yes!” She cheered up instantly.

It was crazy how she was in love with Mi all from one encounter. They’d spoken on FaceTime before, but the night after the club was the first time they actually met. Being interrupted by her was a good thing because had I dropped dick in Noemi like I planned, she would have never gone back to that nigga.

It’s been a week since she went back to Florida, and I was missing the fuck out of her. Hearing her sound so sad on the phone was becoming unbearable, but we both knew what this was when we started kicking it. Mimi was strong, and she would be all right. She would always have me in her corner if she ever needed me.

“Is Uncle Uno and Uncle Wild going to be at the park today?” my baby asked from the backseat. “I miss them so much.”

“Do you?” I chuckled at her excitement as I threw the car in park. It was a nice day out, and my mother suggested a family picnic. Normally, we would just eat at a restaurant or in the backyard, but with AJ walking and Gianna being a ball of energy, my mother was all about memories, different experiences, and a shit load of Polaroids. “Between you and me, who’s your favorite?”

Turning to face her, I tried my best to hold in my laugh as she tapped her chin in deep thought. She was so cute today with her free flowing curls and overalls. My mother dressed her up damn near everyday like the little doll she was.

“My Uncle Uno is nice because he gives me lots of hugs and kisses. He buys me nice toys and tells me he loves me every day.”

“Your Uncle Wild doesn’t do that?”

“Of course, he does, silly.” She gave me a “duh” face as I got out of the car to undo

her booster seat. “He does the same thing as Uncle Uno, but he buys me way more ice cream and pizza. He lets me go to work with him so I can help him point out the skeezers. It’s a fun game, Jordie, and I always get it right.”

I was going to kill Adrian.

Getting my baby girl out of the truck, I grabbed her backpack and led her through the park. It was a nice Saturday afternoon, but it wasn’t packed, and for that, I was grateful. This particular park was between the Heights and Highland Meadows. Uno wanted this one built to unify both areas and show that one side of town was no different from the other. So far, there haven’t been any reported incidents. That fact didn’t stop me from being strapped. I took no chances when it came to protecting my family.

“Grandma! Grandpa!” She snatched away from me and ran across the park when she saw my parents seated. “It’s meee—ahhh!”

Wild came out of nowhere and scooped her up in his arms, causing her to start laughing uncontrollably. He swung her around as she squealed and giggled with tears in her eyes. He began tickling her and only stopped when she screamed that she had to pee.

“Unhand my baby, boy, before she soils herself,” my mother fussed and hit his chest. “Come on, sweetheart. Let Grandma take you to the bathroom.”

I dapped up my father and brothers before kissing Harley on the cheek. She was now three months pregnant with their second child and was pretty as hell. Harley was like the sister I always wanted, and I fucked with her heavy because her soft demeanor always calmed my mind down. All of us needed that type of energy around.

“How’s it going, son?” my father asked as I took a seat beside him. I reached over

and tickled AJ, who was babbling away. “Fatherhood looks good on you.”

“Feels good too.” I nodded, giving my attention to Wild. “I’m going to kill you, nigga. Why you got my baby picking out skeezers?”

Throwing his head back in laughter, we listened as he told us about the game he and my Gi Baby would play when they were at his shoe store. He would let her greet and ring up the ladies, and she would tell him who was nice enough to be his friend.

“This is why y’all need to keep y’all kids from that boy’s store.” My father shook his head in disappointment. “The nigga ain’t got the good sense God gave him.”

As we sat back and ate the lunch my mother packed, we watched as the ladies played with the children. I never thought this would be my life, but I was happy with it. The only thing I was missing was my special girl.

“Skip, have you heard from Noemi?” Uno asked as he sipped his water, reading my mind. He was on vacation for the next week from his mayoral duties, and he was enjoying every minute of not having to make decisions or answer to the demands of either the council or the citizens. “I heard y’all were booed up damn near every day that she was here.”

“I wonder who the fuck said that?” I side-eyed Wild. The ignorant nigga had the nerve to raise his hand as if my question wasn’t rhetorical. “Why are you telling my business, nigga?”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“Big Brother, you have no business in this family.” He opened up a box of Juicy Juice, causing me to frown. “What, nigga? These lil’ shits is good.”

“Anyway...” I gave my attention to my brother. “She’s back home, getting ready for her wedding. We had fun while she was here, and now she’s gone. Ain’t shit else to be said.”

Looking out at the girls, I was done talking about anything concerning Noemi Boudreaux. She wasn’t mine, and I went against the grain by falling in love with her. I was man enough to admit to myself that my feelings for her were stronger than I wanted them to be, but her duties to her family outweighed what either of us wanted.

“I know that look, and I know you don’t want to talk about it,” my father spoke up, patting my shoulder. “I will say this... you’re a Mills, and a Mills will always get what he wants. Nothing has ever stood in our way, and that shit won’t start with you.”

“How can he?—”

Uno’s voice trailed off as he glanced over my shoulder. Walking our way was a nigga I’d never seen before. Dressed in a plain white T-shirt, jean shorts, and Timbs, he was the dirtiest nigga I’d ever seen. The nigga looked bloated and dehydrated as a muthafucka.

“Can I help you nigga?” I asked, examining him for any clue as to who the fuck he was to be rolling up on us. “You lost or something?”

“Jordan Mills, we finally meet.” He smirked. Standing to my feet, he raised his hands

in mock surrender. “No need to be hostile. After all, you don’t want to cause a scene here in front of all these people.” He gestured around us. “Especially Little Miss Gianna.”

Shooting a glare at my brothers, they were now on their feet too. My father was walking toward the ladies and letting them know it was time to go. I could hear them questioning the sudden shift behind us, but what angered me the most was hearing my daughter cry, asking why she had to leave.

“Who the fuck are you nigga, and what the fuck do you want?”

“Excuse my manners.” He chuckled and extended his hand to me. “I’m Lew. I heard you’ve been looking for me.”

Glowing at his hand as if it was covered in shit, I folded my arms and mugged him. “Yeah, I have been looking for you, nigga. Now... my question to you is, do you have your affairs in order because nigga, you’re dying today.”

“Aht, aht. Not so fast.” He smiled as I placed my hand on my waist. “How would it look if Jordan Mills, brother to Mayor Kenneth Mills, kills a man in broad daylight? Not only that but at a park with all these innocent children enjoying their play dates.” My jaw twitched at his sarcasm and because he was right. As bad as I wanted to murder this nigga, I couldn’t do it right now. “Plus, we need to talk. You’ve murdered some men who were very important to me.”

“The niggas you sent to my club to kill me?” I smiled, and the anger in his eyes appeared immediately. “Next time, don’t send children to handle grown man business.”

Clenching his fist, he moved in closer to me. My brothers were by my side in an instant. “You think this shit is a game?”

“Like a Nintendo Switch, fat boy,” Wild spit out from the side of me. “Now that I think about it, you do look like you could be on Donkey Kong.” I could hear Uno snickering, causing me to do the same. “How about you leave peacefully, and we will call it a day. Don’t let Uno being the mayor fool you. We both will take it there behind our brother.”

Looking at each of us, he knew he was outnumbered, and it was best to wrap up his failed attempt to rattle us. Nodding his head, he stepped back, glancing around. A few people were tuned in to our interaction, including a few of our men. With the ladies and kids being in attendance, we could never be too careful. We stayed with security when moving as a unit, as we planned to do today before this Ninja Turtle-looking-ass nigga showed his face.

“I’ll be seeing you around.” He smirked at the same time my phone began to ring. “You might want to get that.”

Pulling my phone from my pocket, I kept my eyes on him as I answered Money’s call. “Yeah, man. What’s?—”

“Bruh! I need some fuckin’ help out here!” He was panicking on the other end of the phone. I could hear shouting in the background. “Houses on the Eastside, as well as the Westside, are both on fire. Man, what the fuck!”

Dragging my eyes up to where the fat nigga was walking away, he glanced over his shoulders and threw me a wink. My trigger finger itched, but I knew I couldn’t risk a scene.

“Where are you?” I spoke calmly into the receiver, although I was everything but. “Is anyone hurt?”

“I’m on the Eastside, man. Fuck!” he yelled into the phone. “I don’t know yet,

but?—”

“I’m going to go to the Westside. Keep your head and ears low. I’ll be in touch.”

Hanging up, I closed my eyes and took a deep breath before turning to my brothers. They both awaited what I had to say with worried eyes.

“Uno, I need you to holler at the connects at the fire and police station. The houses on the East and West are on fire.”

“Fuck...” they both said in unison as we moved to pack up our things. My father and the girls were now headed our way once our men felt the threat was gone.

“Tell us what we need to do,” Adrian chimed in. “Let me know, and I’ll do it.”

“Uno, you’re the mayor, so do whatever it is mayors do.” I locked eyes with him, and I knew he was pissed. He wanted to do more, but he had a whole crew to account for. He put me in charge of this shit, so that’s what it was now. “Adrian, I need you to head to the crib and stay there until I come back. I need you at the house with the girls.”

“Skip—”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“Look, don’t fight me on this. None of you.” I eyed my brothers. “I got this shit.”

Saying nothing else, we packed up and escorted the ladies to the parking lot. It took me ten minutes and lots of promises for multiple princess tea parties before she’d calmed down. Eventually, she was okay with having fun time with Uncle Wild.

“Talk to me...” Uno stopped me from getting into my truck. Harley was in his car waiting because she was adamant about not leaving without him. “What else do you need?”

“The only thing I need is for you to clear up anything that may make it seem like the fires were more than gas leaks or faulty wiring. I promise you... I’m good.” He eyed me worriedly as I pulled him into my embrace. “These niggas want Skip, and I’m going to give it to ’em. Let’s see what they gonna do when the real heat comes their way.”

When my brother handed the streets over to me, I knew I would face challenges, but I didn’t expect it to happen this quickly. It felt like as soon as I was the one calling the plays, niggas wanted to try me. I’ve always been the quiet one of the brothers; always been the one who was laid back. Now it was time for me to show niggas what happens when I lean the fuck up.

“So we have a rat on the team.” I swirled my Hennessy in its glass as I listened to Money speak. “I hope the bullshit they tried to pull is worth them losing their life.”

A few weeks back, Money asked me to trust him to weed out the niggas that didn’t belong on our team. Granted, my brothers and I never really tried to attach our faces

to our illegal dealings, but now it was time I made muhfuckas realize who I was.

“Since the shit happened here last year, I’ve been suspecting it was an inside job. Not once had we had anyone try us, so I figured it was a teammate who was on some jealous shit. You know how it is when it comes to money. When they think someone can give them a bigger payday, they’ll sell out their own family.”

I, too, had my suspicions about niggas on the team, but I knew they were pussy. None of them had the nuts to set me up, and they knew it too. Looking over to one of my most trusted men, I nodded. “Now that I know the real, I have a trick for all of their asses.”

“I say we kill all of those niggas and get it over with,” Wild chimed in as he ate a plate of wings. “Fuck all them hating-ass niggas.”

When Money called me the other day and informed me that the houses on the Eastside and Westside were burning, I was livid. What he left out was the fact that they weren’t actually mine. He’d been planting false information to members on the team to see who wasn’t loyal, and the shit worked. I knew that nigga Lew had something to do with it, too, and I had been looking for him ever since. I didn’t have much to go on outside of the picture we pulled from a camera at the park. It wasn’t until I told Dre about it that I realized I could have had help all along. Speaking of help, the incoming video call was right on time.

“You know, I hate that it takes us needing something from the other person before we call.” Mi’s sultry voice came through the phone. “Why haven’t I heard from you, Jordan?”

“I wish you would come back to town, sis. This nigga been extra mean to me since you been gone.” Wild’s dumb ass hopped up from his chair and ran over to the screen. “All he does is call me names and?—”

“Adrian, please.” She held her hand up and cut him off. “If he cursed you out, I’m sure you deserved it. Do you still have Gi Baby on hoe patrol?”

After I dealt with the fire situation that day, I wanted to choke my brother out for the fool shit he’d been doing at the store with my baby. When I let Mama know, she damn near took his head off with a skillet. Adrian meant well, though, but I hope he doesn’t have children any time soon. He would be lost as fuck on how to really raise a child.

Kissing his teeth, he walked back over to his spot and resumed eating. For a moment, I took my time and took Noemi in. Even though it’s been a couple of weeks, she was still as pretty as ever. It was something about this girl when she was dressed in business attire that made me want to fuck her. The poutiness of her lips caused my dick to brick as I imagined them sucking out Gi’s siblings. As badly as I wanted to fuck her while she was here, I couldn’t. She was more than a fuck to me, and I wouldn’t let that nigga breathe near her again after I slid inside her making her pussy my new home.

“Um, are you okay?” she asked, breaking me from my thoughts. “You seem like you have a lot on your mind.”

“Just you,” I answered honestly, causing her to blush. “Why do you look so sad?” I knew she was calling me about the information I needed from her, but I was more interested in what was going on with her. “You need me to come out there?”

With her getting married soon, I knew I couldn’t always come to her rescue, but if she ever said the word, I would be there. Fuck what anyone else had to say.

“Chandler is adamant about an engagement party this weekend.” She sighed like the world was on her shoulders as she shuffled papers on her desk. It was around closing time at her job, and I knew she was gearing up to leave. “I’m not looking forward to

it, but hey... it is what it is.” Squaring her shoulders as if to break herself from her miserable thoughts, she brought her eyes back to the camera. “I used the scan from the photo Andre gave me, and I ran it through a national database. Once I had the person’s information, I ran a full background check.”

Hearing my wall monitor power on, my eyes widened as the information came onto the screen. I didn’t know how she did that shit from where she was, but I shouldn’t be shocked. Noemi was smart as fuck, and from what I hear, she couldn’t be fucked with on the computer tip.

“Elliot Lewis.” His photo popped up on the screen as Wild read his information aloud. “It says he’s from two towns over in Willow Springs.” He smacked on his chicken wings as he continued, “Ain’t no way that Trick Daddy Dolla-looking-ass nigga twenty-eight.”

Mimi giggled at Wild’s assessment. “As you can see, I have everything on here from grade school up until now.” I’ve never been the one to look at men any type of way, but this was one ugly muthafucka. “He’s always been in trouble with the law. Um... about his family...” She got quiet for a moment, causing me to look back at my phone screen. “I want to go on record and say, at first... I did this to be nosey and see who you were around. Now that I know the situation, I must let you know?—”

“Mi...” I frowned and cut her off, dragging my eyes to the now black monitor. “What’s up, baby?”

The hesitation from her caused me to bring my eyes back to her gorgeous face staring back at me. The worried expression led me to believe the information was about to be something I didn’t want to see. Once the wall screen lit back up with more information, my assumption was fucking right.

“I know you fuckin’ lying!” Wild hollered as he stood and walked toward the screen,

followed by Money. “Tell me this ain’t what I think this is?”

Pushing from my desk, I walked toward the guys because I knew my eyes were deceiving me. There was no way I’d had enemies working this close to me all along, and I did not know it.

“Elliot Lewis, known in the streets as Big Lew, is the oldest of his one sibling, and his sister is Irene Pruitt. They were raised by their grandmother after their mother died when they were eight and six.” I heard Noemi speaking as she presented us with document after document. The screen displayed various pictures of him and his family over the years. There were even photos of the little niggas Dre and I killed in the club, along with Hutch, my previous club bouncer. “Not only does he have a rap sheet that consists of robbery and drugs, but he also has various domestic violence charges filed against him by his long-term girlfriend, Gia Brown.”

We all looked on as she posted picture after picture of Lew and Gia over the years. Some of them were from when she and I were together. The funny thing is this isn’t the same nigga I caught her on the phone with that day in my crib. She was obviously dealing with multiple men and now knowing that he was the one trying to take me out led me to believe she was right there with the nigga. Her coming back into town wasn’t just to bring me back my kid, but it was an attempt to take me out.

“You said you ran a check on the people around me before now?” I called over my shoulder as I continued to look at the screen. “What did you mean?”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“Jordan, I was just?—”

“Noemi!” I yelled as I walked back over to my desk. Staring at her face on the screen, the fire in her eyes couldn’t be missed. “Answer me.”

“I admit... I was jealous when Irene stepped to us at your club. When we were leaving, I found her and another woman staring at us as we left.” She folded her arms across her chest and shrugged. “I pulled the images from your security system to find out who they were. That’s when I found out how they were connected.”

“So you knew for weeks about Lew?”

Silence.

“You can’t hear now?” I clenched my jaw as I palmed my desk and leaned forward. “You’ve known all this time that my baby mama was connected to this nigga, and you said nothing?”

“How the fuck was I supposed to know that sneaky pussy-ass bitch was plotting on you? How the fuck was I to know you even had beef with anyone? Don’t blame me for some shit you should have seen and put together! Your ex popping up on the scene with a whole kid after five years should have been your first red flag!”

“You’re right.” I chuckled as I glanced back at the screen. A picture of Gia and her nigga smiling at the camera while my daughter clung onto her stuffed bear for dear life appeared on the screen, making my blood boil. “You can’t even manage the shit show in your own life... how the fuck do I expect you to help me with mine?”

“Aye, bruh!” Wild shouted, causing me to snap my eyes up at him. “The fuck wrong with you?”

Mugging him, I dragged my eyes back to the screen and saw sadness in Noemi’s. Despite the anger I was feeling about Gia, I felt like shit for what I said to her. I knew what she was dealing with, and I had no right to say that.

“Noemi, I’m?—”

“Don’t.” She held her hand up and stopped me. “My findings will be in your email soon.” She typed for a few seconds and brought her sad eyes back to mine. “If that will be all, I have to go and prepare for a date with my fiancé. My shit show doesn’t stop just because you’re just now discovering your own. At least I’m aware of what the fuck is crumbling down around me. Can you say the same?”

Not even two seconds later, the wall screen went black, and my iPhone made a subtle beep, letting me know she was gone. Snatching it up, I threw it against the wall right before there was a knock on my door. I never wanted to hurt Mimi or make her feel a certain way. In no way was any of this shit her fault, and I didn’t have the right to make her feel as if it was.

“You just wait until I leave this muthafuckin’ club.” Wild scowled at me as he made his way to open the door. “You hurt that girl’s damn feelings with your dumb ass.” Yanking the door open, a slow smirk formed on his face. “Speaking of dumb bitches...”

Irene frowned at him as she stepped past him and into my office. Seeing my iPhone shattered on the floor, she brought her eyes to me before scanning the room. Her eyes landed on Money, who folded his arms as she stepped in further. Confused, she began to speak until she peered up at the screen on the wall. Stuck like a deer in headlights, she began to shake in fear.

“What’s wrong, Irene?” I stuffed my hand into my slacks as I approached her. “See someone familiar?”

“I-I...” she stammered as she turned to face me. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she lied as tears slid down her cheek. “I have to go and get the girls ready for tonight.”

“Say, Wild?” I called out to my brother without taking my eyes off her. Pulling my Glock from my waist, she took small steps backward, bumping into Money’s chest. “Go and tell Jerome he’s in charge of the floor tonight. Irene is clocking out early and has been relieved of her duties... indefinitely.” Placing my gun under her chin, I lifted it until her eyes were on mine.

“Mr. Mills, please,” she begged through her sobs. “I don’t want to die.”

The smell of urine caused me to glance down, and sure enough, this bitch was pissing all over my floor. That infuriated me even more than when those niggas I killed bled out all over my office and hallway.

“Tell me what I want to know, Irene.” I sneered as I continued, “If I don’t like what you have to say, you’re going to regret the day you allowed your brother to talk you into waking a sleeping beast.”

“You look beautiful tonight, baby,” Chandler whispered into my ear as he kissed my cheek. All I did was give him a small smile in response. “Act like you want to be here tonight. After all, this is our engagement party.”

Accepting his awaiting hand, I took a deep breath as we stepped into the banquet hall. It’s been three weeks since I’ve come back from my vacation to Grove’s Isle, and true to his word, we were having our engagement party. Looking around the room, I eyed all of our family, friends, and associates as they, in their finest attire, celebrated

a union that I despised with every fiber of my being. The black-tie theme seemed fitting for the night, being as though it appeared everyone was dressed for my funeral.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the groom-to-be and his bride would like to thank you all for joining them here tonight." The DJ turned down the soft jazz as we walked the center aisle. "Join me in celebrating the upcoming union of Chandler Pierre Gourneau and Noemi Renee Boudreaux."

I smiled and waved at the guests as Chandler led the way to the middle of the dance floor. Along the way, I locked eyes with Rosier. Giving him a small wave, he winked as I prepared for my first dance of the night.

"Did I tell you how good you looked?" Chandler smirked as I wrapped my arms around his neck and swayed to the music. "I don't think I could have picked a better dress."

I could admit that he did well picking out the custom black ball gown for the evening. While the top was a form-fitting corset, the bottom flared in mermaid style. It was a bit dramatic for a simple party, but I looked damn good, so I didn't complain. He looked handsome in his custom-made Versace tux, and he smelled even better. He had a clean shave, and he even had diamonds around his neck and wrist that he wouldn't usually wear. He really wanted to put on a show with not only our outfits but the decorations as well. From what I'd heard, he planned the majority of this event with very little help from our families.

On theme with our outfits, the ballroom was nothing short of extravagant. The floor was a neutral tan, and our initials in a cursive black font danced around in a repeated pattern on the floor and walls. The room walls were a deep red with white draping curtains strategically placed around the space to highlight the different areas that may interest the guest, such as the photo booth and multiple mini bars. A massive floral installation hung from the entire ceiling, with white and red roses and tan pampas

grass being the star of the arrangement. Our guests were seated at round tables covered in cream satin cloths with centerpieces too large but extremely beautiful, casting light through water and diamond-like crystals. Fine china sat on gold-rimmed chargers, and gold eating utensils sat nearby for use. Spotlights throughout the space gave the rooms a nice glow, and the tedious details, such as our names being on the napkins, our faces on multiple framed portraits, and our favors being Dom Perignon champagne gift baskets, proved that money was spent. The room screamed wealth and romance, but I was nowhere near in love with this event or the man who planned it.

As the current song the quartet band played came to an end, everyone clapped as we were approached by Chandler's mother and sister. Charlotte didn't care that much for me, and I did nothing to hide that I didn't give a fuck. Whenever I was around, she was rude and tried with all her power to piss me off. The lady hated my guts, and the gag was I didn't like her ass either.

"Chandler, darling... you look magnificent tonight." She beamed at her son before turning her sights to me, her smile slowly fading. "As do you, Noemi. This classy look fits you compared to how you usually dress."

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“Thank you.” I nodded, trying to break free from Chan, only for him to hold me tighter. “I see Chandler passed along the anti-aging serum I recommended to him. You look less casket-ready this evening.”

Making a funny noise with her throat, Star eyed me before glancing around the room. People were now mingling and beginning to let loose. Seeing her shoulders drop, I followed her line of sight and noticed she’d zeroed in on Rosier and Gabby. My sister was beautiful tonight, with her baby bump on display, as was Bridgette. I couldn’t help but let a small giggle escape my lips.

“Is something funny, sis?” Star asked as she sipped her wine, knowing I was laughing at her mad ass. I knew it angered her to have a simple conversation with me, just like her mother, because I was close with the woman who stole her chance with my brother. “Tell us the joke so we can laugh.”

“The joke is you...” I stopped a nearby waiter and snagged a glass of champagne. I was going to need a buzz for the shit I was set to endure tonight. “You’re over here about to burst into tears at the sight of a man who could care less about you while your mother has smoke coming from her ears because she’s forced to be near me. This union between our families will be nothing less than entertaining.” I took a big sip of my drink before continuing, “Just wait until I fuck your son and birth your grandchild... I can’t wait to give you your own bundle of joy with Boudreaux blood.”

Charlotte’s light skin began to turn red as Star sneered and walked away. Having sex and procreating with Chandler was nowhere near my mind, but I knew saying it out loud would get under their skin. One thing these ladies have never done and will never do is intimidate me. The hate has always been there among our families, but

once their father died and this marriage was suggested, it intensified. They both needed humbling, and I didn't mind being the one to make it happen.

"Listen here, you little bitch?—"

"Mother, not tonight," Chandler stated through clenched teeth as he eyed her. "Remember what happened the last time you called her out of her name in my presence?" He arched his brow, causing her to cower. "Go have a seat. My wife and I need to make our rounds."

Frowning at his words, I put on the smile of a happy bride and worked the room with him as we greeted our guests. Most of the people here tonight were from the five Families, but a good bit of the crowd had no idea that this union was pretty much obligatory. No matter how much I didn't want this, we were in a public setting, and appearances were everything. I would never embarrass him or myself. As we were speaking to one of his business associates, I felt a tap on my shoulder. Turning around, I couldn't help but frown.

"Congratulations, sis." Ginny smiled as she pushed her purse strap up her shoulder. She smirked as she looked from me to Chandler. "I'm happy you finally found the love you always spoke about. You didn't go half bad either."

I haven't seen Virginia since she ran from my mama's house due to Jules being Jules, so I had no idea why she was here tonight. I kept her away from my family and me because I didn't want to see her hurt. She was my friend for years, but I knew she was going to get herself killed fucking with my brothers about their women. Looking from her to Chan, I couldn't help but scoff. While he gripped my waist, glaring at her with a scowl on his face, she gave us a look that told me she knew something I didn't.

Leaning my head on his arm, I couldn't help but simper. "Either you fucked him, or you've tried, huh?" Her eyes bulged, telling me I was right one way or the other.

“Lucky for you... I’m not in the mood to beat your ass today. I could call Bridgette over with some sporks, but I’ll let bygones be bygones since we’re both so pretty tonight.” Removing myself from his grip, he glared down at me. “See your whore out. Let one more person approach me tonight, Chandler, and I promise you... I will embarrass you in a way that will have you ready to murder me.”

Taking his champagne flute from him, I downed the contents before gathering my dress and making my way over to my brother. With my head held high, I glided across the room like a woman with poise and grace. Virginia, Charlotte, and even Star all wanted a rise out of me tonight, but they weren’t going to get it.

“Look at my baby,” my mother gushed as I approached them. Pulling me into her arms, she kissed my cheek. “Your father would be so proud of you.”

“I’m sure...” I gave her a tight smile as she pinched my cheeks. I glanced at them all and whistled in approval. “You people sure do clean up nice. Even Jules looks less spooky this evening.” We all shared a laugh as he took a bow. “I know this isn’t something we’re all thrilled about, but I appreciate you all being here to support me.” Glancing over at Rosier, I smiled. “I love you all.”

Pulling me into his arms, I wrapped mine around him, giving him the tightest hug. At one point, I thought our relationship would be torn beyond repair, but I couldn’t have been more wrong. Rosier is my rock, and that will never change.

“Have I told you lately how proud of you I am?” he asked as he led me to the dance floor. Across the way, I could see Chandler having Ginny escorted out. “He’s given you every reason to call this off, but you still want to see this through. Why?”

“It’s my duty to the Family.” I shrugged, placing my head on his chest and swaying to the music. “I know what’s required of me and?—”

“Don’t give me that politically correct bullshit, Noemi.” He spun me around before locking me back in his arms, surprising me with his ballroom moves. “Why do you want to continue to go through with this? I’ve told you... I can call this whole thing off, and you can be free of him.”

Opening my mouth to do just that, I glanced around him and locked eyes with Chandler, who was dancing with my mother. I’m sure he was laying it on thick because she was giggling like a schoolgirl. My mother knew I hated him, but she was the type who always tried to see the good in people and any situation. She truly believed with time, he and I would learn to respect and love each other. As if he felt my eyes on him, he found mine. A sinister smile formed on his lips, and I shivered. My mother being hurt by him came to my mind, and I knew I would never allow him to do that.

“Chandler isn’t the man I envisioned my life with, but I’m okay with that. You have to keep your enemies closer, right?” I laughed humorlessly. “I’m okay, Rosier, honestly. I want to do this.”

“What about Skip?” I damn near lost my footing as we swayed. “Do you love him?” I snapped my head up and locked eyes with my oldest brother. “Can you marry Chandler knowing your heart belongs to another man?”

Jordan had been on my mind for weeks, and my heart called out to him. I miss him more and more every day, but I know he and I can never be. I’ve known since the night he dropped everything and flew here to be with me that I loved him. He did hurt my feelings by insinuating that I could have told him about his ex sooner, but that did nothing to change how I felt for him. I haven’t spoken to him since that conversation, but I knew he would make it through his situation to ensure his family’s safety, especially Gianna’s. He and I will never be together. It hurts, but that’s just what it has to be.

“Jordan and I are friends, Rosier,” I replied, trying my hardest not to become emotional. “Do I love him?” I looked away for a moment and then back up to him. “Enough to know just because you crave something with your soul doesn’t mean it’s the best thing for you. Sometimes... you have to be uncomfortable with the cards you’re dealt and let go... even if it hurts.”

“Nah.” He shook his head and stopped dancing. “You’re not going to?—”

“Excuse me, everyone...” Chandler tapped the mic and stopped the music. The dancing and chatter around us ceased. “If I can have your attention, please.” He gave his signature smile as everyone, including me, turned toward the stage. “I want to thank each and every one of you for coming out tonight in support of Noemi and I. Baby, come here.”

Detaching from my brother, I glanced back at him as he was hesitant to let me go. Letting him know it was okay with my eyes, he sighed and gave me the go-ahead. People parted and stepped to the side, giving me a clear path to the stage. Upon reaching it, Chan helped me up and kissed my hand.

“Noemi, I know things haven’t been perfect and easy with me, but I appreciate you for remaining by my side.” His eyes held so much deceit that I wanted to call bullshit. “I’m looking forward to a lifetime of happiness with you. I can’t wait to start a family with you, tying our families together forever. A little girl with your sass and beauty will keep us all in line.” The guests all laughed because they knew I was a handful all by myself. “But the thing is, I don’t want to wait any longer to call you my wife.” Eyeing him skeptically, I watched as he reached into his pocket and removed a small diamond ring. Granted, I know this marriage is one of love and appreciation, but I was expecting a little more in the jewelry department. Hell, this event probably cost more than the ring. “Do me the honor of marrying me tonight in front of all of our family and friends. What do you say, baby? Are you ready to do this?”

The crowd clapped and cheered while I stood there in shock. My palms were sweating, and my heart felt like it was about to beat out of my chest. His throwing this engagement party was one thing, but turning it into an actual wedding? Chan was backing me into a wall, and the grin on his face told me he knew it. Looking around the room, I knew I couldn't say no in front of all these people. Finding my family in the crowd, I could tell from the fire in my brothers' eyes that they were just as shocked as me. Once they headed toward the stage, I knew I had to do something, or it was going to turn into a blood bath.

"Yes," I croaked, barely above a whisper. "I'll marry you tonight."

Smiling brightly, he pulled me into his arms and planted a kiss on my lips. I placed my hands on his chest to push him back, but he wouldn't budge. When he let me go for air, I had to stop myself from scrubbing my lips clean.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“I have an officiant here, and we can do it now.” He smirked, pulling me toward a man I’d never seen before. The crowd had quieted back down as he spoke into the microphone. “We can start now?—”

“Wait!” I yelled as I snatched the microphone from him, finally finding my voice. The fire in his eyes was instant. “If we’re going to do this tonight, I want my brother to officiate it.”

Squinting his eyes, I knew he wasn’t happy about my public protest, but I didn’t care. If we were going to do this, it was going to be Jules or no one. Turning around toward the crowd, Jules stepped to the stage as Rosier looked on with rage.

“You sure about this?” was the first thing my brother asked as I placed my hand on his shoulder. His eyes held all the love he had for me, but the worry couldn’t be missed. “You don’t have to do this.”

“What the fuck do you mean?—”

“I’m sure,” I answered him as I cut Chandler off. The crowd had grown so quiet that you could hear a pin drop. “Will you please do me the honor? I’m not getting married unless my big brother officiates.”

Nodding, he dragged his eyes over to Chan, and I prayed he didn’t turn this man into a rodent in front of all these people. Hereached for the microphone, and Chandler’s hesitancy to hand it over was witnessed by all.

Staring at each other for a moment, a grin formed on Jules’ face as he began to speak.

“Chan, I wish you the best with the hellion you’re about to bind yourself to.” Stepping back, we took our places on the stage as Jules did the same. Winking at me, he cracked his neck a few times. I dropped my head to keep from laughing. He didn’t have a serious bone in his body. “Let’s get you two hitched.”

"Welcome home, Mrs. Gourneau."

Pushing down the bile I felt rising in my throat, I crossed over the threshold into Chandler's home. I’ve stayed over here once or twice, so I’m familiar with the layout of his home. Everything about his place screamed bachelor pad. I knew the paintings on the wall and furniture pieces were expensive, but there was nothing he could ever do to this place that would make it feel like home to me.

“I thought I told you I didn’t want to live in a home where you’ve fucked other women.” I spun on my heels and found him staring at me. Crossing my arms, I shot daggers his way. “So, is this what life is going to be like? Asking you to compromise and getting nothing in return? The contract states?—”

“Fuck the contract, Noemi.” He pushed off the wall, stalking toward me as if I were his prey. In a way, I was. “You’re my wife now, and the actions or things you’re given from this day forward are dependent upon how well you perform duties. Tonight...” He pushed one of my loose locs from my face, and I immediately saw the hunger fill his eyes. “Is where it will all begin. You’re my wife now, and this will be our home until you prove to me that you deserve better. The more you fight me on this, the worse your hell will be.”

Dragging his finger down my exposed chest, my skin felt as if it was sizzling. The mere touch of this man made me want to rip it off. My chest was visibly throbbing as I watched him undress me with his eyes.

“You did a good thing marrying me tonight.” He chuckled as he spun me around,

pinning my back to his front. “I was almost hoping you would’ve fought me. I wanted a reason to cause your family pain. Marrying you will do for now because I know you are carrying my last name, which is killing your brother.”

Standing in the middle of his living room, I held my breath as his hands roamed my body. I knew what I was getting into by marrying him, just like I knew what he wanted from me tonight. Instead of making matters worse by rejecting him, I decided to approach things a different way.

“Wait!” I pulled from him before he could slide his hand down the middle of my corset. “I need to go upstairs and shower. I’ve been in this dress all evening. We’ve been dancing and sweating. It’s best I am fresh for our encounter.”

Giving me his evil eye, he relented as he strolled to his dining area with me closely following. The room was so vast and immaculate that it pretty much could have been its own wing. The arrangement on the extra-long island of different sandwiches, fruits, cheese, and wine caused me to pause.

“Fine. The only reason I’m agreeing to this is because we will be having company soon.” He spoke with malice. As if on cue, a few of his housekeepers made their presence known. I watched as they hustled about getting things in order as the doorbell rang. “A few people from my Family wanted to come by and congratulate us privately on our nuptials, so we will be hosting for a while. Go upstairs and change but make it quick.”

The way he so casually dismissed me caused the blood in my veins to boil. Chandler wanted a dormant for a wife, but unfortunately, that wouldn’t be me.

“Chan...” I stopped him before he walked back toward the sitting area. Glancing over his shoulder, he waited to see what I had to say. “Just one question. It’s been on my mind all night.” Stepping to him, my glare never wavered. “Did you fuck Virginia?”

Licking his lips, he smirked. “Did you fuck that nigga you were with on your little vacation? You two looked cozy on your dates.” My eye twitched at his revelation, but I said nothing. “I may have been late in finding out where you were, but I know more than you think. I let you get your rocks off because I was a little occupied myself.” He winked before turning to walk away. “Go get changed. Your things from your condo were moved earlier this evening in our main bedroom—you know where that is.”

This arrogant son of a bitch!

Seeing a hunting rifle in his gun case, my fingers itched to unload it into him. Knowing him, he probably fucked the manager and sweet-talked himself into my unit. That’s fine because my name will be on that building by the end of the summer. I ignored the hellos and waves from his staff because now wasn’t the time to get chummy with me. They’ve heard Chandler and me argue about this union on several occasions, and I didn’t fuck with them either.

Taking the stairs to the second floor of his home, I made a beeline for his bedroom. Out of the six rooms he had in this house, he would make me sleep in the same room as him on the first night. Pushing the mahogany doors open, my knees buckled once I stepped inside. In the moonlit room, I could easily see my way around. What caused pause was that my mind was playing tricks on me. Chandler had a distinct smell. The YSL was very potent but lingering in the air was the smell of cedar and spice. It was the smell of a man that caused my soul to stir from his presence alone.

It smells like him in here.

“Get it together, Noemi...” I spoke to myself as I crossed the room to find the light switch. “You miss him that much that you think you’re smelling him, girl.” I laughed at how stupid I sounded. “You had your chance, and you blew it.”

“Seems we both did.”

Before I could flick on the lights, the voice of Jordan Mills sounded in the room. My eyes bulged once the bedroom illuminated, and I saw the love of my life in the flesh. Tucked in a corner, he was dressed in all black as he pulled from his blunt. His eyes scanned my body as he pushed off the wall.

“H-How? W-Why?” I stammered, unable to move. “Jordan, what is going on? How did you get in here?”

“I hear congratulations are in order, baby.” He chuckled as he flicked the roach of his blunt across the room. This man was so disrespectful. “What type of friend would I be if I didn’t support my bestie on her big night?”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

Still in shock, my eyes followed him as he observed Chandler's bedroom. The size of a small apartment, the room was just like any other in the house—plain and designed for a man. As I examined Jordan, I noticed the bed was littered with rose petals and balloons. The thought of what was going to happen later tonight caused my throat to dry.

“Shouldn't you be back in Milly Grove looking for the man you blame me for not telling you about?” I crossed my arms and mugged him. “Matter of fact, you need to leave. If Chandler comes up here?—”

“One to the head, two to the chest,” was all he said as he turned and eyed the bed. “That nigga is going to be mad as fuck when he comes up here and finds his sheets are a mess.” He chuckled and turned to me, eyes full of yearning. “You're asking me a lot of questions, Mi, but you ain't really saying shit. Come here.”

Like a moth to a flame, any resolve I had in an instant was gone. The only man I wanted was before me, and that's all I cared about. I didn't care about this being my wedding night. I didn't care about my husband being on the floor beneath me. All I cared about was Jordan.

“Ask me...” he murmured as he reached out, raising my chin with his finger. Batting my lids softly at him, I saw what I wanted to see from the man I wanted forever with. “Ask me the questions you really want to know.”

“Why are you here?” I started before hissing as his hand slid across my collarbone. Goosebumps formed instantly, and I knew then that I was in trouble. “Tell me the reason, Jordan.”

“I’m here for you,” he answered as he snaked his arm behind me and began to untie my corset. “I came here to get what’s been mine since the day I met you.” Once the dress was undone, our stare stayed locked on each other as it fell to my feet. “What else do you want to know?”

Pushing me back toward the bed with his body, I fell gently onto the sea of rose petals. Dressed in nothing but heels and a thong, I watched with hooded lenses as he pulled his hoodie over his head. Once those arms and tattoos were on display, I knew it was truly over for these silk sheets. Jordan was a living statue of David with a slightly larger physique that was making me melt a milliliter per millisecond.

“Are you going to fuck me, Jordan?” I licked my lips as he placed each of my legs on his shoulder. Kissing up the inside of each thigh, I threw my head back and moaned. “Fuck, baby.”

“All I’m doing is kissing you, Mi, and you got the nerve to ask me about my dick.” He chuckled as he pulled my thong to the side, nuzzling his face into my pussy. Inhaling deeply, I was soembarrassed when I felt the small release of my essence. “Damn, baby. You smell so good.”

Without warning, he flicked my clit with his tongue before spreading my lower lips open, easing his whole nose and mouth inside. The most he’d done before was a finger here and there, so feeling his flat tongue against me while his nose tickled my hardened nub was driving me crazy.

“J-Jordan...” I panted as I thrust my pussy into his face. I wish he’d let my legs down, but he had me locked in a pretzel, and I couldn’t do shit but beg for mercy. “It’s too much, baby. Oh my goshhhh!”

The voices and music below us faded as I temporarily went deaf in both ears. I was shaking and screaming so much that I knew Chandler would be bursting into the

room at any moment. Coming down from my orgasm, Jordan peppered kisses on my sensitive clit before easing his way up my body. Finally, he let my legs down, and they felt like feathers as I continued to lay in bliss from my release.

“I knew once I finally got my hands on you, it was going to change my life.” His eyes were trained on mine as he stood to remove his shoes and joggers. Once his dick sprang free, I felt the drool roll down the corner of my mouth. It was the thickest and juiciest I’d ever seen. “There’ll be plenty of time for that later, baby.” He stroked his dick as he climbed on top of me. “I want to apologize in advance for what I’m about to do to you.” Pushing my legs open wide, he tapped his dick at my entrance, hungry orbs still on me.

“Wait...” I placed my hands on his chest and stopped him from penetrating me. “I have one more question.” Closing my eyes tightly, I took a deep breath. “Do you love me?”

It shouldn’t matter, nor should I care, but being with him at this moment, I needed to know. Jordan is the man I want. He’s the one I want to grow old with. He’s the man I wanted to father my children. I know I’m bound to Chandler now, but I couldn’t help who my heart and soul cried out for.

“Look at me.” He placed his hand around my throat with his thumb tracing my bottom lip. My eyelids opened on command. “I love you with my entire heart, Noemi.” He pushed himself into me, causing me to shriek. Being as though he was only the second man to ever enter me, I felt like I was being ripped in half. “There isn’t a nigga walking this earth, angel floating in heaven, or devil dancing in hell that will stop me from making you mine.” Prematurely thinking he was all the way in, I was in for the shock of my life when he pulled out just to slide back in deeper. “I always told you that I wouldn’t fuck you unless you were mine, right?” I was too full to speak, so I nodded. “Well, let me show you what my words can’t say.”

Dropping his lips onto mine, he kissed me with so much passion and possession that I came instantly. I was so caught off guard that it scared me when my body started to tremble. Instead of stopping to let me catch my second wind, he kept going.

“That’s it, my baby,” he moaned against my mouth before pulling away. “I feel you coming all over Daddy’s dick. I told you once I fucked you, you were going to be mine.” His strokes were so deep and powerful that I felt him in my chest. If he wasn’t already in my heart, he would have a place there after he finished fucking me. “Tell me how much you love this dick and how this pussy belongs to nobody but me.”

Taking his hand from my neck, he pinched my right nipple before placing it in his mouth. “Hmph,” I bit my bottom lip and grunted as he slammed into me. “You’re going to make me come again, Jordan.”

“Stop all that fuckin’ moaning and say what the fuck I told you, Mi.”

Whap.

He slapped my breast, and I groaned from the sting. I never thought I would be the woman who was turned on by pain, but when you’ve lacked experience, the right man can make your body do whatever he wants. “Answer my question and tell me who the fuck you belong to.”

“I-I belong to you, Jordan!” I yelled as his strokes became faster. With the left leg already tucked in his arm, he did the same with the right. This caused him to go even deeper than before with my ass slightly lifted from the bed. My poor kitty was going to need to soak for three days to recover. “This is your pussy, baby! Nobody but yours!”

“Can I nut in my pussy, baby?” He wound his hips as he pummeled into me. My eyes rolled into the back of my head as I was on the brink of another climax. Tapping my

face with his left hand, my eyes popped open. His facial expression held nothing but lust, and he never looked so sexy. “I asked you a question. Can. I. Nut. In. My. Pussy?”

Between his dominance, his attack on my uterus, and the wickedness of what we were doing, I couldn’t hold back any longer. With my nails digging into his shoulders, I screamed out in pleasure as I squirted all over Jordan, myself, and Chandler’s Alaskan King-sized bed.

“Nut in me, baby!” I whimpered as tears fell from the corners of my eyes from the overwhelming feeling of being pleased. “Come in your pussy! I love you so much, Jordan!”

“Oh fuck!” he roared as he thumped into me over and over. His pelvis hitting my clit prolonged my orgasm, and I fought hard not to pass out. “Take all this nut, mama! Daddy of two on the way.”

It didn’t take long before I felt him expand and release his hot seed inside of me. I’d never felt anything like this before, and if I could relive this moment every day for the rest of my life, I would. His pouring into me was never-ending, and he wasn’t letting up until his balls were empty. When Chandler saw this mess?—

“Shit!” I began to panic, attempting to sit up. Looking over at the door, I realized that we didn’t even lock it. “He’s going to kill me!”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“That nigga ain’t gone do a fuck thing to you,” he mumbled into my neck before biting it to calm me down. I moaned from the sting and felt his dick jump inside of me. “What you need to be worried about is what you want your headstone to say.”

I stuttered. “W-what? What the hell are you talking about?”

Pushing up off me, he eyed me intently. “A daughter, a sister, and a good-pussy-having demon,” he replied in a riddle as he lifted from the bed, but not before putting my thong back in place. I could feel a mixture of us both seeping out of me. Walking over to Chandler’s dresser, he removed one of his shirts. My eyes widened as he used it to clean his dick. “Yeah, that sounds about right.”

“Are you crazy?” I shot up now that he was no longer trapping me to the bed. That was the wrong move because pain immediately shot through my pussy. “Shit!”

“You can soak when we get home.” He threw the used shirt on the bed next to the messy evidence of our fucking. “We have a flight to catch.” Walking over to the closet, he paused before turning back to me. “Nah, you ain’t wearing this shit.” I stood in shock and watched this man redress without a care in the world as if I hadn’t committed adultery within six hours of being married. Picking his hoodie up from the nearby ottoman, he nodded. “Up.”

Frowning in confusion, I lifted my arms and allowed him to slide the oversized clothing over my body. With his Glock in one hand and mine in the other, he walked toward the door. It was then that I snatched back. This man had broken into my husband’s home, fucked me silly, low-key threatened me, and now was expecting me to walk out of this room with him.

“What are we doing, Jordan? He’s down there with a fucking mob. You’re going to shoot your way out of here? I can’t just leave here with you. I married him and?—”

“You love me, Noemi?” he cut me off and asked.

“Yes,” I answered truthfully. “More than I’ve ever loved anyone in my whole life.”

“Then trust me, baby.” He placed his hand on my cheek. “I won’t let anything happen to you. I’m sorry for what I said about Gia and that nigga. I’m sorry for the fact that I even let you come back here, knowing you didn’t want to. I love you, and I don’t play about what I love. You belong to me now. You, NoemiBoudreaux, belong to me. I will go to war with your family, husband, and God himself when it comes to you. We gonna be all right, and we gonna figure this shit out together. Just trust me.”

Holding his hand out for me to take, he was letting me know that the ball was in my court. Could I risk my life and my family’s just for the sake of love? Could I be selfish and put my own wants before what my family needs? As I looked into the eyes of the man before me, I saw all the love and admiration he had for me. It’s the one thing I prayed for when it came to finding a life-long partner. That revelation made my choice simple.

“Your plane better have a nice bathroom so I can clean myself.” I smirked as I put my hand in his. “Everything is just squishing around down there.”

“Good.” He chuckled as he stepped into the hallway. Hearing the melodies of the music below caused my heart to fall to my ass. “I hope you leave a trail of my nut for that nigga to see when he comes up here.”

In nothing but a hoodie, a thong, and five-inch heels, I walked down the staircase and prayed that we would make it out of here alive. I squeezed Jordan’s hand for dear life because it was, in fact, the anchor that I needed to keep moving.

“How the fuck are we getting out of here, Jordan?” I whispered as we reached the bottom of the stairs. “There are too many people in here.”

“I’m leaving out the same way I came in...” He pulled me forward, and I cursed at the clacking of my heels. Thankfully, everyone seemed to be partying hard in his dining hall. “The front muthafuckin’ door.”

“What the fuck?” I groaned as I shifted in the bed. My head felt as if somebody had beaten me with a brick. “What the fuck happened last night?”

Running my hand down my face, I took some deep breaths to will myself not to vomit. As I lay there, I fought to remember what took place last night. It was rare that I would drink to the point of a hangover, but apparently, I was on one last night. Prying an eye open due to the sunlight beaming through the room, I patted the nightstand in hopes of finding my cell.

“Fuck,” I grumbled when I noticed it was almost noon. “I need to get my ass up.”

“Hey.” I stiffened at the voice behind me. “Lay back down, baby. That bitch will be okay.”

Glancing over my shoulder, my eyes widened at the sight of Virginia.

What the fuck is she doing in my house?

Looking around the room, I frowned in confusion when I noticed I was in one of my guest rooms. I stood abruptly from the bed and regretted it once my head started pounding. Noemi was going to kill me if she found out about this.

Noemi!

Memories of last night flooded my mind and sweat began to form all over me. From the engagement party turned wedding to me having members from my organization over to celebrate, I knew I had fucked up. Last night, I should have been laid up with my wife, but instead, I spent my wedding night with her ex-best friend.

“You have to get up and get the fuck out!” I quietly demanded as I picked her dress up from the floor, throwing it at her. “Don’t make me tell you twice.”

As silently as I could, I searched the room for all of our clothes and hurriedly put them on. Noemi must be pissed that I didn’t come to bed last night. Now that I think about it, I don’t even remember her coming down to the party at all.

“Are you serious right now?” Ginny all but shouted as she ran and stood between me and the door. “You’re going to leave me here after the night we shared? You chose me over your wife on your wedding night. Does that not mean anything to you?”

Looking at her as if she were crazy, I pocketed my phone. I took slow and deliberate steps toward her, and the fire in her eyes began to fade.

“I don’t know what you think last night was, but you will never be more than a fuck, Ginny. I used you just like every other man in your life.” Pushing her to the side, she lost her balance and fell to the floor with a thud. “You stay in this room until I get back. I need to find my wife.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

Ignoring her soft whimpers behind me, I stepped out into the hallway in search of Noemi. She should be up by now, and I know she was most likely pissed the fuck off. Creeping down the hallway, I made my way to the main bedroom. Stepping inside, I frowned in confusion at the scene before me.

“What the fuck did she do in here?” I mumbled as I walked over to the bed. I remember directing my staff on the plan to deck the room out in roses and balloons. The roses were now scattered about on the floor instead of the bed. My silky black sheets looked as if something had been spilled all over them. The balloons were deflated slightly as if the room was heated.

“Is this my Gucci shirt?” I picked it up from the floor, giving it a whiff. “Why does this smell like?—”

Suddenly, chills began to form all over me as I looked from the shirt to my disheveled sheets. Stepping closer, I placed my nose on the crusted area in the middle of my bed. My eyes widened as the familiar smell of semen invaded my nostrils.

In haste, I made my way over to our walk-in closet and noticed that none of her clothing was disturbed. Noemi was playing a dangerous game with me. For her sake, she’d better not have done what my mind was leading me to believe.

Leaving the room, I searched my entire home on a hunt for my wretched bride. I called her phone repeatedly, only to get her voicemail. My blood began to boil in anger at the realization that she’d left. Going into my downstairs office, I took a seat at my desk and began reviewing footage from last night to see when she’d made her leave.

I watched as she and I first arrived and entered the dining area. Not long after, the camera captured someone walking past the sitting room, headed for the stairs. Shrugging it off, I knew it was one of my staff members or one of the hired workers preparing for the evening. I sat and watched in disappointment as the festivities began. Drugs, women, and alcohol could be seen all over the place. If Noemi came down and saw the type of party I was having, I can only imagine how pissed she must have been when it was supposed to be a celebration for us. However, none of the cameras caught my wife coming down during the party. Switching to the main bedroom cameras, I watched as Noemi entered the room. There was no space in this home that was not monitored twenty-four seven, and today, I was thankful for the earlier decision.

“Who the fuck is that?” I spoke to myself as a shadowed figure came onto the screen. I adjusted the volume so I could hear what they were saying. “I know that’s not who the fuck I think it is...”

Leaning closer to the screen, I stared as if what I was seeing would change. I watched and listened as that bitch-ass nigga she swore was just a friend began to kiss her, eat her pussy, and fuck her on a bed we were to share. The way she cried out and responded to his body pissed me off to where all I could see was red. I listened to her holler out for him as he fucked her for over an hour on my oversized bed.

She wept as he fucked her in my house.

She panted as he fucked her under my own fucking nose.

How dare she give away what was meant for me?

“I’m going to kill her.” I gritted my teeth as I removed my Beretta from my desk drawer. “I’m going to kill them both.”

I couldn't take my eyes away from how her pretty face scrunched up as he took her body to ecstasy. Noemi had fucked up, and I was going to make her pay. Once it was over, I watched as he peered over her as she caught her breath. The love for her was evident in his eyes as he cleaned his dick with my expensive T-shirt. I looked on as the evidence of their love-making seeped onto my sheets.

"Chandler, we need to talk..." Ginny whined as she entered my office. "I'm not leaving until we do."

I paid her no attention as my system went to another camera capturing, showing them hand in hand, leaving out of my front door. Noemi was braver than I thought.

"Wow..." Ginny giggled as she came and stood behind me. "I guess you both spent your wedding night getting fucked by someone else." She placed her hand on my shoulder, causing me to push her off. "What the fuck is your problem, Chandler?"

"You!" I shouted as I stood from my desk. "I am sick and tired of all you bitches not knowing your place. You all think I'm a joke—someone you can laugh at and play with." I turned to face her, and she was already backing away in fear. "It's time I show all you hoes who the fuck I am!"

"Chandler, baby, wait." She held her hands out as she tried to back out of the room. "I didn't do anything. You're the one who called me over last night, remember? We were supposed to talk about the baby."

Baby? Oh, fuck no.

Dropping my eyes to her stomach, there was a slight roundness that peeked from under her dress. She and I had been fucking around for a few weeks. She came to me saying Noemi wasn't half the woman she was and didn't know what to do with me. I knew she was on some shady shit, but that didn't have shit to do with me. Scenes

from the day before flashed through my mind when she told me she was pregnant, as I had securityescort her from the church. I probably called her over after I'd gotten so high off my own product last night, knowing she'd let me fuck her any way I wanted.

Ginny was a problem—one I no longer wanted or needed.

“The baby?” I chuckled as I took steps toward her. “It’s going to die right along with you.”

As she screamed for help, I grabbed her by her hair before she could run out of the room. Shooting her once in the stomach, followed by a shot to her temple, I watched as her body hit the ground. Peering down at her lifeless frame, flashes of Noemi came to mind. She’d fucked up royally, and everyone would feel my wrath until she was back home with me.

“Mr. Gourneau! Is everything...” my main housekeeper yelled as she entered the room. She’d been working for me for years now and had seen a lot of shit in this house. “...I will get someone on this right away.”

“Wait!” I called out to her, stopping her in her tracks. “Come here...”

Walking her over to my computer screen, she watched as I showed her Noemi and that nigga Skip leaving my house.

“How did this nigga enter and leave my home without anyone knowing? Through my front door at that? With my fuckin’ wife?”

“I-I don’t know,” she stammered as she looked at the screen. “I’m sorry. He must have?—”

Pow!

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

Her eyes stretched wide in shock as her body hit the floor. I wasn't interested in what the fuck she had to say either. Scratching my temple with the barrel of my gun, I picked up my desk phone and dialed my head of security.

“Boss?”

“Come to my office and take out the fuckin' trash,” I shouted as I looked down at the bodies. “When you're done, let me know. My wife is missing, and I don't care if I have to kill her whole family and drag that bitch back home by her ankles. She's a fuckin' Gourneau, and she's coming back home where she belongs. Today!”

Adjusting my tie, I slammed the door to my Ferrari and entered Boudreaux Enterprises. The bottom of my Gucci loafers sounded off on the marbled floors as I made my way through the lobby.

“Good morning, and welcome to?—”

“Fuck that!” I cut the receptionist off as I removed my sunglasses. “What floor is Rosier Boudreaux on? Being as though this is his business, I'm going to assume the top.” The bitch said nothing as she eyed me, enraging me even more. “You can't open your mouth and fuckin' talk?”

“When you say something worth responding to, I will.” She sassed as she typed away at her computer. “When I greeted you, only to be cut off, all hospitality and professionalism went out the window. Now...” She stopped pecking on the keyboard and gave me her attention. “Good morning, and welcome to Boudreaux Enterprises.” She smiled sarcastically, and it took everything in me not to knock her teeth out.

“How may I help you this morning?”

Taking a deep breath, I squeezed the bridge of my nose. “I’m here to see Rosier,” I stated, trying again while my patience slowly left me. “Will you tell him that his brother-in-law, Chandler, is here to see him?”

She eyed me for a moment before she picked up the phone to give him a call. Stepping back from the desk, I stuffed my hands inside my slacks and looked around the lobby. The fifteen-story building was breathtaking and put mine to shame. Both of us came from powerful families with money, but my pockets didn't stand a chance next to his. That was just another reason why he felt as if he was better than me.

"Sir," she called out, garnering my attention. "Mr. Boudreaux said, ‘Fuck off, and that he is busy right now. He doesn't have time for visitors’—hey! You can't go up there!"

Ignoring her threats, I made my way over to the elevator right as security was rounding the corner. I was fed the fuck up with this family, and today was the day they all were going to see the fury they’d caused.

Once the elevator dinged to the conference room floor, I stepped off and made my way to the largest conference room where Rosier held his meetings. If he didn't want to come down and talk to me, I would certainly come up and talk to him.

Boom!

The office door bounced off the wall as I literally kicked it in. The eyes of many businessmen locked on me, but mine were settled on one.

"Mr. Gourneau..." Rosier leaned back in his seat at the head of the table, cool as ever. "To what do I owe the pleasure of you bursting into a very important meeting with the governor?" He motioned to a clearly spooked Carlton. "I'm sure this is

something that could have waited."

"Where the fuck is my wife?" I asked in a hiss, stepping further into the room. I didn't give a fuck about the governor or anyone else in this damn room. To the side of me, I could see Dre in the corner ready to make a move, but I knew he wouldn't do anything in a room full of witnesses. "She left my home last night, and I can't reach her."

Angling his head to the side, he excused himself as he buzzed his assistant to the room. "Gentlemen... I sincerely apologize for the interruption." He gestured to a cute blonde as she rolled a cart with various platters into the room. "Enjoy a small but delicious lunch on my dime while I sort this personal matter out."

The men stood from their seats to make their lunch selection as he nodded for me to follow him to his office with Andre on our heels. They could very well kill me, but it wouldn't be as easy as they thought. Stepping inside his office, the tension was so thick that it could be cut with a knife. My eyes stayed on Rosier as he crossed the room and poured himself a drink.

"I'm going to ask you one more time, Boudreaux..." I walked over, not caring that Andre had pulled a gun from his waist. I was not here to play with these muthafuckas and it was time that they gave me the respect I deserved. "Where the fuck is Noemi? I woke up this morning to video footage of your whore of a sister fucking another man in my bed!" I shouted as the images replayed over and over in my head. "I'm going to make her pay for defiling our marital bed—in my fuckin' home!"

Calmly, he poured himself another shot. I was growing more and more angry as I watched him sip his liquor without a care in the world. He watched me over the rim of his glass as if my frustrations meant nothing! Snatching the glass from his hands, I launched it to the other side of the room. Crystal and liquid flew everywhere as the pricey, old-fashion glass shattered against the wall. Dragging his eyes from it to me,

Rosier swiped his nose and chuckled lowly.

“If this lil’ temper tantrum is any indication as to why my sister left, I can understand.” He stood up straight and stepped to me. “She would’ve been in a lesbian relationship because you ain’t nothing short of a bitch, nigga. You walk your muthafuckin’ ass up in my shit, huffin’ and puffin’ like you’re the big bad wolf.” A sinister grin formed across his face as he glared at me. “Keep playing with me, and I will put you in a cage with a real one. Nigga, I’ll make you show me you’re ’bout that shit in real life, which we all know you ain’t.”

“You think I’m scared of you and your threats, nigga?” I pulled my Beretta from my waist, aiming it at his face. I wasn’t moved one way or the other when Dre placed his Glock at the back of my head. “If I don’t have my wife to me by sundown?—”

“What you gone do with that lil’ pistol, lil’ nigga?” He’d cut me off and ignored me as he walked closer, pressing the barrel of my gun to his forehead. “If you pull a gun on me, you better be ready to use that shit.” The darkness in his eyes couldn’t be missed. “Consider the union between our families null and fuckin’ void. It’s been less than twenty-four hours, and my sister has already run off on your ass. Don’t worry about where the fuck she is. She’s where she wants to be. Now, I’m going to give you two minutes to get the fuck out of my office. Come back here on some tough guy shit again; you’re going to leave out through the muthafuckin’ window.”

The anger that was coursing through me caused my hand to shake slightly. I glared at him as he trekked toward his door to leave. “So, that’s it? You think I’m going to let you fuck me over again?”

Slanting his eyes at me over his shoulder, he nodded at Dre. Before I could process what was happening, the butt of his Glock slammed into the back of my head. Losing my footing, I stumbled forward and onto the floor. My gun slid from my hand, and it wasn’t long before Dre hopped on top of me.

“Make this the last muthafuckin’ time you walk into our place of business on some disrespectful bullshit, bitch.” His teeth grated together as he rained blows from his gun all over my head and face. It was the middle of a work day, and I was getting pistol-whipped in a corporate building. “The only reason I’m not gon’ creep into your crib or your mammy’s house tonight is because it was too many witnesses here today. Make no mistake...”

Whap! Wham!

“You better sleep with one eye open, you dumb-ass nigga.” He hit me a few more times, causing me to groan loudly before he stood to his full height. “Consider any business contracts with Boudreaux Enterprises terminated.” He stood over me and spat on my custom-made suit before kicking me in the side.

“Not only that...” Rosier chimed in, walking over and crouching before me. “You and your family areout.”

My eyes swelled as I held my side, coughing up blood.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

Rosier continued, not giving me a chance to breathe out a reply. “I tried to be civil and amicable with y’all bitch-made niggas, but I should have known you were a bitch like your father. You keep fucking with me, and I’m going to make you bunkmates in hell.” He stood to his feet and adjusted his suit jacket right as security came into the office. “Get this fuck nigga outta my shit!”

Snatching me from the floor, they dragged me to his private elevator. I leaned up against the wall and tried to catch my bearings on the way down, but all I could think about was what he’d said. Not only was my marriage over before it could start, but he had finally admitted that he indeed killed my father.

“Come on...” The big, buff nigga I know as Trench gripped me up. “I don’t have all day.”

“Get the fuck off me!” I tried snatching myself from him, but it was no use. I was fucked up. “I can fuckin’ walk!”

“Barely,” was all he said as he hauled me through the lobby. I was so embarrassed as the people stared, but I was too sore and disoriented to do anything. “Move.”

My eyes were beginning to swell shut, but along the way, I locked them with the receptionist. The smirk on her face couldn’t be missed, and if I wasn’t in such bad shape, I’d really give that bitch something to smile about.

Once we were outside, he threw me into the door of my car without a word. Holding my side, I fumbled with the fob until I was able to unlock the car and slide inside. Laying my head against the seat, I removed my phone from my pocket and called my

right hand, Ralph.

“Boss,” he answered on the first ring. “Is everything okay?”

“No.” I coughed a few times before groaning. “I need you to come get me.” Before he could respond, an idea came to me. “I also need you to get in touch with that little bitch you fucking from the massage parlor. One of her client’s upcoming appointment will be cut short.”

Rosier and his sister may think they have won, but they had fucked over my family and me for the last time. I’ve always been an eye-for-an-eye type of man. Let’s see how they react when I take away the one they love the most.

Silently, we all stood and watched as Noemi entered the back room of the beach house. I had plans for us to have a good night since her time in the Grove was coming to an end. We wouldn’t be able to do that with these two niggas staring me in the face, though.

“You nigga’s got something you want to say?” I crossed my arms and eyed them both. I didn’t know if they were trying to intimidate me or not, but I was not easily spooked. “Speak now or forever hold your peace because when Mi comes out of that room, we’re headed out.”

The only thing that could be heard was Dre smacking as he rustled his bag of chips. Shrugging my shoulders, I walked into my kitchen to grab a bottle of water. Twisting the cap off the bottle, I took a sip before turning and coming face to face with Rosier.

“What is it exactly that you’re doing with my sister, Skip?” he asked as he leaned against the kitchen island. “She’s set to be married in a few months, and she’s out here going on dates and shit. What’s going on?”

“You know...” I chuckled as I set the bottle on the counter next to me. “I was going to be quiet and play the backfield, letting Mi handle her shit like she asked, but since you’re here, I might as well speak my peace.” Stepping to him, I watched as he kept his eyes on me ever so closely. “I don’t fuck with the way you’re doing your sister. She hasn’t told me the entire dynamic of your family, but I know she’s paying for some shit that shouldn’t have anything to do with her.”

“You said all that to say...” He waved his hand around as if he was bored with the conversation. “Noemi is my concern—not yours. I know what’s best for her and my family. She knows that, and it’s not for me to make you understand.”

Nodding, I stepped back to put some space between us. I was working on expressing myself with my words, and if I swing on this nigga the way I wanted to, I’m going to end up ruining the night shorty and I had planned.

“Bet,” was all I said as I grabbed my bottle to exit the kitchen. “Looks like we have nothing else to discuss.”

“You love her, don’t you?” His words stopped me in my tracks as I entered the living room. Dre paused mid-bite as he heard his cousin. “You’ve fallen in love with my sister.”

Glancing over my shoulder, I gave him a smirk. His face was neutral, but I could see the amusement in his eyes. It was as if he knew the answer, but he wanted me to say the words aloud.

“Mi texted me a couple of months ago and asked me to come see her. I dropped everything and hopped on a jet with no questions asked.” I turned and faced him, taking slow steps in his direction. “When I got there, she was a crying mess. She was ready to say fuck you and her entire family because of a choice you made for her.” The amusement in his eyes had vanished in that quick second. “I held her and told her

everything would be okay because it would be. Just know that if I have fallen for your sister, it ain't shit you or that bitch ass fiancé' of hers can do to stop me from making her mine."

We stood nose to nose, having nothing else to say. I knew his stance on Noemi's life, and now he knew mine. What's understood doesn't have to be explained on my end.

"Heard you." He grinned, stepping back. Offering me his hand, I looked at it for a moment before accepting it. "Just know that if she's what you want, there may be a few obstacles in the way of being with her."

"Like I just said, if I want to be with Noemi, ain't shit standing in the way of me making it happen. When it comes to what or who I want, I'll go to war about it."

"Jordie, did you hear me?" Gianna's little loud ass snapped me from my thoughts of the conversation I had with Rosier at the beach house. "I want to go shopping today! Mimi said it was our world, and you're the man to give us whatever we want."

Hearing her snicker to the side of me, I locked eyes with Noemi. It had been a few days since I snatched her from her nigga's house, and I've been fucking her crazy ever since. I loved her, and I wasn't going to deny that shit to her or anyone else. She was mine, and I was waiting on the day I had to prove it to her pussy ass husband. I wasn't dumb by far. I knew he was still calling her phone constantly. I'm just waiting on him to make his move before I show my ass.

"Is that right?" I reached over the table and wiped the pancake syrup from Gi Baby's mouth. I decided to take the girls on a breakfast date and to do some shopping. "She didn't lie; I love y'all, and I'll definitely do anything for you."

"Don't I know it?" Mi said, smirking as she popped a slice of bacon into her mouth. "This is the happiest I've ever been. I owe it all to you."

Giving her a wink, we continued to eat our food. She and I were going to have a conversation soon about where we were going from here, but I wanted to do it in private. We've been sexing each other and spending time together, but I needed her to know this shit wasn't temporary. I wasn't in a pussy coma when I told her she was mine.

"I have to go back home soon," she said as if she were reading my mind. "I have to go back to work and have a conversation with my brother."

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

Ignoring her, I said nothing as we finished eating. Seeing Gianna scarf down her food had my heart clenching. I hated how my baby felt like she had to hurry and eat her food so no one would take it away or so she wouldn't miss out on anything. I wanted to ask her so badly about what she went through with her mother, but I didn't want to make her sad. Not only that, I don't think I can handle the answer if it were something I didn't want to hear.

With one hand wrapped around Gianna and the other holding onto Mi, I felt like the man as we entered The Galleria. Mi wasn't a big shopper, but she didn't mind making my pockets hurt when the opportunity came. With school starting in a few weeks and Gianna entering a new school setting, I wanted to make sure my baby was dressed and ready for the occasion. She told me that kids would often pick on her because of her clothes and shoes being dirty at her old school, and that shit was not happening on my watch. I would fuck all their little asses up about my baby.

"Let's go in here," Mimi said as she pulled us into Gap Kids. "The clothes in here aren't bad at all for her age."

"Gap..." I frowned as we walked into the store. "I got money to splurge on my kid's clothes, Noemi."

She giggled as she grabbed my daughter's hand and led us through the store. "I don't doubt that baby. She's only six, though... almost seven. She doesn't need Louie, Prada, and Gucci, Jordan."

"Yeah, Daddy!" Gianna chimed in like she knew Noemi was right. Her eyes lit up like a candle when she saw the furry animal purses. "Mimi said pretty girls never

have to do too much. She said good hygiene, a fresh hairstyle, and some gloss is all I need!”

Stopping in my tracks, my eyes widened at what she said. Mi was right with what she told her, but I was stuck at the fact that she called me “daddy.” Since day one, it’s been Jordie. I couldn’t lie if I tried to; I wanted to drop a tear in the semi-crowded store, but I didn’t want to shoot these motherfuckers for witnessing a gangsta cry.

“Come on, big girl!” Noemi giggled as they browsed the racks. “Daddy’s gonna go cry in the car.”

Walking up behind her, I pulled her into me. Instantly, my dick began to harden at the feel of her soft, round ass. “You keep playing with me, and Daddy is going to put something on you that’s going to make you cry too.”

Shuddering when I kissed her neck, I let her go as we began shopping. The clothes she picked up for Gianna were fly as hell and very age-appropriate. The various colored graphic shirts and blouses matched Gi Baby’s personality to the T. Noemi also suggested we get some plain T-shirts in every color so she could accessorize more simple outfits. The shopping cart was full of shorts, leggings, and jeans, too, and on top lay a lot of colorful jackets, girly purses, and hair accessories. As long as my baby was happy, I was good. I was also thankful that Noemi had volunteered to help us get this part of school shopping done.

As I followed them around, I began to feel uneasy. I scanned the store we were in, hoping to see someone or something out of place, but there was nothing. I always trusted my gut, so when I couldn’t locate what was causing the feeling, I knew it was time to bounce.

“Hey, ladies...” I interrupted them as they browsed the kid sandals in Macy’s. In a split second, they had a buggy full of shit as if they didn’t just buy everything Gi

Baby needed in Gap Kids. “How about we go to the house and watch movies while we finish shopping online? We can make ice cream like we did the other night.”

“But, Daddyyy...” Gianna began to whine and pout. “I wanted to go get another teddy bear for my Uncle Wild. He said I give Uncle Uno the good ones, and he was jealous. Please, Daddy. Just one more store.”

As much as I hated to see my baby sad, I felt the need to get them out of here. I was about to speak, but Noemi beat me to it. “How about we go home, have a tea party, and then go online to buy some really nice gifts for Uncle Wild? He likes shoes, so what if we go make him some custom ones that only he has? He will love that so much!”

“You’re right!” Gianna practically bounced up and down. “I could make him some with his favorite Disney princesses on it!” Her expression got serious as she stepped to Noemi and whispered, “Don’t tell him I told you, but he likes Cinderella the most. He said her stepmother is an old wench. What’s a wench, Mi?”

Standing to her full height with wide eyes, Noemi glimpsed at me, and it took everything in me not to burst into laughter. Grabbing Gi Baby’s hand, she led us to the counter. After paying for the shoes Noemi had grabbed for her and Gianna, I grabbed their hands and led them back through the mall the same way we came.

“Is everything okay?” Mi asked in a hushed tone. It was a little after noon, and the crowd was piling in. I hate that I had to end my baby’s day so early, but I couldn’t shake the sensation that something was brewing close by.

“I just want to get y’all out of here in case it’s not.” I kissed her cheek as I led them to the valet. This is one of those times I’m glad I opted to come to this particular location. “Let me get y’all home.”

After putting the bags into the trunk and making sure my girls were secure, we headed back to my condo for the evening. Cutting down the music, I eyed Gianna in the back as we approached the red light. She was back there kicking her feet and playing with her iPad without a care in the world.

“Hey, little mama...” I called out, getting her attention instantly. “You want some candy before we head in?”

“Oh my gosh! Yes!” she squealed. “You’re the best daddy ever!”

Smiling, I winked as the light turned green. Before we could pull off, a red Tahoe rammed into the passenger side of my Escalade. The glass shattered as the vehicle began to spin, and I was sure the airbags were next to shatter through their compartments. My heart thudded because, at that moment, all I could think about was my girls. Groaning, I started to call out to them before the sound of a machine gun filled the air.

Tat! Tat! Tat!

Bullets began to hit the bulletproof panels and windows as Gianna screamed in the backseat. My head was thumping from the impact of the airbags. The blood streaming down my face spilled into my eyes, making it hard to see, but that didn’t stop me from reaching into my secret door compartment for my Glock. Fumbling with the seat belt, pure adrenaline aided me in hopping from my truck in hopes of killing whoever thought it was a good day to fuck with me and mine.

Pow! Pow! Pow!

“Argh!” I heard one of the gunmen say as I shot through his torso. From what I could see, it was two of them in ski masks. Once he was down, I aimed my gun at the next masked gunman right as the screams of my daughter sounded into the air.

“Daddy! Help me!” Spinning on my heels, I felt the dizziness as I ran to where my daughter was taken. Passing Noemi’s door, I noticed her slumped over her seat onto the driver’s side. As I sprinted across the road, I wasn’t fast enough as I watched her being thrown into the back of a white van with heavily tinted windows. Letting my Glock loose, I shot in its direction, not caring who was hit in the process.

“Gianna!” I dropped to my knees and let out a gut-wrenching scream. My breathing was ragged as I heard sirens in the distance. People were walking over, asking me if I was okay, while others mentioned the need for an ambulance. I didn’t give a fuck about any of that. I needed my daughter.

How the fuck did a nice day with my girls turn into my worst nightmare in an instant?

Standing to my feet, I needed to check on Noemi. I was able to stand for two seconds before the spinning came back in full force, knocking me to my knees. As a uniformed officer stood over me, I collapsed and succumbed to the darkness that took over me.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“I don’t give a fuck about none of that shit y’all are talking about! That’s my muthafuckin’ brother back there, and I want the niggas that did this shit dead to-fuckin’-night!”

As I pried my eyes open, the sounds of beeping could be heard over the sounds of Uno’s boisterous voice. Groaning, I looked around the room, squinting at the bright lights. My head thudded, and that’s when the day’s events came back to me. Sitting up in the bed, the monitors began to go crazy as I began snatching wires and IVs from my body.

“Mr. Mills, you have to calm down!” Nurses ran into the room, trying to see what was going on. “You’re going to make matters worse!”

Ignoring their pleas, I stood from the bed, almost losing my footing. Glancing down, I frowned at being dressed in a gown with matching socks. “Where my clothes at so I can fuckin’ leave? I have to find my daughter.”

My voice cracked as I tried my hardest to keep my tears at bay. All I could do was hear my daughter’s screams and see the scared look on her face as she was taken from me.

“I’m not giving you anything!” one of the nurses said in a stern tone, fussing as she walked over to me. “You’re going to lay your ass back down in the bed until we tell you otherwise.” The disdain on her face couldn’t be missed. “Now, lay the fuck down and—ahh!”

“Who the fuck are you talking to?” I gripped her neck, ready to snap it in two. She,

along with the three other nurses, had lost all of the spunk they had moments ago. “You want a body in this bed? It will be yours if you don’t do what the fuck I say.” I squeezed her neck tighter right as my brother and motherburst into the room. I heard my mother gasp as she ran over to me. “Bring me my muthafuckin’ clothes, or I’m going to throw you out of the fuckin’ window. You want your family trying to identify you while you’re nothing but blood and guts splattered all over the sidewalk?”

“Jordan, baby... let her go,” my mother said softly while trying to pry my fingers from the nurse’s frail neck. The bitch was scratching my hand up something serious, but she was losing her fight as well as her consciousness. “You’re making matters worse, son.”

“She did this to herself—talking all that tough shit like I’m not really like that.” The nurse’s eyes began to roll to the back of her head, and I decided to drop the bitch before I killed her. Looking around as the other nurses shook in fear, I stepped over her semi-lifeless body. “If y’all don’t want to be next, I suggest you find my belongings, as well as my discharge papers. If I have to ask again?—”

They dashed all over the room before leaving to do as I asked.

Holding my side, I stumbled back and sat at the edge of the bed. Squeezing my eyes shut, I took several deep breaths. Opening them slowly, I locked eyes with my mama, and I couldn’t help but let the tears fall.

“I fucked up, Ma,” I croaked as salty water droplets streamed down my face. “I fucked up bad.”

“Come here, baby,” my mother whispered as she took a seat beside me. Wrapping me in her arms, I placed my head on her chest and let my frustration flow from my eye sockets. I let down my girls and didn’t protect them the way I should have. I deserved

the misery I was currently living in.

“It’s going to be okay, Jordan.” She kissed my forehead as she rubbed all over my back. “You’re blessed to be alive, baby boy. I know you’re hurting, but God is going to make it all right. Do you believe that?”

“Mama...” I sniffled as I looked up at her, as she had tears in her own eyes. I could tell that she had been crying before I woke up. “I’m the reason—” I shook my head slightly. “Have you heard from Gianna? Noemi? Fuck! Is she okay?”

Noemi left home to be with me, and not even a week later, I had her in some dangerous shit. If she was hurt, or even worse, I don’t know what I was liable to do.

“Noemi is fine. She was discharged already.” She patted my cheek, giving me a small smile. “You both have concussions, but you have the worst of it since you have a gunshot wound to your side, baby.” Looking down, I noticed the blood saturating the gown. “You need to allow these people to help you.” She nodded toward the nurse, who was slowly waking from her slumber. “You can’t be in here choking out the staff, Jordan Mills.”

Declining to respond, I trailed my eyes over to the noise coming from the corner. I looked on and watched as my oldest brother, hands behind his back, paced in front of the window. Wiping my face, I lifted from my mother. Slowly and carefully, I made my way over.

“Aye, nigga...” I grunted, causing him to snap his head around. “I heard you acting like a fool out there. That’s not a good look for the mayor.”

“This my fuckin’ city, nigga!” He mugged me as if I was the enemy, showing he had reached his limit. “The fuck they gone do to me?”

Smirking, I nodded as his stern expression fell. Gently but firmly, he pulled me into a hug. We weren't the most affectionate bunch, but we didn't play about each other. I loved my brothers, and I knew they felt the same about me.

"Had I lost you, I would have blown this entire city up without a second thought," he mumbled, and I could hear the conviction in his voice. "I love you, Jordan."

"I love you, too, Ken." I patted his back as the room door swung open. One of the nurses had come back with fresh joggers, my discharge papers, and to collect her now alert co-worker. "Where's Adrian?"

"While you've been playing Sleeping Beauty for two days?—"

"Two fuckin' days?!" I bellowed as I made my way over to grab the clothes so I could get dressed. "What the fuck, man? Gianna could be anywhere!"

Palming my chest, I leaned over onto the bed to catch my breath.

What if I never saw my Gi Baby again? I have to get the fuck out of here.

"When I find out who the fuck did this, I'm killing them." I sighed. "Two fuckin' days, man."

"Yeah, two days, bro." He gave me a sympathetic look. "Wild has been tearing the city apart looking for our niece in your absence. I haven't been able to get in touch with Noemi. She's not answering her phone for any of us."

"Here." My mother placed her hand on my shoulder, handing me a duffle bag. I was thankful for my brother, but what was up with Noemi? I hope she wasn't thinking about leaving me because of this bullshit. "I know you wouldn't have wanted to wear hospital clothes, so I went and bought you something from the penthouse." Nodding

to the bathroom, she added, “Go get dressed so you can come out here and tell me about Noemi Boudreaux.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

Hearing my brother chuckle, I shot a glare at him before kissing my mother's cheek and heading to the bathroom. Once inside, I gripped the sink as I looked at my reflection in the mirror. There were a few cuts and bruises on my head, as well as stitches on my face and shoulders, but I was okay.

As I got dressed, I said a prayer for my baby girl. I had just got her, and I'll be damned if I lose her already. She was my heart, and there was no way I would be able to live without her. Not only Gianna, but Noemi too. I was glad to know she was okay, but she won't be for long if she thinks leaving a nigga was an option. I know this shit happening wasn't in the plans, but neither was falling in love with her. She could fuck around and find out if she wanted to, but this shit with us was forever. I didn't care about her so-called marriage because once she gave herself to me, she entered the only "till death do us part" contract that mattered.

"Boss man... what the hell are you doing here?" Jerome asked as I entered the club.

I've been out of the hospital for two days and still haven't found my daughter. I also hadn't seen or heard from Noemi. I've called her cousin, hoping our bonding over killing muthafuckas would get me an in on where she was, but instead, he claimed that when she was ready to speak to me, she would reach out. I wanted to hop on a flight and go show my ass in Florida, but I was doing enough of that here at home.

"You need to be at home resting, Bossman."

"You need to shut the fuck up and do what you're paid to do!" I snapped at him as I made my way around the bar. It was a Tuesday evening, and even though we had a nice crowd, it was the slowest night of the week. "Do you need anything?"

Jerome didn't deserve to be the target of my anger, but I didn't feel like hearing his mouth. I had enough shit going on, and this club was the last place I wanted to be. However, even with all that was going on, I still had to make sure the businesses were running smoothly.

"If I did, what good would it do with you being the way you are right now?" He mugged me and placed his hand on his hip. Glaring at him while I poured myself a shot, he wasn't fazed at all. Jerome was never influenced or bothered by my attitude, and that's how he's been able to stay around for so long. "The girls have been managing things just fine. You left the best in charge."

"Is that right?" I nodded while I threw back another shot. "I appreciate you stepping up. Help running a club wasn't in your job description, but?—"

"Then add it," he said over his shoulder, cutting me off to serve another guest. "Add the money that goes along with it too." We shared a laugh, but we both knew he was serious. "But in all seriousness, I have everything under control here, Skip. You have other things going on." He gave me a sympathetic look, causing my jaw to twitch. "I will call you if you're needed, but I promise you... I got this. So, go on, grumpy pants."

Slapping him on the back, I left him and the two girls at the bar to do their thing. Since getting rid of Irene, the vibe here had been different, and the girls had been happier. If I had known she was causing such hostility in the workplace, she would have been gone.

"Shit..." I groaned once I made my way upstairs to my office. My side was healing, but it was still tender as fuck. It didn't help that I've been on the go since I left the hospital. "I'm killing everybody and their mama's for this shit."

"We're right there with you on that one."

Snapping my head up, I saw Money and Wild waiting outside my office door. My brother looked tired as hell, and I know it's because he's been searching the streets non-stop for Gianna. I appreciated the fuck out of him for that, and I couldn't think of anything I could do to show him the depth of my gratefulness.

"What's up, y'all?" I slapped hands with them both as best as I could. "What are y'all doing here?"

"We came to get your ass." I frowned at Wild as he spoke. "This club is fine. I been by to help Rome with whatever he needs. Outside of wanting to beat his ass for hitting on me, he has it all under control here."

"Everything is still booming at the houses too," Money chimed in as he pushed off the wall. "With us not knowing who was behind the shooting, I didn't want to spook them or raise suspicion until we came up with a plan. You don't have to do this shit alone, bro. We got you."

Leaning against the wall, I dropped my head and took a breather. I've been overwhelmed like hell for the past few days, and it was getting to me. Still, I had shit to do and niggas to kill.

"Aight, let's get out of here." I nodded toward the exit. "Let's go to the warehouse—the one in Sunset Valley."

Without question, they followed me out. Getting into the car with them, I rested my eyes as Wild drove us. I had almost dozed off until Wild spoke up.

"Say, Skip... has Gia tried calling you." I popped an eye open and caught his stare under the street lights. "Mama has been trying to reach her for a couple of days now and has been getting her voicemail."

“That bitch ain’t dialed my number at all. She wasn’t calling before Gi Baby was snatched, but you’d think she’d reached out by now, knowing the hood knew what the fuck was going on.”

The day my baby was taken, I made it clear that regardless of whether a report was filed or not, I was killing those responsible. My brother had a lot of connections in high places and assured me he would keep it under wraps as long as possible for me to do my thing. I didn’t want to believe Gia would do something so heinous and reckless but knowing she’s with the nigga that callshimself wanting to take over the streets in my city, I didn’t put shit past her.

“Good thing you kept Irene alive,” Money said as we pulled up to the warehouse. “For her sake, I hope she has the answers to whatever you want to ask.”

Entering the facility, the eeriness hit you right away. This place hasn’t been used since Dre decided to kill the lieutenant governor, but to me, you could always feel the souls of all the lives taken here lingering and roaming around. As we got closer to the room where Irene was held, we heard a bit of commotion. All three of us pulled our Glocks instantly because there was no way anyone else should have been in here. As we crept closer, the sounds of whimpering filled the air.

“I’m going to ask you one more time... where the fuck would your brother get the money from!”

Scraping sounded throughout the building as I pulled the door open. I noticed the figure in the corner right away. I said nothing as I walked over toward the one hovering over a whimpering and now battered Irene. Before I could reach them, they turned toward me, removing the familiar hoodie in the process.

“Hey, baby,” Noemi smiled, greeting me. It was then that I noticed the Beretta in her right hand. “What are you doing here?”

“Where the fuck have you been, Mi?” Jordan walked over and grabbed me by the collar of his hoodie, the same hoodie he dressed me in the night he snatched me from Chan’s. “You haven’t seen a nigga blowing up your phone?”

“I’ve been a little busy...” I gestured around the room with my gun in hand. “I was going to call you back when I got the chance, babe. Relax.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

Chuckling, he stepped back and nodded. Looking him over, I could tell he was still in pain. His eyes were sunken in their sockets, and I knew he was exhausted. Dressed in a black jogger set, his movements were sluggish. I knew he had been worried sick about me and Gianna, but there were some things I needed to check out on my own.

“You want me to relax?” he asked as he walked back toward the other side of the room. “You’ve been MIA for fuckin’ days, and you tell me to relax? I have been out here searching for my fuckin’ daughter, and you’ve been doing what?” he shouted as he pointed to a whimpering Irene. “Beating this bitch’s ass when you could’ve been with me!”

“Aight, bro.” Dre stood from his stool and walked over to us. When he found out what had happened, he came to the hospital immediately. “You don’t have to holler at her like that.”

As I looked back and forth between the guys, I knew I had to diffuse the situation before it got ugly. Neither family did the back and forth, and both were liable to pop off at any given time with fists or guns. Once a slow grin spread across Jordan’s face, I knew he was about to say some fly shit.

“That one...” He pointed in my direction, “Belongs to me.” He stabbed himself in the chest as he stepped to Dre. “I love this girl with every breath in my fuckin’ body, so if I want to curse her the fuck out about ghosting a nigga, I’m going to do just that. Where the fuck was your fake-ass concern when y’all married her off to nigga that disrespected and treated her like a dog every time he walked out the house? Where was the love when she had to cry herself to sleep because she thought she would never experience true and unconditional love? That’s what she got with me. I know

it—she knows it. Stay the fuck out of my business when it comes to Noemi because that's all me now. Y'all have officially been released as her protectors.”

Angling his head, Dre crossed his wrists at his waist with his Desert Eagle in hand. I tried to squeeze in between them, but Jordan moved me right back out of the way.

“You ready to die about her?” Dre spoke coolly. “Are you ready to lay down behind the love you claim you have for my sister?”

“Nah, I'm not laying down for a soul.” Jordan shrugged. My heart dropped at his words, but I said nothing. He matched Dre's stance with his Glock already clutched. “You gone have to be a man and force me down because I'm forever standing ten toes about that one.”

Shifting on my feet, I clenched my thighs together at his words. Jordan held Skip's glare, and he didn't waver. It seemed as if they stood there for an eternity before Dre cracked a smile.

“I told Zoo a man who walks out the front door of another man's home with his wife ain't one to be fucked with.” He slapped Jordan on the shoulder before walking over and dapping up Wild and their friend, Money. “Y'all missed Noemi's hands in action.” He nodded to Irene, who had her arms wrapped around herself, watching Jordan with sad eyes. She had some nerve, looking at my man as if she were heartbroken. “She beat that damn girl outta her shoes.” Looking down, a giggle slipped from my lips as I noticed her shoes on the other side of the room.

When I was discharged from the hospital, I was on the hunt to find out why Jordan had stashed her here after dragging her from the club a couple of weeks ago. After finding out she was Gia's boyfriend's sister, I knew she knew more than what she must've told Jordan about her ugly-ass brother. It was weighing me down that no one had found Gianna yet. I had no choice but to use my brain, as I always did, to connect

the dots that the men were missing. Profiling his baby mama and those connected to her was my first task.

“You want to tell me what’s going on here, or are you going to keep me guessing?” Jordan leaned against the table and folded his arms. “I came here to press the bitch and then kill her. I have other shit I need to be doing, Mi.”

“You know... we’re going to speak about how you’re talking to me when I’m done but know that we both are working toward the same goal.” Rolling my eyes, I led him to the makeshift workstation I’d set up in the corner. “Let me show you what I’ve been up to.”

Walking past me, he hovered and stared before he took a seat. I could see his pain sitting on his shoulders about this whole fiasco, but I could also see his love for me in his facial expressions once he saw it was me in the warehouse. Gripping the front of my hoodie, he pulled me to him and dropped a kiss on my lips. A gentle peck turned hot and heavy within seconds.

“Oh my gosh, Skip! Are you really going to do that in front of me?” Irene cried out. “You’ve had me here for weeks with nothing but crackers and water! I told you that I love you! I told you I was sorry about what my brother planned! Please... don’t do this to me!”

“As soon as I finish with you, I’m going to make you watch me fuck my man before I put a bullet in you, bitch,” I stated in a harsh tone between kisses as I pulled away from him. “Sit the fuck down and shut the fuck up.”

I watched as she peered at Jordan with pleading eyes. Unfortunately, he only had eyes for me. He was gripping my waist and nibbling on his bottom lip as he watched me watch her. I could feel his dick bricking up through his joggers, so I knew he was turned on by this side of me he’d yet to see.

“Skip, you’re my boy and all, but will you sit down and listen to whatever Noemi has to say so I can get back home to my wife?” Dre spoke in a disgusted tone. “I’m not about to sit here and watch you fantasize about fucking my cousin while ole girl cry about it in the corner.”

“Shut up, nigga.” Jordan gripped my ass before kissing my forehead. “Show Daddy what you found, baby.”

Hearing the guys groan, I blushed as Jordan pulled me onto his lap and sat back down. Putting in the password to my laptop, multiple screens powered up on the walls. The life of a hacker could be chaotic at times, and this was one of those times. I didn’t have any of my many devices here with me, so I had to get Dre to make a special trip from Florida with some of my things.

“Being that Gianna was taken and you weren’t killed, I felt as if her mother had something to do with this,” I said as I typed, accessing my searched database. “The screen shows her whereabouts two weeks before the shooting. She’s been staying at a house a couple of towns over under her cousin’s name. I tapped into the satellites in the area, and she hasn’t been there since the day you said Lew approached you at the park.” Switching screens, I brought up the one from the day of the shooting. “This is from the day...” He stiffened, squeezing me tighter as he glowered at the screens. “This is footage of the day Gianna was taken.”

Pressing play, we watched as his Escalade approached the red light. From the right side of the screen, you could see where the red Tahoe rammed into the passenger side of the truck. The masked men jumped out and began spraying the truck with no remorse. If it weren’t for it being bulletproof, we all would have been dead. After seeing him kill one of the men, we watched as Gianna screamed out for him to help her.

“Aight... cut it off,” he mumbled, and I could hear the emotion in his tone. “You said

all that to say what, baby? I know what happened.”

“I wanted to show you this.” Logging into the city’s street camera system, I used the downloaded surveillance footage to show other angles. He moved me to the side once the screen became clearer. By now, Money and Wild were hovering over his shoulder, trying to see what I’d found. “Although the windows were tinted, I was able to clear the image and identify who took Gianna.”

No sooner than the words left my mouth, the pixel cleared, and the driver, as well as the backseat passenger, came into view.

“I’m going to kill that bitch!” Jordan roared as he jumped from his seat. “She could have killed my fuckin’ daughter!”

Not only did the screen show Gia in the white van, but it also showed Lew as the driver of the Tahoe truck. Only one of the two shooters was able to get away that day, which meant Lew was probably down to his last foot soldier. Stepping to the screen, Money pointed before turning to address Jordan.

“Say, bro... I can bet that’s Snoop hopping into the backseat with Gianna. Base is the one you took out, and you know those two are joined at the hip. Not to mention, those are the ones I suspected of being rats on the teams. They’re the ones I told about the houses, and not even three days later... well, you know the rest.”

“Shut the houses down and round all them niggas up,” Jordan instructed Money. “I want all the houses cleaned and shut down. I want it done tonight.” He turned to his brother. “Go with him and help. I don’t trust anybody to help him with the shit but you.”

“Nah... I’m wherever you at,” Adrian shook his head and objected. “You think I’m about to have you out there by yourself? I know you, J. You’re about to be on some

crash-out shit, and?—”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“Do like I fuckin’ asked, Adrian!” Jordan yelled angrily. Turning on his heels, he stalked over to Irene. She walked backward into the corner, fear evident on her face and throughout her shaking body. “Where the fuck could they have taken my daughter?”

“I-I don’t know!” she cried, holding her hands out before her as he aimed his gun at her head. “Our parents are dead, and all we have is our grandmother! They don’t tell me anything! Only that they wanted you gone!”

Pow!

“Jordan! I wanted to be the one to kill her,” I whined as I watched him shoot her in the head. “You took the fun away from me.”

“You just wanted that girl to watch you hunch on that nigga.” Dre frowned his face up. “What’s the move now that you’ve killed the broad?”

Walking over to the portable printer, I grabbed the papers and handed them to Jordan. “These are the names and addresses of the family they frequented and talk to the most. I say one of them could be where they are. I also have a database searching surveillance cameras for facial recognition in case they’re driving or at any ATMs.”

“Those broke bitches don’t have any money,” Skip stated as he eyed the papers. “That’s what this shit is all about.”

“That’s true, but I tracked Lew’s account, and he was wired half a million two days ago. I figured whoever sent him the money is helping him. Your baby mama is a

deadbeat, and her man is a scrub. They don't have the manpower or street smarts to do this on their own."

As we stepped back into the night, I tilted my head back and allowed the cool breeze to calm my nerves. I was still a little sore from the impact, but I wouldn't rest until Jordan had his daughter back.

"Hey, come here." He pulled me from my thoughts as he wrapped me in his arms. "I want to apologize for how I spoke to you in there. It's never my intention to handle you like that. Seeing you after you ghosted a nigga pissed me off. I thought you decided this was too much and you didn't want to be with me anymore."

"I'm a Boudreaux, baby." I smiled as I wrapped my arms around his neck. Technically, I was a Gourneau but fuck that nigga. "I don't run from shit."

"Oh, yeah?" He smirked as he gripped a handful of my ass. "How about when you ran from this?—"

"Got dammit! Let her loose." Dre gritted his teeth as he walked over and pried us apart. "I've told y'all assers I didn't come here for this shit." The fellas and I laughed at his aggression because he was absolutely serious. "Tell me what the fuck we're about to do. Denim and Big Bri are expecting me for a tea party."

"Go home, Dre." Jordan reached out and dapped him up. "I'm about to get started on this list while Money and Adrian..." He side-eyed them, causing Wild to kiss his teeth. "Go shut my shit down and round them niggas up. We gonna bring them back here so they can kick shit with the dead bitch inside. They'll be joining her soon."

"You're not going searching alone, nigga." Wild stepped in front of his brother. "I will call Mama right now and tell her?—"

“He won’t be alone.” I stepped beside him, causing all eyes to fall on me. Waving my Beretta, I smirked. “I’ll be right there with him.”

With wide eyes, the guys looked at me as if I weren’t serious while Dre pulled out his phone. “Denim, baby, I need a rain check on the tea party.” He looked up and locked eyes with me before shifting them to Jordan. “Looks like I’m about to be on my reaper shit. Call Sweets and have her pray for me.”

“Aight, Noemi! Bring your ass on before you get left! We’ve wasted enough time, and I’m ready to fuckin’ go!”

Pursing my lips shut, I grabbed my ball cap and phone before leaving the bedroom. We came up short last night at one of the locations on our list, so tonight, I’m hoping we were luckier. Neither Lew nor Gia had called Skip about a ransom or their whereabouts, and we were all starting to worry.

“I’m here. Let’s go,” I called out once I walked into the living room. The frown on his face let me know he was irritated. “Dre is about to pull up.”

“Fuck it. You can wait on that nigga!” he said, snapping. He grabbed his keys from the end table, preparing to leave. “I don’t have time for this shit.”

Having had enough of his attitude, I threw my bag on the couch and stripped as I made my way over to him. I knew we didn’t have long, but he needed to calm down, and I had the remedy.

“Bring your ass here, Jordan.” I gripped his wrist as he reached the front door. “I’m about sick of your mean ass.”

“What the fuck do you expect for me to—” His words trailed once he locked in on my naked body. “Mi, what are you doing?”

Instead of answering, I dropped to my knees and brought his ball shorts and briefs down with me. Peering up at him, I stroked his dick steadily before placing him into my mouth.

“Fuckkk.” He hissed in a low whistle as he grabbed a fistful of my locs. “Baby...”

“Hmm,” I mumbled with a mouth full of dick. Pulling off, a trail of saliva followed as I continued to stroke him. “I just want to make you feel good, baby. If just for a second. Can I do that?”

Licking his bottom lip, he guided my mouth back onto his dick, and I knew I had my answer. Twirling my tongue around his mushroom head, I suctioned him into my mouth, causing his hips to jerk.

“You’re doing that shit so good, girl,” he moaned out as he rotated his hips and began fucking my mouth. Jerking my head back, he groaned sexily. “Open wider for me and play with that pussy, baby. I want to hear how much you love sucking this dick.”

I could feel myself leaking on the floor, so I dipped two fingers inside of me before using them to rub my clit. I was so turned on by his roughness that I knew I would reach my peak before he reached his.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“Mhm.” He chuckled, causing me to shiver. He was fucking my mouth as if it was my pussy, and I could feel his pole throb and swell as it hit my tonsils. “You sucking this dick so good, baby, like it was made for you.”

“Because it was.” I panted as I continued to pleasure myself. “That’s my dick, and you know it too. These bitches can never fuck and love you like me, baby.”

I don’t know what it was, but Jordan loved when I talked that boss shit to him. Snatching me from the floor, he walked me over to his loveseat, throwing me over the arm. Gripping the cushion, I braced myself for what was to come. Oftentimes, Jordan was a gentle lover, but I knew at this moment that there wasn’t going to be anything gentle about what he was about to do.

“Hold on, baby.” He gripped my waist with one hand and my hair with the other. “Since you said this dick is yours, I need you to be a good girl and take it. We don’t have all night, so make Daddy proud and take this dick.”

With one quick plunge, he slid into me fully. Moaning in pleasure, I didn’t have time to adjust before he was diving in and out of me. With my neck bent back and my eyes rolled, I allowed him to hurt me in a way that only he could.

“Shit, Jordan,” I cried as he fucked me harder. “Just like that.”

“You like that rough shit?” he groaned in my ear before licking the side of my neck. “Throw that ass back. You know how I like it.”

Letting my hair go, I was able to drop my head and glance over my shoulder. His

eyes were in a trance by the way my ass rippled and twerked on his dick. His nails dug into the skin of my hips, and we entered a rhythm to see who could fuck each other the best.

“Fuck, I’m about to come, Jordan!” I cried as my phone began to ring. I knew that no one was calling but Dre, letting me know he was downstairs. “It’s too much!”

“I’m right behind you, Mama.” He slammed into me harder and faster. “Tell me this is my pussy. Tell me I can bust all up in my shit.”

“Yes! Yes!” I cried out as I exploded. It didn’t take long before I felt him do the same inside of me. “Shit, baby.”

“Shit!” he hollered out, panting as he jerked, moving in and out of me at a slower pace. “Gah damn, Mi!”

Giggling lowly, I craned my neck as he leaned over me, bringing his lips to meet mine. We engaged in a slow, sensual kiss as my phone went off again.

“Come on and clean up. You know that nigga gone be talking cash shit.”

After the quickest shower of my life, we were redressed and downstairs within fifteen minutes.

“Thank you, Mi.” He pulled me into him as we headed down the elevator to his penthouse parking garage. “Not for the pussy, but for being here for me. I’d be lost without you.”

“No thanks needed.” I turned in his arms and kissed him. “Just know... it’s war about you, too, baby.”

Once we exited the elevator into the lower level of the four-story garage, Dre's awaiting Range came into view. Opening the door to the backseat, I couldn't help but laugh at the frown that met Jordan.

"Nigga, you just wait until I tell Jules about how you been out here freaking on our lil' sister. She was a nice, wholesome girl until she met you."

Simpering, Jordan glanced over his shoulder and winked at me, causing me to blush. "You got it wrong, Dre. Your sister might be wholesome to y'all, but she's a pornstar for me. Straight up certified?—"

"Shut the hell up, Jordan!" I screamed, causing him to laugh and Dre to turn up Donnie McClurkin. Reaching up to the front seat, I mushed the side of his head. "Take a nap until we get to where we're going."

Getting adjusted in his seat, Jordan chuckled before he got comfortable. Before long, he went still, and I knew he had dozed off. Gazing out of the window, I leaned my head against the cool glass, watching as we rode under the street lights. Through all of this, I still loved this man more than I had ever loved anyone. I hoped when this situation was over, we could pick back up where we left off.

Buzz. Buzz.

The vibration in my lap caused me to draw my eyes open. Looking around in a daze, I realize I'd dozed off for a little more than an hour. As I picked up the phone, I sighed at the unknown number. I knew it was no one but Chandler calling to threaten me. Since the day I left—or rather escaped—his home, he's been threatening to kill me. I wasn't stupid, so I let my brothers know in case he wanted to make good on his threats. I knew all about him popping up at our building, causing a scene, but he hasn't made any noise since. He's even been going to work and fucking his worker bitches like usual.

“Hello...” I stuck a finger in my ear so I could hear over Dre getting his praise on. He was singing Willie Neal Johnson at the top of his lungs. “Who is this?”

“Bitch, when I get my fuckin’ hands on you, I’m going to murder you,” Chandler screamed into the phone as soon as the question left my lips. “How dare you disrespect me the way you have, Noemi?”

“I don’t love you, Chan.” I sighed as we turned down a dirt road. I knew we were closer to our destination. “You don’t love me either. We will get an annulment and?—”

“You think it’s that simple?” He cut me off and chuckled.

Whap!

I heard a woman cry out. I cringed at the fact that she could have been me. “You’re my wife, Noemi Gourneau. Sooner or later... you’ll be back home where you belong. You’d better hope I have mercy on you, whore-ass bitch.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

Disconnecting the call, I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. I really was hoping my brothers would find him soon. I shivered, thinking about what would happen to me if he ever got his hands on me.

“Hey, you good?” I popped my eyes open to see the guys had their eyes glued on me. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing...” I hurriedly answered, undoing my seat belt so we could get answers on Gianna. “Let’s head inside.”

The men looked skeptically before doing as I asked. We had other things to worry about at the moment; dealing with Chandler could wait.

Parking near the rear of the trailer, Dre nodded for us to go toward the front while he continued to trek to the back.

“You know I’m not going to let nothing happen to you, right?” Jordan asked as we crept up the front porch steps. “I will kill that nigga before you go back to him.”

Sighing, I gave him a quick nod before our guns led the way. My brothers would be proud and pissed if they knew what I was doing right now. The only thing saving me was being with Dre.

As we reached the top step, I stood and watched as Jordan crept over and peeked into the window that flickered a small amount of light. Waving me over, I looked on as a small group appeared to be watching television. Too bad that movie night was about to be cancelled.

Boom!

I snapped my head to the door and noticed Jordan had kicked it in. I hurried inside and watched as they all screamed. Dre came in through the back with his gun raised toward anyone who thought they were leaving out the back door.

“Mi, keep your gun on them while I do a sweep.” I nodded at Dre’s order. I watched as he dashed down the hall and searched the three bedrooms. Jordan’s glare was on one of the girls, and I could tell they knew each other.

“Skip?” she cried as she held on to a child who looked to be around Gianna’s age. “What is this about?”

“Where the fuck is Gia and my daughter?” he inquired, causing her to stiffen. “By the way you reacted, you know why I’m here.”

“Clear.” Dre re-entered the room. “There’s no sign of anyone or Gianna here.”

“Here’s what we’re going to do...” Jordan paced as the house residents were seated and lined up on the sofa. “You’re going to tell me where the fuck that nigga Lew and your hoe of a cousin took my child...” He pointed his gun toward the oldest lady there, causing the five of them to gasp. “Or I’m killing all of y’all while I make the youngest watch.”

Upon my research, we were standing in the home of Jess, Gia’s cousin. She was the one who rented out the small house for them. The house was up in smoke now, so she could forget about getting her security deposit back. Jess lived here with her mother, two brothers, and her son. From what I discovered, she and Gia were close, so I’m sure she knew what was going on and where they could’ve possibly been with Gianna.

“You should have given Gia the money when she asked!” she jumped from her seat and yelled. “You live in penthouses and mansions while we penny-pinch to get by! We want to live good, too, and you were the key!” She stepped closer to him, and so did I. If she touched my man, it was lights out for her cartoon-looking ass. “You have the money, and Lew was going to make sure we all lived well when you were gone! You want Gianna? It’s going to cost you.”

“All y’all muthafuckas are delusional!” Skip roared. “I was good to her! I would have taken care of her and my daughter had I known about her! Gia would have been good if we were together or not!” He stepped toward her, causing her to retreat. “I’m going to ask you again. Where. Is. My. Child?”

“Get out of my face!” she yelled, pushing him backward. “When she wants you to know, she’ll call you. Hopefully, it’s before she or Lew hurts her.” She smirked, crossing her arms. “Gia hates the little brat?—”

Pow!

“Ahh!”

They all jumped as Jess screamed and dropped to the floor, wailing as she grabbed her right knee. All eyes were on me as I held my smoking gun.

“What?” I snapped at everyone as they stared. “She shouldn’t have touched my man.” Walking over, I gripped her by the dry-ass braids hanging on by a thread to her scalp. Before I could punch the bitch, I felt my phone vibrate in my back pocket. “Tell my man where the fuck his daughter is, or it’ll be me that will end you.”

Letting her go, I pushed her away as I pulled my phone from my pocket. Seeing it was another unknown call, I silenced it. Before I could pocket it, it buzzed once more. This time, there was a text message with an attachment. Tears immediately

sprang to my eyes as my hands began to shake.

Unknown:

Since you want to play games, how about we have more players? Who loses is up to you, wife.

“Sis, what’s wrong?” Dre asked as he hurried over to me, grabbing Skip’s attention. “Why the fuck are you crying?”

“We have to leave!” I grabbed Skip and ran out of the door. “Now!

“Wait!” he yelled, pulling from me. “I need this bitch to tell me where the fuck my kid is at!”

Glancing over his shoulder, I locked eyes with Jess. Although she was still crying, the smirk on her face pissed me off. The bitch knew Skip needed her to give him the information, and he wasn’t leaving or hurting her until he got it.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“We have to get to Florida, baby,” I pleaded with him as I dragged him out the door. “I will explain it in the car. We have to get on a plane right now!”

Running to the car, I couldn’t help but drop to my knees and cry. Chandler was ruining my life. Not only mine but the ones around me. If I had just stayed with him, maybe all of this wouldn’t be happening. Feeling arms around me, I was lifted from the ground. I dropped my head into Jordan’s chest and cried as he pried the phone from my fingers.

“What the fuck!” he bellowed into the night. “How the fuck did that nigga get my daughter?”

Handing the phone to Dre, I heard him curse under his breath as he dialed my brothers. Not only did Chandler have his daughter, but he’d kidnapped my mother as well.

“I’m so sorry!” I cried as I peered up at him. “If I had never left him?—”

“This ain’t on you, Mi,” he cut me off, kissing my forehead. “Now we know where Lew and Gia got the money to pull off the bullshit they did.” Looking down at me, the anger in his eyes scared me. “We’re going to get your mother and my daughter back, and we’re going to make them all pay for fucking with us.”

Holding the back door open for me to get inside the bulletproof Escalade, I wiped my tears and slid into the back seat. Once in, I could hear Rosier’s voice booming through the speaker. He was pissed and barking orders, wanting to know how our mother was taken. Thinking back to the woman getting slapped when he called, the

tears fell faster. I knew he was hurting her. This psychotic nigga was harming our mother.

Pop! Pop! Boom!

Looking out of the window, Jordan let off shots at the gas tank near the mobile home, causing it to go up in flames. I wanted to say something—to feel sorry for the possible innocent lives lost—but I couldn't. They didn't give a damn about what was happening to his child, so he didn't give a damn about what happened to theirs.

“Get me to the airstrip,” he said into the quietness of the car. “I’m about to show y’all Florida niggas how we handle business in the Grove.”

“Mommy, can I please go back with Daddy now? I don’t want to stay here with you.”

Rolling my eyes, I scrolled through social media on my phone as I listened to Gianna cry and plead to go back to Skip. It’s been over a week since we snatched her, and every day with her is one I wish they would have either left the brat where she was or killed her.

I glared over at her and snapped. “Gianna, I’m not going to tell you again to shut the hell up with all of that damn crying! If I have to tell you again, I’m going to beat you worse than you’ve ever seen.”

Standing from the folding chair, I yawned loudly as I stretched and walked out of the room. Looking around, the basement alone in this small family home was nicer than anything Lew and I had ever stayed in. When we were propositioned with the plan to hit Skip where it hurt, we were all in. Had I known I would be stuck with babysitter duty, I would have definitely declined.

“It’s going to be all right, sweetheart. Your father will find us soon.” Rosalyn scooted

over on the bed and cuddled Gianna the best way she could. “I’m sure it won’t be too much longer.”

“I wouldn’t count on that...” I smirked, crossing my arms. “When the fellas call Skip and meet with him to get the money, I’m sure they’re going to kill him.” Gianna placed her face in the woman’s chest and cried. “Not only him but your whore of a daughter too. She’s lucky they’re going to get to her before I do.”

After running up in the houses that Lew thought belonged to Skip, we thought we’d reached a dead end. There weren’t any drugs or money in sight, so Lew decided to torch them. He’d linked up with a few members of Skip’s team and promised them more money and more power if they would help him get Skip out of the way. He was beginning to think the guys had fucked him over because all of the information given to him had fallen through.

When Chandler pulled up at the house we were renting, we were shocked that he had been able to find us. If he could, Skip could as well, and that shit scared me. If he knew we were behind the chaos happening to his drug empire, he wouldn’t care that I was Gianna’s mother. Chandler, who I now know is married to Skip’s makeshift girlfriend, offered us half a million to help him make them pay for betraying him. I didn’t even know Skip was seeing someone, and it bothered me. He wasn’t mine, but he was my child’s father. No one deserved his heart or dick but me.

“Young lady, you have some nerve to talk to your child like this.” Rosalyn frowned at me. “When this is over, I hope I’m around to see what my daughter has planned for you. You two have no idea what family you’re messing with.”

Nibbling my bottom lip, I stared at her and couldn’t help but think she was right. I didn’t have the first clue about any of them. When I overheard Chandler telling Lew that he’d snatch Noemi’s mother from her spa appointment, I thought it would be impossible to do. Seeing footage of her being snatched from her massage table and

out the back door let me know we weren't dealing with a rookie. Once he brought her here, he'd hit her so hard I thought he was going to kill her. For her to be his mother-in-law, his hatred for her ran deep.

"Lady, if I were you, I would just shut the hell up. From where I'm standing, you're not in a position to really speak on much of anything." Hearing the door behind me unlock, I locked eyes with a pissed-off Chandler. I hoped he wasn't staying long because every minute I was near this man, I felt uneasy. "Talk to me nice, and I might let you guys eat lunch."

"You're not calling any shots here, baby girl," Chandler chimed in as he placed a few bags of food and clothes on the small metal table. "What do you think will happen if you starve them to death?" He shook his head, speaking to me as if I were slow. "I'm starting to question your purpose here."

Dressed in a button-down and slacks, I admitted to myself that the man was fine. His bald head and goatee gave him a rugged look. Although I didn't know much about him personally, I was aware of what I'd read about him online. He was a very successful businessman from Haiti and seemed to do a lot for his community. I thought it was crazy for us to leave Milly Grove and come to Florida with a stranger, but I guess he felt safer here.

"Since it seems you have it all figured out and under control, I'm going to get out of here." I grabbed my phone, giving our guests one last look. Gianna was looking at me with sad eyes, but that shit didn't move me one way or another. "Be nice, or the next time I see you will be in a ditch."

Throwing my purse over my shoulder, I made my way to the door. Once I reached it, I was thrown off balance when I was grabbed from behind.

"Where the fuck do you think you're going?" Chandler mugged me. "Who the fuck

you think is going to watch these two while we're not here?"

"I didn't know I was being held hostage too." I tried to snatch away, only for him to grip my arm tighter. "I'm not here to be a babysitter."

He chuckled in a sinister manner, and I felt my heart sink. He let my arm go, only for him to take a few steps toward me, backing me into the door. My chest caved as he hovered over me with a menacing glare. His eyes roamed my face before he reached out and gripped my neck. Squeezing tightly, my eyeballs expanded as I clawed at his hand.

"Listen here, you little bitch. I don't know what type of men you're used to, but I'm not one of them." He choked me tighter, and I was scared he would crush my windpipe. "Know that I'm not Lew's fat, funky ass. I will kill you, bitch. You contribute nothing but holes for niggas to stick their dicks into. In my presence, you will sit the fuck down, and you will shut the fuck up. Do I make myself clear?"

With tears streaming down my cheeks, I nodded as best as I could. He scowled at me for seconds more before he pushed me away, letting my neck go. Dropping to my knees, I wrapped my hands around my neck and grasped for air. Feeling the doorpush at my back, I moved out of the way so Lew could come in. Looking from Chandler to me on the floor, he continued eating away at the drumstick in his hand.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“So, what’s on the agenda for today, Chan?” He crunched on the chicken skin as he walked into the room. Moving over to the metal table, he tried to reach for the sandwiches. His movement was halted when his hand was cracked with the butt of Chandler’s gun. “What the fuck?”

“Get your ass back,” Chandler said as he mugged him. Turning toward the small, full-sized bed, he placed his hands in his slacks as he made his way over. “How are you two feeling today?”

Stroking Gianna’s matted hair, Rosalyn held Chandler’s glare. For an older woman, she was tough. Chandler didn’t intimidate her at all with his outbursts and tantrums. Too bad her stupidity and bravery were going to get her killed.

“Do you really care?” She sassed, shifting her position to get a better look at him. She and Gianna both had one hand cuffed to the bed. “Let us go, Chandler. You don’t have to do this.”

Rising from the floor, I kept my distance as I watched him take a seat in the chair near the edge of the bed. Looking between her and my kid, he smirked as he reclined in the chair. “Now, why on earth would I do that, Mommy Dearest? Having you here is the only way I can assure my wife comes back home.” Leaning forward, he removed his gun from his waist, placing his elbows on his knees. “Tell me... what do you know about Noemi leaving me? Did she tell you that she fucked another man on our wedding night... in my fuckin’ bed?”

Rosalyn’s eyes went from his to the gun as Gianna scooted closer to her. I watched as she held her resolve, but something told me she was unaware of what was going on

with her daughter. That tidbit of information was missed by me the night I was eavesdropping as they discussed Skip. I couldn't help but wonder what kind of woman Skip had around my Gianna. I wasn't the cleanest peach, but I wasn't fucking off as a married woman. The only time I'd missed around on Lew was with Skip, but he was a mark. I also was surprised at Skip because for him to have sex with her, knowing she was married, wasn't his style. He's always been a little crazy, but he would never sleep with a married woman. I turned to look at Rosalyn again just as she cleared her throat to speak.

"I know that my daughter is with a man who loves, respects, and cherishes her." She smiled happily. "Noemi deserves to be with someone who sees only her. That man wasn't you, Chandler. You're mean, abusive, and a womanizer. I don't want that for my child, and if she found someone who treats her the way she needs to be treated, I support it one hundred percent."

"She was contracted to me!" He jumped from his seat and roared, scaring us all. "I don't give a damn if I fucked a woman on my side of the bed every night while she slept on the other. She's crossed the line, and when she's back home with me, I'm going to make her pay."

"I hope her new man kills you first," she stated, moving Gianna gently to the side. "From what I hear, he is just as ruthless as her brothers. That's what I want for her—a man who can protect her—not one who throws temper tantrums because he misses his daddy. That's what this is about, right? You don't want my child, Chandler. You just want to torture her because you think Rosier killed Charles." He said nothing as his jaw twitched, causing her to chuckle. "That's what I thought. Something tells me you'll be seeing him again sooner than you think."

Stomping over to her, Gianna screamed and cried as he yanked her head backward. Placing his gun under her chin, his eyes were wild and filled with anger. "I'll blow you away right now, you old bitch. Open your mouth. Let's see how much shit you

talk when there's a bullet lodged in your throat.

"Wait!" I shouted and ran over as he tried to stuff the barrel between her lips. "If you kill her?—"

Whap!

"You don't speak to me!" he bellowed as the windows shook. Slapping me to the floor, I grabbed my cheek as I cried silently. "I will kill all of you!"

"If you kill them, what good will that do us?" Lew stepped over me and cautiously approached Chandler. "We need them alive for the money and to get your girl back. She ain't coming if you off her mother."

Glaring at each of us while still holding his gun to Rosalyn's lips, he grunted as he pushed her head back. Hovering over me, I held my breath at what was coming next. "Get them fed and cleaned up. We have some calls to make."

With ringing ears, blurry vision, and a huge incoming headache, I watched him walk out the door with Lew on his heels. He didn't even speak up or help me when Chandler put his hands on me. Shakily, I stood to my feet.

"You remember that ditch you spoke of?" Rosalyn asked as she comforted a weeping Gianna. "When you dig that hole for me, dig one for yourself too."

I chose not to respond to her because she was right. I was in way over my head with Chandler, and Lew was too blinded by his hunger to be in control. He couldn't even protect me from that psychotic man; there was no way he would have the balls to run a drug empire. I feared Chandler was going to kill me right along with everyone else if his demands were not answered soon.

For the first time since all of this shit started years ago, I was beginning to regret my actions and choices. The only person who could help me now was Skip. Sadly, all of my wrongdoings and ill intentions have probably burnt that bridge. I was sure by now that he'd discovered I was involved with all of this ruckus. Looking over at my trembling daughter, I prayed that he would find a sliver of forgiveness for me because his daughter and Rosalyn were not the only ones needing to be saved.

“Gia, I’m about to run out for a minute! I’ll see you when I get back in!”

Rolling my eyes, I listened as the front door slammed behind Lew. It was barely noon on a Friday, and he was headed out to God knows where. As far as I knew, he didn’t have any affiliation with anyone here in Florida other than Chandler. When we first got here, and Chandler dumped us at this house, Lew and I stayed put, ordering food through Uber Eats and binging on Netflix as we watched over Rosalyn and Gianna in the basement. After the first week, Lew started getting uneasy, calling Chandler constantly, only for him to tell us to sit tight until he came back.

Once he came back, I quickly found out Lew and I had made a deal with a devil. It'd been another two weeks, and that demon had shown us on more than one occasion he wasn’t here to be friendly. He’d made it clear that he was in charge, and Lew had positioned himself to be on Chandler’s side, completely neglecting me. I felt dumb as fuck and stupid as hell. I’d been loyal to Lew for years, and the minute he felt he was close to getting the power he craved, he no longer felt the need to give that loyalty back.

“I’m going up to stretch my legs.” I stood from the chair and eyed Rosalyn. She’d gotten mouthy with Chandler again about her children, and he’d roughed her up pretty good. We had to keep Gianna drunk on Benadryl because all the damn crying was going to get her killed. “Do you need anything?”

“The only thing I need is to make sure I look my best for your homegoing celebration

when my eldest gets his hands on you.” She smirked as best as she could with her busted lip. “Word around town... my son owns a nice gator pit in the swamps. I’m sure he’s going to have fun with you.” She tapped her chin as she appeared to be thinking. “Then again... I might let Jules handle you. My boy has always been deep in with his Haitian roots. I’m sure a little chant here and a potion there will have you chirping like the bird you are in no time.”

“Fuck you!” I spat, trying to act as if I was unfazed when, in reality, I was scared. I didn’t know the men she spoke of, but she’s been pretty confident about what they were capable of since we all arrived in Florida. “You’d better hope you live to see them again the way Chandler keeps beating your ass.”

“Hmm...” She nodded as she slid down on the bed as best as she could. Her hand was still cuffed to the headboard, and although I knew she was uncomfortable, she never let us see it.

Chandler wouldn’t allow her or Gianna to bathe, so the basement was starting to smell. I’d had to bring a fan down that I’d found upstairs in a closet to get some better circulation going because the tartness was making me sick. Chandler told me that he preferred I stay in the basement with Rosalyn and Gianna, not wanting them to be left alone, but fuck that. The main levels of the house were nice, with four big-ass bedrooms and three full baths. I was laying my head on a bed regardless of what that monster said. While I didn’t express my disagreement for fear of being beaten, I’d broken the “no upstairs” rule every time I was left alone with the girls and, of course, at night once they went to sleep. For the last four days, though, Chandler has been showing up randomly, multiple times a day, so I’d been confined to the basement since Monday.

“Close the door on your way out,” Rosalyn called out as soon as I made it to the stairs. “I’m going to need my beauty sleep for the show my babies are going to put on when they get their hands on y’all.”

I stared at the back of her head momentarily when she turned her back to me. So badly did I want to take one of the bricks in the corner and smash her skull, but I didn't want to face Chandler's wrath for killing her. He'd made it clear that I was not allowed to hurt them, although he took no pause in hitting on Rosalyn whenever he could. I'd realized that Rosalyn had every right to talk her shit, but that didn't stop me from smacking her, too, when she tried to interfere with me disciplining Gianna. I was more mad at Lew at this point, but I wasn't about to beat on his big ass. Gianna cried for her daddy and Noemi all damn day, and every time she did, I would tear her ass up before dosing her with the Benadryl. Turning back to look up the stairway, I started marching up, planning to sit on the porch for a little bit until lunchtime.

"Lew is fuckin' filthy..." I groaned when I saw the state of the main living areas. Takeout boxes and liquor bottles were spread all over the floor and kitchen counters. Looking around the wall to the living room area, I could see that Lew had been having the time of his life. There was so much trash everywhere that I knew Lew was the culprit because it was not a new sighting. He was never tidy in our old apartments or hotel rooms. I was always cleaning up behind him whenever I left him alone for more than a few hours. However, surveying the mess again, I knew he couldn't have done this alone. In some areas of the living room, trash had piled up, suggesting multiple people contributed to this mess. I guess that was why Chandler had been coming over more. He and Lew must've been bonding for real, and Lew was really going to be the biggest drug dealer in Milly Grove now. I didn't know where that left me, though, because the last three weeks really had me looking at my relationship with Lew as a joke.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“I didn’t sign up for this shit!” I fussed as I grabbed a trash bag and began to clean. “I hope this shit ends soon because I don’t know how much more I can take. I can’t keep?—”

Picking up the trash from the floor, I noticed an used condom under the kitchen table. Anger and hurt filled my heart and soul instantly. I could’ve been overreacting on my assumptions, but my gut was telling me it belonged to Lew. Only his dog ass would throw his used condom on the floor.

I’d sacrificed so much to be with him, but to know he would be so careless as to fuck someone while I was putting my life on the line for him to come up told me just how much I meant to him. I was already over this shit with the way he was letting Chandler rough me up and talk to me like I was trash, but him fucking bitches right above my head was next level. Dropping the trash bag to the floor, I grabbed my things and the keys to my Camry. Chandler didn’t want my car here, but I refused to be stranded anywhere for times like this. He also made it clear that he didn’t want us using phones, and until recently, I complied, but fuck that shit too. I needed to check in with my people because I was over this for real this time, and it was time for me to head home.

“To hell with them all!” I huffed as I finally made it to the main highway. Thank God for Waze because I had the slightest clue where I was. “I should call Skip and sell his ass out!”

No later than the words left my mouth, a slow grin began to form on my face. Looking from the highway at my phone, I went to my contacts app, unblocked Skip’s number, and prayed he picked up. It rang so long that I started to give up hope until

his raspy voice flowed through my speakers.

“Who the fuck is this?” he all but growled as he answered. “Talk fast before you piss me off.”

“Damn, baby daddy! I figured after all of this time... you would be happy to hear from me.” I chuckled, knowing I was the last person he wanted to hear from. “I was hoping that after all of this time, you would be a little less angry. I heard you were in an accident, and I wanted to check on you.”

Hearing my low-fuel sensor ding, I cursed myself for not checking it sooner. My car was an older model and making it to the nearest station before it cut off was not likely. Pulling over, I decided to search for a gas station on my GPS before I continued to drive aimlessly.

“Where the fuck is my daughter, Gia?” he shouted, snapping me from my thoughts once I parked on the side of the country road. When I thought of Florida, I thought of palm trees and sunshine. It was gloomy as fuck here, and the mosquitoes were bigger than I was. I needed to get the hell away from here. “Is she okay?”

“She’s fine...” I waved him off, placing the phone on speaker so I could search for a gas station. “She’s a fuckin’ brat that cries for her daddy every day. The old broad has been taking care of her, but that’s the one who’s really on borrowed time. Chandler—” Snapping my mouth and eyes shut, I cursed myself for talking so much. I didn’t know if Chandler had made himself known to them or not, and I could have just ruined it for everyone.

“Tell me where you are, Gia, and I might think about killing you quickly,” he spoke eerily as his background grew quiet. “You shot at me and my girl, then you snatched my daughter. Tell me where the fuck Gianna and Noemi’s mother are and?—”

“How dare you have that bitch around my child, Skip?” I got out of the car and slammed the door behind me. “Did that whore tell you she’s married?”

I didn’t know what it was, but his calling her “his girl” did something to me. No one deserved to have his heart the way I did. I’d been following them from afar since the night they left Club Honey, and the way he handled and cared for her let me know he liked her. Skip was never affectionate with women; it had taken him months to even show me an ounce of tenderness, but the way he catered to her told it all.

“Who the fuck are you calling a hoe, you deadbeat-ass bitch?” a female’s voice blared in my ear suddenly. “When I get my hands on you, I’m going to dog walk you before I put a bullet between your eyes. I’m going to show you just what this whore can do. You better ask Chandler about his so-called wife and what she did to the last bitch that pissed her off.”

Hearing Skip tell her to chill before a slapping sound echoed angered me. This nigga was flirting with her while I was on the phone instead of looking for my child and his daughter.

“How dare you parley with her when you need to be worried about your child? Maybe she is better off with me and my family instead of you.” Walking back over to get into my car, I decided to head back to the house until the fellas came back. I changed my mind that quickly, and now I wanted Skip and his bitch gone again. “Maybe I’m the better parent since it’s obvious your concern lies with getting your dick wet.”

Turning the ignition, I could scream at the car not cranking. I knew it was about to storm from the dark clouds that suddenly appeared in the sky, and my car had either broken down or run out of gas. Tears of frustration streamed down my face as I hit the steering wheel repeatedly.

Forgetting that Skip was still to my ear, his menacing chuckle startled me. “Gia, I’m not sure what type of inclination I gave you that I was a simp-ass nigga, but I apologize. When I get my hands on you, you better hope the devil in Hell steps in and swoops you away because I have plans for you, baby. By the way... check your phone. You said Gianna is better off with you and your family? Imagine that.”

Hearing the beep signifying the call was disconnected, I noticed I had several attachments from Skip. Opening them, I gulped as tears ran down my cheeks. Multiple photos and links to news articles showed how my cousins and aunt were killed in a house fire. What made me physically sick were the images of their unrecognizable charred bodies.

“Argh!” I opened the car door, throwing up everything I had on my stomach. “Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh!”

Locking up the car doors, I had no choice but to leave it and walk back to the house. I wrapped my arms around myself and cried for the family I had lost. They didn’t deserve what Skip did to them, and I knew when he got his hands on me, it would be way worse. I shouldn’t have ever reached out to him about Gianna. I should have aborted her and saved myself the drama I was going through right now.

I was feeling like shit when thunder clapped in the distance, and rain began to pour down on me. Feeling defeated, I slumped my shoulders and trekked toward the house in the storm. With the relentless downpour, I could barely see where I was going, but I felt hopeful when I saw two headlights approaching. I ran over as the outline of a SUV stopped in the middle of the road. I was praying they would give me a ride and was ready to do whatever to get out of the rain. Hearing the passenger door open, I was ready to plead until the voice I heard sent chills down my body.

“Now... can you tell me exactly who you were calling a hoe? I want to make sure I heard you correctly, love.”

Leaning forward into view, Skip smiled from the driver's seat as I looked into the face of Noemi. Shaking my head profusely, I sobbed, knowing my luck had run out. It was going to take a miracle for me to make it out of this predicament alive. The way karma had been tearing me up in just the last few weeks, I was aware that the chances of staying alive were slim to none.

“Based on the satellite footage in the area, no one has been in or out of the house since she left,” Noemi said as we exited her Porsche Cayenne.

We'd been in Florida for two days now, trying to find leads on where Chandler could have been with Noemi's mother and my baby girl. When we got a hit from tracking Gia's phone, we knew she'd finally turned it on. What shocked us all was when the dumb bitch called me, allowing Noemi to find her exact location even faster.

Walking past her brothers and cousin, we made our way onto the porch of a nice-sized, two-story house. It was secluded entirely by trees that looked to have been here for centuries. My best guess was that whoever built this house wanted it to be out of sight from passing travelers. Taking a deep breath, I prayed that my daughter was okay. Not only my baby but Noemi's mother as well.

“What about the bitch in the trunk?” Luca asked as Rosier picked the lock on the door. “You want us to leave her there?”

“Now, what fun would that be?” I called out over my shoulder. “Grab the bitch and bring her inside.”

Hearing the lock on the door click, we all removed our guns from our waists and eased our way inside. I frowned instantly at the filth that met us. The house was a basic family home, but it looked as if they had been partying, as if they weren't living on borrowed time.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“Where do you want us to sit her?” Luca asked as he came into the house with a defeated-looking Gia. He was eager to spread out with everyone else to canvas the home. “We killing her now or what?”

Before I could answer, a loud thud came from the basement, followed by terrified screams. Bypassing everyone, I ran toward the kitchen, where I knew the entrance was located, and flew down the stairs as if my legs were wings. The sight before me damn near brought me to my knees.

“Get away from me!” Gianna cried as she tried to fight Jules off, as he did his best to remove her cuffs. “My daddy will kill you all!”

“Daddy’s here, baby girl!” I rushed over. Her eyes darted toward me at the sound of my voice. “Daddy is right here, Gi Baby.”

Weeping more now that she’d seen my presence, she reached for me right as Jules got her cuffs loose. Jumping into my arms, I held her tightly as she cried her little heart out. My baby was bruised, dirty, and smaller than she was when she was taken. Yet, the most important thing to me was that she was alive.

“I missed you so much, Daddy.” She locked onto my neck tightly as she sobbed. From the corner of my eye, I could see the guys and Noemi tending to their mother. “I don’t want to be with Mommy anymore.”

“You never have to be,” I assured her as I kissed all over her face. “Let’s get you out of here.”

“Wait!” She stopped me as I headed toward the basement stairs. “Where is Noemi? We have to get Mama Ros outta here too!” She looked around until her eyes landed on my girl. “Noemi!”

Wiggling from my arms, she jumped down and ran over to Noemi, slower than usual. My heart was bursting as I watched them hug and kiss all over each other. Seeing Noemi’s mother’s love for my baby as well had me thanking God that my baby girl was sheltered even while being mistreated. However, a slight pain in my heart was present as Gianna struggled to move her limbs. The more I witnessed her and Noemi’s mother struggle to hold themselves upright, the more enraged I became. A few people had signed their death certificates fucking with mine. Knowing I would be handling that very soon, I shook off the intense need to see bloodshed and stood to greet my future mother-in-law.

“I wish it were under better circumstances, but it’s nice to see you again.” I walked over and pulled Ma Ros into a hug. She looked so weak and tired but still beautiful. “It’s almost silly to ask, but how are you?”

She gave me a small smile and patted my cheeks. “I’ve had better days, son. I’m happy to see all of you, though.” She looked around at us all, and our eyes welled with tears at seeing her battered and bruised in the manner she was. “I know you all have things to handle, but Gianna and I need to get out of here. She needs a doctor to check her out because the only thing they’ve fed her these last few days was Benadryl.”

Hearing how they’ve been treating my daughter confirmed my observation of her lack of control. I looked over, and the way Noemi was clutching and rocking my daughter, I knew she felt the same way I did about needing to see bloodshed.

“I have a place in the city that’s closer than the compound,” Rosier stated through his clenched jaw. He pulled out his phone as he made eye contact with me. “I will have our doctor meet us there?—”

“Aye, Gia! Whose car is that out there? Who the fuck are you?!” We all jerked our heads upward as the voice boomed from above us. “Get the fuck away from my girl!”

“Looks like we have company...” Jules grinned as he leaned against the wall. “I can’t wait to meet the man who thought it was a good idea to help snatch up my mama.”

Before we could make a move toward the stairs, Luca and Trench were escorting Gia and her nigga Lew down them. Once his face came into view and his eyes met our smiles, they widened, damn near bulging from their sockets. Gia’s crying fell on deaf ears and soon would be silenced permanently.

“Well, hello, Lew.” I stuffed my hands in my joggers and walked over to him. I was itching to put them on him, but I wouldn’t do that with my child present—she had seen enough. “Long time no see, my boy. You’ve had me looking for you for a few weeks now.”

“Skip, please...” Gia began to beg as Luca held onto her arm. “I’m sorry for everything. Just let me go, baby, and you will never see me again.”

“Baby?” Noemi scoffed from behind me. “I got your muthaf?—”

“Daddy... Mommy said that they were going to call you for money and that she was going to laugh when they blew your brains out. She said she was gonna do the same to me or sell me to some bad men,” Gianna spoke up, causing Noemi to gasp. My eyes never left Gia, who appeared to be shocked at what her daughter was saying. “She said she didn’t want me and was going to make a new baby. I cried for you and Mi, Daddy, and all she did was hit me and tell me to shut up. When Ma Ros held me and took up for me, she slapped her and said mean things about Noemi too. She bad, Daddy. She not sorry at all.”

The room fell silent outside of Lew’s heavy-ass breathing. Footsteps could be heard

from beside me before Ma Ros came into view and walked over toward Gia. Although weak, the slap she connected to Gia's cheek was so powerful that we all heard her neck crack.

"That's for putting your hands on that little girl!" She spat angrily before smirking. "You remember that ditch I was telling you about? I changed my mind. I hope your final resting place is way worse." She grinned menacingly as Gia's tears continued to flow. Glancing over her shoulder, she looked back at her boys. "Y'all, come on and take me somewhere so I can shower. Also, I need to have a word with the masseuse who let Chandler into the spa to take me."

"Mama, you know that girl is already dead," Jules chimed in as he walked over and helped her toward the stairs. "I hope you're not too fond of your son-in-law because he's on his way out too."

"See, we're not even the ones y'all need to be taking your anger out on. We didn't have anything to do with the old broad getting snatched." Lew huffed as he looked between Rosier and me. "He's the one who was behind all of this. I just wanted some money."

"Noemi, take my baby outside," I called out to my girl. She was still holding onto my daughter. Looking from her to Gianna, I knew they were both hesitant about leaving me. "I'll be right up... I promise."

Sighing heavily, she nodded and tried walking past me. Grabbing her arm, I dropped a kiss on her lips before kissing Gianna's forehead. I stepped back and watched as they ascended the stairs, taking my heart with them.

"Skip! Baby?—"

"Shut the fuck up, Gia!" Lew snapped as he snatched from Trench. "Call that nigga

baby again and see what I do.”

“You ain’t gone do shit, nigga!” she yelled, charging toward him. “You’ve been fucking bitches in this house while I’ve been down here acting like a fucking caretaker! This is your fuckin’ fault.”

Having heard enough, I raised my gun, shooting them both in the foot. While Lew hopped around, howling and holding his foot, Gia dropped to the ground.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“Ah fuck!” he bellowed as his foot bled out quickly. “What the fuck, man?”

“While I wish I were able to sit around and torture you both, I need to go check on my daughter and mother-in-law.” Gia paused her wailing and frowned in disgust at my words. “Before I go... I just want to say... you both are getting off easy. What I really wanted to do was hang you both upside down until you died from the blood rushing to your head, but my boy here has other plans.” Just then, Luca reentered the basement with two big cages. “I wish I could stick around for the action, but hopefully, your suffering will be as great as I imagine.”

Setting the cages on the floor, Luca stepped back and opened them, releasing two of the deadliest rodents known to men: the African crested rat. We watched as they scoured the floor. Rosier told me the lethal rats typically did not attack humans, but they were big eaters and were extremely poisonous. As soon as the two maned rats realized the only food source down here was Lew and Gia, it was a wrap for them.

“They’re just here to do the legwork,” Rosier stated with pride as we began to leave the room. “By the time they’ve done their job, the timer on the other cage will go off, releasing their cousins to feast on the dead corpses. Trust me, I wanted you two to suffer more, but I have to go check on my mother and niece.”

“Your death won’t be nearly as quick as your family’s.” I smiled and winked at Gia as she hopped all over the floor with her bleeding foot, trying to avoid the rats as they circled around. “When you get to Hell, tell them I said, “Hello.”

Closing the basement door behind us, we listened as they squealed below. To me, their death was too easy, but that is something I can live with as long as the job is

done. I was hoping Chandler would come back and find their bodies. It would be the proof he needed to know his time was coming sooner than he thought.

“You good, man?” Rosier asked as we stepped outside the house and headed to the truck. “She’s your child's mother?—”

“Do you miss Ariana?” I asked, granting me the most sour look. “Exactly.”

Getting into the back of Noemi’s Porsche, I pulled my daughter into my lap and held her close. I could have lost my girl, but God saw fit for me to have a little more time with her. While I’m blessed and thankful to have her back, my job wasn’t done. Until I watch Chandler take his last breath, I won’t be satisfied.

My havoc in this city has yet to begin.

“Hey, Big Bri. I’m Princess Gi or Gi Baby.” We all sat and laughed as Gianna introduced herself to Dre’s daughter, Briley. “You can be my cousin if you want. My daddy has tea parties with me, but it would be nice to have it with girls sometimes too.”

“Yeah, I know...” Bri chimed in as she combed her doll’s hair. “My daddy plays with me, too, when Mommy doesn’t. He draws the line at letting me paint his nails.” Looking over at Dre, she frowned in confusion. “Daddy, why don’t you let me paint your nails like Uncie Jerome?”

“Because Jerome is a sis?—”

“Okay, girls!” Denim placed her hand over Dre’s mouth as she came in from the kitchen. “I just made some fresh ice cream. Would you like to try it out?”

Jumping from the floor and abandoning their toys, they ran into the kitchen with RJ

doing the same. We decided to let the kids get to know each other because it was evident that we would be family soon. From this simple interaction, I could tell they were going to be thick as thieves. We've been staying on the compound with Noemi before going back to the Grove. I did let Gianna FaceTime my family because they've been dying to lay eyes on her, especially her Uncle Wild. I wasn't in a rush to leave since Ma Ros had told us about Gianna being doped up, but the doctors had cleared her more than once, stating she was fine and would continue to be fine. She'd been asking to sleep in the bed with Noemi and me for the past few nights, and I had no objections. I would do anything to assure my baby that she was safe.

"Baby, lunch is ready if you're hungry." Mi came from the kitchen, looking as beautiful as ever. She had been quiet these past few days, and I didn't like it. "You want me to fix you something?"

"Come here." I waved her over, patting my lap, as her brothers looked on. Hesitantly, she looked from me to her brothers. "Noemi..."

Dropping her head, she complied. Confusion spread across her brothers' faces as she timidly sat in my lap. Placing my finger under her chin, I lifted her gaze to meet mine. Tears pooled in her eyes, and as soon as one fell, Jules was on his feet in an instant.

"Man, what the hell is wrong with you, Noemi?" He came stomping over like he was ready to cast a spell. "Tell me right now, or I swear to you?"

"You all hate me..." She covered her face and began to bawl. "All of this is my fault! Had I just stayed with Chandler, none of this would have happened. Mama was beaten... beaten! I'm so sorry!"

Wrapping my arms around her, I placed kisses all over her face, allowing her to get it all out. By now, all of the ladies, including her mother and the kids, had come

running back into the living room. Her sobs were becoming unbearable, and I needed her to stop.

“Noemi, I need you to chill, baby,” I said, pleading with her. Pushing her back slightly, I waited until she moved her hands from her face to look at me. “No one is mad at you. Why would you think that?”

“Look at my mother’s face...” She stood and pointed. Ma Ros bruises were healing, but they were still visible. “He put his hands on her as if she were filth! He should never have been able to do that! He wouldn’t have done that if it weren’t for me. Rosier won’t even talk to me?—”

“Hey, hey!” His eyes bulged as he walked over and pulled his sister into his arms. “I’ve been in my head, Mimi, but I promise you... it has nothing to do with you. I’m the leader of this family, so all of this falls on me. I should have never offered you to that nigga. I should have killed him the day I saw the love you had in your eyes for Skip. I knew then that you were never supposed to marry Chandler’s bitch ass.” He kissed her forehead before looking into her eyes. “You are my baby sister—my heart. I love you more than life, Noemi. That nigga shouldn’t have ever been able to get that close to my mama in the first place, and that’s on me.”

“I made sure to off everyone who had a hand in helping him,” Dre chimed in. “I didn’t care if they were grocery shopping, picking their kids up from school, or leaving church. All them bitch-ass niggas and shiesty-ass hoes fell like flies.”

“Oh my gosh!” Denim groaned as she rounded up the kids. “I’m a federal agent; I don’t need to hear this. Come on, kids.”

“My daddy don’t play,” Bri spoke proudly, causing us all to laugh. “Come on, Gi Baby... let’s go beat RJ in a bike race.”

Grabbing her hand, they took off running to the side patio door. Upon reaching it, Gianna let her hand go and ran back to Noemi. Wrapping her arms around her legs, she looked up and gave her the brightest smile.

“I love you, Noemi, and I don’t want you to be sad. You and my Jordie saved me, and I want us to be together forever.”

Running back off, fresh tears ran down her face. “I almost made you lose her.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“No, you helped save her,” Ma Ros stated before I could. “That little girl sang your praises the entire time she was with me. She knew her mother helped the bad men get her, and she knew her best friend, Mimi, was going to save her.” She pulled her daughter into her arms. “Look, baby... this isn’t on anyone except for the people who did it. From what I gathered, Gia and her man wanted money that wasn’t coming quickly enough. They were plotting to hurt Jordan all along, and Chandler offered them an easier way. I’m sure they’re looking up right now, regretting their choices in Hell.”

“Mama!” Noemi gasped. “Since when do you talk like that?”

“Since they thought it was a good idea to fuck with me and my kids.” She winked and patted my cheeks. Looking over at Rosier, she frowned. “I want you to stop blaming yourself too.” She pointed and chastised him. “You’re a great leader when it comes to this family, and I know your father is proud—I sure as hell am.” Glancing over at Jules and Dre, they were smiling from ear to ear. “What the hell are y’all goofy asses grinning for?” Their smiles dropped instantly. “Go wash up and come eat. The girls and I cooked all that food, and it ain’t going to waste.”

Running to do what she said, we all chortled. Hugging me, she kissed my cheek and retreated to the kitchen. The three of us stood in silence for a moment before Noemi said, “I guess I was a little dramatic just now. I’m sorry.”

“Tell me something new.” Rosier rolled his eyes, grabbing his keys. Glancing over at me, he nodded. “You ready?”

“Yeah.” Peering down at my watch, it was a little after five in the evening, and we

had to get going. I grabbed my suit jacket and turned to Noemi. “I’ll be back, baby.” I dropped a kiss on her lips, but I could tell she had questions. “I’m just going to handle a little business. I love you.”

“I love you more, Jordan.” She grabbed the sides of my shirt. “Please be careful.”

Getting into the car with Rosier, we left the compound on a mission. Chandler thought he was safe from my wrath, but he couldn’t be more wrong. When I said I wasn’t leaving this city until I got my hands on him, I meant that shit.

“You know you don’t have to do this, right?” I spoke and pulled from my blunt as Rosier drove us closer to the city. “You’re a very important man in this town—I’m not. I don’t give a fuck about the backlash that comes with what I do.”

“Your brother is the city official.” He glimpsed over at me as he pulled from his own blunt. “I don’t give a fuck about these niggas. I might have an image to uphold, but all that shit goes out of the window when it comes to my family. The muthafucka snatched my mother.”

“He tried to kill my girl and my daughter.” I eyed him as he did the same. “I know you’re pissed and want revenge. You deserve to have that, but I want his blood on my hands for what he’s done.”

Pulling up to Gourneau Land and Harvesting Solutions, I appreciated the beautiful high-rise. Too bad it was about to be under new management and construction. Adjusting my jacket and Versace shades, I walked into the building just like the man I knew I was. I could hear the whispers as people stopped and stared, but that shit meant nothing to me. I was here for one reason and one reason only.

“Excuse me, but can I help you?” Some blonde and frail-looking bitch stepped near me when I stepped off the elevator. I’d gotten all the way to the top floor without

security or anybody else asking me who the fuck I was.

“Look here, Becky...” I removed my Versace gold-lensed sunglasses, and whatever she saw in my eyes caused her to step the fuck back. “Unless you want me to break you in half like the toothpick you look like, I advise you to get the fuck out of my way.” Looking around at the eyes that were peeping from over the cubicle walls, I nodded and smiled. “Y’all nosey muthafuckas can get this work too.”

Slamming back into their seats, the murmurs that could be heard moments ago were long gone. Giving my attention back to the receptionist, who was now beet red, I stepped to her slowly. “I’m going to ask you this question one time and one time only, Karen. It will serve you well to answer wisely and honestly. Okay?” She gulped slowly, dragging her eyes between Rosier and me before she nodded slowly. “Good. Where is Chandler?”

Tears flooded her eyes before she began to tremble. I was a patient man, so I crossed my hands in front of my waist and waited for her to speak.

“I-I don’t know,” she stammered. “He stayed at my house a few nights ago, and then, he just left. He’s a very busy man, and he’s under a lot of stress.”

“I assume busting in your mouth and on your face is how he relieves it,” Rosier spoke as he began to walk toward his office. “You don’t mind if I take a look inside, right?”

With me behind him, we entered Chandler’s office. The way it looked, you could tell no one had been here for a while. Going over to his computer, he powered it on and inserted the flash drive that Noemi sent to download his files.

“Hey! You can’t be on there.” I picked up the portrait of him and his family as another woman entered the office. “I’m going to have to ask you all to leave before I call security.”

“Does it look like I give a fuck about you or those mall cop-ass niggas.” I chuckled as I picked up a photo he had of Noemi. Removing it from the frame, I placed it in my pocket. “Tell me where your boss is, and I’ll leave.”

“He’s going through something personal,” she said as she entered the room. “His wife is— hey!” she called out to Rosier as he removed the drive. “You can’t do that! Give it to me!”

Aiming his Glock at her face, he nodded once she stopped moving. “The only thing I’m going to do is give your mother a closed-casket ceremony next week if you touch me.” Peering over at me, he nodded. “You ready?”

Nodding back at him, we calmly left the office. Chandler’s many employees scrambled to get out of our way. None of them dared to breathe or look our way. Back on the elevator, we were able to pop in and out without incident.

“Give me a second...” I tapped Rosier on the chest as we walked back to his truck. I eyed a familiar truck across the lot. “This won’t take long.”

Going our separate ways, I walked the pavement to my homie, Mayhem, exiting his Lambo. Pulling him into an embrace, I watched him as he leaned against his ride, scanning the area.

“You good?” he dapped me up as he pulled from his blunt that smelled exotic. “You still want to do this?”

“I wouldn’t have had you come to this muthafucka if I didn’t.” I smirked as I removed my Versace frames. “Show these niggas how we do it in the city.”

Looking around, I placed my shades back on as I walked back over to Rosier. I had no worries about anything occurring because once we’re gone, it’ll be like we were

never here. As I opened the passenger door, a loud whistling could be heard cracking throughout the sky before Chandler's building blew up and erupted in flames.

"Gah damn!" Rosier yelled as I slid inside. "What the fuck kind of shit y'all niggas on?"

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“About Noemi and Gianna, I’m turning everything into a warzone.” I got comfortable in my seat as I watched the orange flames and black smoke fill the sky. “Take me back to my girls. That fuck nigga still ain’t seen the last of me.”

“We’re reporting live from what’s left of Gourneau Land and Harvesting Solutions. While we aren’t certain of what happened, sources tell us that negligence on the owner’s behalf caused the explosion that left over one hundred of his employees dead. Details are scarce at the moment, but authorities say they’ve been looking for Chandler Gourneau. Now, Mr. Gourneau is not a suspect, but until he cooperates with authorities to mediate this horrific event, we are all left to wonder about the billionaire who was once a beloved community leader. Since the tragedy, Mr. Gourneau has been hit with several wrongful death lawsuits in just one week, and we, like the police, have been unable to reach for comment. If you happen to see him, the authorities are asking that you reach out immediately to the number below. Tom... back to you.”

Crash!

Having heard enough of the bullshit the news was reporting, I threw the bottle of Hennessy into the television screen, watching in anger as they both shattered to the floor. My life had become a shit show over the past couple of weeks, and I had no one but Noemi to blame.

“Son, what is the—” my mother shouted as she ran from the back room. “What on earth is going on?”

Panting heavily, I dragged my eyes over to her, causing her to recoil. Since the day I

went back to my property in Florida and discovered Gia and Lew's corpses, I've been in Haiti with my mother and sister. If I knew they were going to be such a bother to me, I would have left them behind.

"Mom, get the fuck away from me..." I hissed as I backed her into a corner. "If you're not going to help me with a solution, you're part of my fuckin' problems. And I'm up to my fuckin' ears with problems, Charlotte. Don't be the straw that breaks the camel's back."

Spinning on her heels, she hurried out of the small office. I took a moment to catch my breath. Standing in my family home on our native land in our home country was bittersweet to me. This is the first property that my father built for us—the home where he raised us. It was because of him and his honor that I've landed myself in this bullshit.

When I pulled up to Gia and Lew's home, payback and murder were the only things on my mind. I'd done my homework on them, and I knew for the right amount of money that I could get them to do anything. Finding out that they hated Skip didn't mean much to me; I just wanted him to suffer before I killed him and brought my wife back home where she belonged. Snatching her mother from the spa was a no-brainer, but it was something I hadn't thought through. Everyone I enlisted to help me had been casualties of a war I was now losing.

"Chandler," my sister stated timidly as she tapped on the door. "I was about to bathe, but Ralph is here, and he said it's urgent. He stated that he'd called your phone, but you didn't answer."

As I scanned my sister's half-naked body, I couldn't help but twitch with annoyance. She'd never been good for anything but using her body, and for what? Had she been able to hold on to Rosier the way I wanted her to, it would have been much easier to kill him for what he'd done to my father. This is her fault just as much as it is his, and

she has the black eye to prove it.

“Didn’t I tell you I didn’t want to see your face again while I was here?” I balled my fists up to prevent them from blacking her other eye as I walked over to her. The water falling down her cheeks pissed me off immediately. “Why the fuck are you in here?”

“Chandler, please!” she cried as she backed out of the room. “I was just telling you—ahh!”

“Where the fuck is the rest of my dope, Star?” I roared as I gripped her neck. “Did you take my shit?”

“What? No!” She shook her head, but I knew she was lying. “I haven’t been near your things!”

Grabbing the back of her hair, I dragged her back to her bedroom. I was past the point of caring about her and her mother. In my eyes, they were liabilities. Everyone who meant me no good had to go—even them. Kicking in the door to her room, I dragged her into the en suite bathroom. Seeing the steaming water filling the tub, I ignored her screams as I dunked her head first.

“I am sick and tired of you and your shit!” I shouted as I held her under the water while she fought to resurface. “You have done nothing for this family but cause us shame. You want to be a whore?” I laughed ominously as she waved her arms rapidly in hopes of getting free. “I’m going to show you what happens to whores!”

Getting behind her, I kicked her knees apart. Ripping the robe from her body, I bent her further into the water. If she wanted to slut herself out to every man she met without any real purpose, I was going to show her the consequences by fucking her like the whore she was. Right as her movements slowed from fighting me to get out

of the water, I unzipped my slacks and pulled my dick out as a knock interrupted.

“Boss,” Ralph called into the bathroom. Glancing over my shoulder, he looked from me to Star before continuing, “I need you to come ride to the fields with me. This shit is all bad.”

Grunting, I yanked Star’s head out of the water before the bitch drowned. I stood over her and tucked my dick back into my briefs before zipping my slacks up. She rolled to her side, sputtering and coughing, but I could see the horror in her facial expression.

“Clean this shit up before I get back.” I kicked her in the side, causing her to groan. “And tell Charlotte that dinner better be ready when I step foot back into this house.”

Grabbing my gun and keys, I followed Ralph out of the door and into his Ford truck. I didn’t see my mother on my way out, but I’m sure she was somewhere lurking as always. I knew without a doubt that the house would be cleaned with food waiting for me when I returned after the episode I’d just had.

“I got something for you in the glove box.” He nodded toward the compartment as he drove us through the countryside. From the direction we were going, I assumed we were headed toward my coca and marijuana farms. “It’ll help get your mind right.”

Smirking slightly, I opened it up and beamed at what I saw. It had been a few days since I was able to get a hit, and I was on edge. I had some of the purest dope around, and lately, it was the only thing that helped me cope with the shit surrounding me.

“This...” I placed three hits under my thumbnail and inhaled deeply. “This is just what the fuck I needed. The girls are driving me crazy on top of this shit with Mimi and my business being blown up. I swear to God, when I get my hands on that bitch, she’s dead.”

Ralph said nothing as he listened to me vent. From the time we were in middle school to now, he's the only constant I've had in my life. He was the closest thing to family, and he never judged me. Even after witnessing what was about to happen between Star and me, I knew he wouldn't judge or turn his back on me.

"You should have killed her when you got the chance." He grunted as he pulled us toward the gate leading to my farm property. "Now, we will all suffer because of it."

"What the fuck are you talking about?" I mumbled, closing my eyes as I pinched the bridge of my nose. The dope was kicking in, and I felt like I was in the clouds already. "I take good care of my team."

"There is no fuckin' team, Chan!" he roared, slamming on the brakes. "Everything attached to you is crumbling! Don't you see! Your selfish ways and sick obsession with the Boudreaux family is costing us everything!"

Waving him off, I opened the passenger door and stumbled out. It was hot as fuck out in Haiti today, and I was more than ready to get home. With the coke flowing through my veins, I was ready for something warm and tight to suffocate my dick. Star better hope one of the farmhands complied, or she'd be bent over again. Sister or not, she was a whore, and that is what whores were for.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“Where the fuck is everybody?” I mumbled as I walked over toward the main house. The majority of my workers lived on the property, and I was fine with it. It made it easier for me to harvest my plants for my drugs. “Somebody is getting... fired.”

As I entered the house, my words stalled in my throat at the sight of all the dead bodies. Sprawled over the furniture, dropped in the middle of the floor, hanging off the counters and stair railing, there were at least twenty people dead.

“This is just the lower level,” Ralph sounded from behind me. Glancing over at him, I could see the tears in his eyes as he looked around. When his eyes landed on one spot in particular, I swallowed the lump that had formed in my throat moments ago. His wife and son were lying on the kitchen counter, her holding him as if she thought that would save him from the bullets that had ripped through his torso. “There are more bodies upstairs as well as in the guest house. Children and dogs included.”

“Fuck...” I mumbled as I ran back outside, throwing up all I had eaten earlier today. “Fuck, man.”

“Yeah, fuck is right.” He came back on the porch with fire in his eyes. “My family is dead, and the fields are ruined, and for what? A woman who never even wanted you? Because your father left and never came back? Who’s to say the nigga is dead...” He walked over and pushed me, causing me to stumble. “All of this... for what? Fuck you, Chandler! Fuck you and your father! This is because of you!”

Listening to him curse my family’s name did something to me. For my entire life, I made sure he was well taken care of. How dare he forget that? How dare he be ungrateful when I’m the reason all of these degenerates ate?

Pow! Pow! Pow!

Shooting him in the face three times, I watched as his body hit the ground. One thing I wouldn't tolerate was disrespect from anyone. I had enough on my plate. If my best friend of twenty years wanted to turn his back on me, he could join his family.

Walking to the back of the house where the fields began, I couldn't help but wonder how my entire staff in Haiti was massacred. Was it Rosier? I knew it was him because that Mills nigga didn't have that type of pull. Then again, the cryptic messages and photos about my buildings said otherwise. Had I underestimated him? My heart thumped rapidly as I thought about the possibility of biting off more than I could chew. All thoughts of regret slipped my mind as soon as they came when I laid eyes on my barren fields.

"Nooo!" I screamed into the emptiness of the afternoon sky. "What the fuck?!"

Running from row to row, I looked on as all of my coca and marijuana plants withered away, completely destroyed. Dropping to my knees, I grabbed a fistful of soil and gagged at the smell—pesticides, herbicides, vinegar, and salt. Swiveling my head from side to side, I screamed as my entire field appeared to be demolished. There was no need to ask who had done this. In my mind, I already knew. Jumping up, I ran back to Ralph's truck. I needed to get the fuck out of here. Jumping inside, I fumbled with the keys to turn the ignition. Placing my hand on the gear to shift, the coolness of a barrel on my temple caused me to pause.

"Hello, husband..." I tugged my eyes to the rearview mirror, locking them with a beautiful and smiling Noemi. "I think it's time to talk about a divorce."

Fueled with fury, I turned to try and grab her from the back seat, but a blow to the head stopped me. Dazed, I looked around and noticed she wasn't alone. To the side of her was none other than Jordan Mills. Hearing her soft giggles, my vision began to

blur as I laid eyes on her again.

“Be nice, Chandler...” She bit her bottom lip before pulling him into her for a kiss. “My man doesn’t play about me.”

Before I could respond, the barrel of a gun hit my temple once more, causing everything to go black.

“I’m saying, Noemi... you could have called that nigga a bitch before calling him your husband. Let me find out you like his ass.” Groaning from the pounding of my head, I tried my best to pry my eyes open. I could hear Noemi’s giggles like the man speaking had told the joke of the year. “I’m a see if it’s funny when I give your husband a live show of me dropping dick off in you.”

“Fuck you, nigga,” I grunted out the words as my eyes struggled to open. When they did finally part wide enough, their blurry faces came into view. “Untie me and watch what I do, muthafucka.”

Mugging my wife as she straddled Skip, I watched as he tapped her thigh for her to move. Not wanting to, he gripped her neck and tongued her down so deeply that even I had to look away. Looking around, I noticed that they had brought me back to my home, and we were still in Haiti.

“Shit...” she moaned and squirmed in his lap. “Don’t start nothing you can’t finish, Jordan.”

“You know damn well that if I can’t do nothing else, I can make that pussy cream.” He pulled his bottom lip between his teeth as he gripped her ass. “Give me an hour, and I’m going to show you.”

Blushing, she scooted from his lap and stood in front of him. Her eyes zeroed in on

the tent in his shorts, and that pissed me off. She was in here acting as if I wasn't sitting here. The disrespect she'd shown me had been astronomical.

"Get the fuck away from her!" I bellowed, causing them both to glance my way. "I'm going to kill you, nigga."

Rocking back and forth in the chair, I tried my best to loosen the ropes he'd tied me with. His laughing only increased my anger. I could see Noemi becoming irritated as well, and that warmed my darkened heart some.

"Okay, Jordan... maybe we should leave well enough alone." She sighed before stepping between us. "This has gone on long enough. Honestly, can you give Chandler and me a minute to talk?"

"Talk about what?" he said, jerking his head to look at her. "It ain't shit to talk about. He's about to die, and you belong to me, Mi."

"He's still my husband!" she shouted, exasperated. "It's fucked up how I did him, and I owe him an explanation. We're still bound together under God."

Looking back and forth between us, I smirked at his irritation. That was one thing that he couldn't deny. This girl was Mrs. Gourneau. No matter what he and she had going on, she was still my fucking wife.

"Fine!" He threw his hands back and glared at her. "All of a sudden, you want to be a wife to that nigga, but you were just a hoe for me when you was taking this dick." He dragged his eye to me. "I don't give a fuck what she tells you, you're dying here today."

"We'll see." I grinned and winked as he left the room, leaving us. Fidgeting, she averted her eyes from me. That wasn't going to do. "Noemi..."

“I know you want to talk, Chandler.” She sighed heavily, bringing those pretty eyes to me.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

Maybe I can look into them as I fuck her before she dies.

“You’ve been out for a while, so let me feed you.” Frowning, she went into the kitchen. It was then that I smelled the food. Noemi has never been the domestic type, so I was hesitant when she came back with the pasta.

“Noemi, I don’t want that.” I eyed the steaming Alfredo as my stomach growled. Despite my hesitation, I couldn’t lie and say it didn’t look or smell good. “We both know you can’t cook.”

“Nigga, please. Your mother was cooking this when we came in. Speaking of... she was not happy with me.”

Dragging a chair before me, I watched as she forked the noodles, blowing away some of the steam. Her pouty lips caused my dick to stir, and food was the last thing on my mind.

“Where is she?” I eyed her as she brought the noodles to my mouth. “She and Star were supposed to be waiting on me when I got back.”

“You traumatized them, Chan.” She shook her head disappointedly, waiting for me to open my mouth. “They’re long gone...”

Holding my stare, I reluctantly opened my lips as she fed me. Chewing, I admit it was good as hell. Although the chicken had a different texture and taste, the sauce helped. There was some type of seasoning sprinkled all over it, giving it a horrible aftertaste, but it wasn’t unbearable. It was a good thing that my mother and sister were nowhere

in sight because I would have put my belt to ass for them fucking up my favorite dish.

“Here... eat the bread.” She held a piece of garlic toast to my lips. I wasted no time biting it. “It’s good?”

“Mhm,” I mumbled as I chewed. Maybe I have a concussion from the hits, and it’s fucking up my taste buds. Everything tasted off today. “I’m more interested in why you think being sweet to me after you played me is going to solve this mess you’ve created.”

Placing the plate in her lap, she reached to the side of her and grabbed the glass of my favorite drink: cherry Kool-Aid. Had she catered to me like this in the beginning, I would have been a little more selective with where I put my dick.

“Chandler... you played me at every turn,” she stated as she watched me drink. It was a little bit more bitter than I remembered from the last time Charlotte made it. “You called me out of my name, and you disrespected me to everyone, from my family to your whores. Why would I want you?”

“Noemi—”

“You tried to have me killed.” She angled her head at me, scanning my face. “What’s wrong?”

“It’s hot as fuck in here.” I twisted in the chair. “Fuck.”

“Must be those demons in you trying to break free...” She simpered as she stood from her seat. “My brother told me that it would happen. Here, let me help you.”

Coughing and gagging, I watched her as she retrieved a knife from the nearby table. I thought it was over for me as she reached behind me, but to my surprise, she cut me

loose.

“W-What did you do to me?” I reached for her, but she side-stepped my touch. “I’ll k-kill?—”

“Kill me? Yeah, you’ve been saying that for a while.” She smirked as she turned on her heels. “Come follow me to the sitting room; your family is waiting for you.”

Stumbling, I was barely able to walk straight as I wheezed and bumped into the wall, trying my best to follow her. My insides were boiling, and my throat was burning raw.

“Now that the gang is all here...” She smiled and spun around. “I feel like it’s time you properly introduce me to your family. Go ahead, hubs. Introduce me.”

Glancing around the living room, my eyes bulged in horror. My mother and sister were sitting on the sofa, side by side, bloodied, with their eyes and tongues missing.

“I always thought those bitches talked too much.” She kissed her teeth as she gestured toward them. It was then that Skip re-entered the room. “Oh! Hey, baby. I was just getting acquainted with the in-laws.”

“You’re really about to piss me off, Noemi.” He leaned against the wall and eyed me as I fell forward onto the loveseat. The walls were closing in on me, and I knew it. Spitting up blood was a clear indication that the end was near. “Hurry up so I can get my dick wet.”

“So rude.” She licked her lips seductively. “But I like that shit.” Turning back to me, her smile widened. “Back to you. Did you enjoy your dinner? Grinding those eyes and tongues took a lot of work, so I hope you can appreciate?—”

“Ughhh!” I bent over and regurgitated the entire meal. “What the fuck did you do?”

“Since I couldn’t make them eat their words, you did.” She shrugged, walking around the room. “None of you will ever disrespect me or my family again. You tried to kill me, my man, and my daughter. You should have known you were going to pay for that.”

Still throwing up, I looked into her dark eyes. The woman before me wasn’t the one I’ve known all these years. The one before me right now was darker than I could have imagined, and in that moment, I regretted ever thinking she was the perfect way to seek revenge against Rosier.

“I’m s-sorry.” I tried to stand and apologize, but she pushed me back down.

“I’m sorry,” she mimicked, picking at her nails. “That sorry shit doesn’t mean shit to me, my man, or a traumatized six-year-old. I want your soul, Chandler, and thanks to Jules, I will have it.” Leaning forward, she frowned as he eyed me. “You stink.” Standing straight, she stepped back from me. The room was spinning and getting gloomier. I could feel my insides scorching as blood began to seep from my eyes, nose, and ears.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“Oh, before I forget...” She walked over toward Skip but turned to address me. “That special seasoning on your pasta was homegrown, courtesy of your father’s femur. ” Her smile turned wicked. “When you get to Hell, tell your mother her roses wouldn’t grow over the past couple of years because the soil was tainted.” Glancing to the side of me, she winked. “Ain’t that right, Pop?”

Slowly, I turned to the side of me and released a gut-wrenching cry. The decomposed body of my father sat next to me. His body was covered in dirt, and I could tell he’d just been dug out of the ground. I turned to her, trying my best to move, but it was useless. I was paralyzed from whatever she had given me, and my lifeline was slipping away.

“My brother told me your father begged for his life like a bitch before it ended.” She laughed as she threw her arms around Jordan while he gripped all over her ass. “When you see him, ask him if avenging his death was worth causing yours.”

Gargling on my own fluids, my breathing became ragged. My tears mixed with the blood as I regretted every decision I’d made over the last few years. I hated that I agreed to marry Noemi because of my own vendetta, and I regretted trying to take out the man she called brother and the one she’d fallen in love with. My jealousy and delusion were the reasons I was sitting here dying from the inside out. The only thing I could do was pray death came quickly as I watched my wife drop to her knees before a man that wasn’t me.

Two Months Later

“Oh shit, Jordan. Just like that...”

Gripping her slippery thighs, I held Mi against the shower wall and fucked her relentlessly. Noemi attempted to bathe by herself this morning, so I was in the midst of punishing her for trying some slick shit. I guess she thought being on vacation gave her grounds to bathe alone. We didn't shower alone at home, and we certainly weren't doing it now.

"Like this?" I murmured into her neck, stroking her fast and deep. "Or like this?" Rotating my hips, I hit the one spot that drove her crazy every time I was inside of her. At times, I felt like Noemi loved my right curve more than she loved me. "Yeah, with the way you're gripping this dick, I think you like that better."

Pulling her right nipple into my mouth, I sucked firmly as I pounded her with everything I had. One thing I loved about sex with Noemi was that no matter how I wanted to fuck her, she was down for it. It didn't matter the time, place, or position; she was always ready and willing to spread her legs for her man.

"I love you so much, Jordan," she moaned into my ear as the water cascaded all over her body. "You make me so happy."

"I love you, too, Mama...." I grunted as I slid in and out of her, trying not to moan like a bitch. Mi's pussy was spectacular, and I was just about ready to do whatever to keep it close to me at all times. "I can't wait to make you my wife. I want to spend the rest of my life showing you how much you mean to me. I want to always be there to provide for and protect you, baby." I could feel her walls hugging me tighter as she dug her stiletto nails into my shoulders as I slammed in and out of her. "You have my entire heart, Noemi, and I don't want that shit back. I want a family with you. I want forever with you."

"Oh shit, baby!" she screamed out in pleasure. "I'm about to come!"

"Can I come in my pussy, baby?" I gripped her thighs, feeling my dick expand as her

pussy became even more snug. The way I was fucking this girl, I clearly had a hidden agenda to rearrange her entire insides. “Tell Daddy it’s his, and he can come all in his shit.”

“It’s yours, baby! Come all in your pussy!”

No sooner than she said the words, we were both shaking and releasing together. I held onto her closely as she shook like a wet cat in my arms. My dick pulsed endlessly as I gave this girl all I had. If it were up to me, she would be carrying my son back home by the time this trip was over.

“I know they’re down there talking about us.” She smiled lazily as I placed her on her feet. Her swaying back and forth made me chuckle. “Don’t laugh at me, Jordan. My legs feel like noodles.”

“I can always sit you back on this dick.” I bit my bottom lip as I eyed her naked body. “We could always ditch them jokers and spend the day in the room. I want to spend some much-needed quality time with that pussy you said was mine.”

Watching her blush as she continued to shower meant the world to me. Seeing her happy and carefree is what I always wanted for her. The last few months have been rough, but we made it through that shit. If I had to go through trying times, I wouldn’t want anyone by my side but Noemi. I loved my brothers and knew they would get in the field with me, but when shit gets sticky, it’s something about my girl having my back that made me feel complete. Granted, I would never put her in a position where she’s busting guns beside me but knowing she could made me love her even more.

“Whatever you want to do is fine with me, Daddy.” She stood on her tiptoes and kissed my lips. “Before we do that, we need to at least pretend we want to spend time with them. Jules and Wild have been pains in my entire ass since arriving in Barbados.”

Making small talk with stolen kisses, we finished our shower and got dressed. When the smoke settled, literally, from everything we had going on, we decided to get our families together for a very necessary vacation. All of our mothers clicked immediately, and you would think they had been best friends for years with how they doted on the kids and spent all our money shopping for things no one needed. The kids were acting the same. Big Bri and my Gi Baby referred to themselves as sisters, while RJ was the overbearing big brother. Harley, Gabby, Bridgette, and Denim were at various stages in their second and third pregnancies. I tried to stay the hell out of their way because if I was going to deal with a hormonal woman, it was going to be my own.

“It’s about time you got the fuck off my sister and brought your ass down here.” Jules belted out the snide remark as soon as we reached the bottom of the staircase. “Y’all can do all that hunching and shit when you get back home.”

“Jules, leave them alone...” Bridgette mused as she walked past him. Everyone decided to eat breakfast outside this morning since the weather was nice. “Didn’t you just have your head under my dress before we came down here?”

Grinning like a kid at Christmas, we laughed at that fool as he wiggled his brows at his wife. We had an entire property to ourselves, with enough rooms for even the kids to have their own. Looking out over the beach, our kids had their grandmothers running behind them while the catering company continued to set up the food. We didn’t want any of the women lifting a finger on this trip if it didn’t consist of swiping a credit card or flipping through bills.

“It’s so nice out here,” Noemi spoke in awe as she tried to take a seat beside me. I wasn’t having it, so she blushed when I pulled her into my lap. “I wish we could stay here forever.”

“Nope. Unt, unt,” Wild objected as he shook his head. “I have a business to run and

so does Wild. If y'all move out here, I'm living with y'all because there's no way I'm letting y'all take Princess Gi from a nigga. She and AJ are the lil' homies, and Unc ain't living without them."

"You just want our kids to help you on your pussy patrol." Uno chuckled as he sipped his water, causing Harley to frown. "We're about to ban you from being around our kids."

"Imagine Mama having that shit." Uno gave Wild the middle finger, causing Wild to throw a biscuit at his head.

"Oh, I'm telling my mama on you, nigga!" Uno said with a smirk, and I laughed silently because he always did that. He knew Mama favored him since he was the oldest.

Wild shrugged as if he didn't care, but I knew better once Uno jumped from his seat and jogged the short distance to where our mothers were across the beach. Once he stood in front of our mom, he pointed at his head before turning to point at Wild. Seeing Mama frown and look between the two boys, she placed her hand on her hips and stomped Wild's way.

"Ah, shit!" Wild yelled before taking off into the house. We lost it as my mother chased him and began fussing about her grown-ass baby, Kenneth. This grabbed my father's attention, and he did what he always did.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“Kenneth, you are the oldest. Why must y’all involve my wife in y’all shenanigans?”

“Pops, that don’t even be me... Wild be living up to his name,” Uno rebutted, which did nothing but make my dad fuss some more.

Listening to my mama chase behind Wild and my father lecture Uno had me in stitches. This was life for me, and now I was able to share it with Noemi.

“Oh my gosh!” Mi laughed as she wiped her tears. “I needed that laugh.”

“That’s what you have to look forward to for the rest of your life, baby.”

Upon hearing my words, it seemed as if everyone fell silent and looked our way. With her eyes searching mine momentarily, she dropped her gaze. Lifting her chin, I brought them back to mine. “What’s wrong?”

“I don’t doubt your love for me—I never have.” She gave me a small smile. “Even when you weren’t trying to be more than friends. Ugh! I gave you all the signs that I wanted you to beat this?—”

“Aye!” Rosier yelled, causing us to simper. “Don’t piss me off, Noemi.”

“Whatt?” She giggled. “I just love my man, big brother.” She threw her arms around my neck, kissing my lips. “You’ve made me the happiest I’ve ever been in my life, Jordan. I no longer have to sit and pray about finding a man who loves me like my brothers love their wives. Now, I have something better... I was blessed with someone tailor-made for me.”

“So why the long face?” I asked as I shifted her further onto my lap. She always got my dick hard when she talked about how much she loved me. Being here with family didn’t change the way we expressed our feelings and love for one another. “What’s the real issue, Mi?”

“How can we talk about forever when I’m still attached to Chandler?” Hearing that fuck nigga’s name caused me to growl. “Calm down, babe. I know I should’ve already sorted it out, but that nigga is dead, and my main concern has been you and our family. Also, how would it look if I remarried so soon after his death?”

Although I didn’t agree with what she was saying, I respected it. She had an image she wanted to uphold, and even though his death was ruled a murder-suicide, she still didn’t want to be ridiculed by the public.

“I can help with that...” Jules wiped his mouth as he finished eating. By now, Wild was back at the table, frowning from getting his ass beat. The rest of the family was coming up from the beach to get some cooler air from the outdoor airconditioning unit. “As the one who officiated the wedding, I may or may not have forgot to get you two to sign the marriage license.” He smirked mischievously. “So technically?—”

“I was never married to Chandler... I was never married to Chandler!” She jumped from my lap and shouted once she realized she was always as free as a bird. “I never carried his name!”

“In that case...” I stood behind her, dropping to one knee. Spinning around, she gasped in shock when I revealed the seven-carat, princess-cut diamond ring from my pocket. I knew I was proposing during this trip, and this seemed like the perfect time. “Marry me, Noemi.”

“Why?” she whispered as tears ran down her face. “Tell me why you want to marry

me, Jordan.”

Noemi has always been a lover at heart. She portrayed to be this hardcore boss bitch, but at the end of the day, she wanted to be a soft woman and live a soft life. I wanted to give that to her—I was the man who was willing and ready to give that to her.

“You’re the most amazing woman I’ve ever met in my life outside of Evelyn Mills,” I peered up at her and spoke honestly. I heard my mama gasp in the crowd, and my heart filled with pride at having her and everyone else here to witness me pour my heart out. This was a once-in-a-lifetime speech about to take place, and you could hear a pin drop as everyone held their breath in anticipation of what else ole mute Skip had to say.

“You spent many nights on the phone with me, talking about how you were willing to neglect your own happiness to bring peace to your family. Your loyalty to those you love is unmatched. Your commitment to being someone with a good heart and opting to see the good in everyone, even though life has shown you how low-down dirty people can be, sparked something within me. I tried to be your friend, Mi, but I fell in love with you. I fell in love the moment you thought taking me to an arcade was a perfect date night and how my name meant nothing to you, just as your name meant nothing to me. I don’t care about the reputation your brothers have. I don’t care about who my family is supposed to be and the image that comes with being a Mills. I will go to war with any man, woman, or child walking this earth when it comes to being with you. You know how I’m coming behind you.”

I paused as a thought came to mind. “That’s another thing too.... You love Gianna. You stood ten toes for my daughter, Noemi... that’s some shit her own mother wouldn’t even do. My Gi Baby wakes up in the morning looking for you before she even thinks about saying hello to me. You’re kind and supportive. You’re gentle but strong. You talk your shit and walk in it, looking sexy as hell while doing it. You ain’t afraid get in the field with me. Let us not forget the way you take this?”

“I’m killing this nigga.” Rosier gritted his teeth as she tried to reach over the table and grab him. Gabby slapped his chest, making him sit down. We all shared a laugh, and I smirked at Rosier because I loved getting under that nigga’s skin.

Looking back into Noemi’s eyes, which were overflowing with tears, I continued, “You a nigga’s best friend, Noemi. That’s why, baby. That’s why you’re going to be my wife. You deserve the moon, the stars, hell... the universe. It’s war about you... always.”

She dropped to her knees, placing her hands on my cheeks. “You saved me, Jordan. You saved me from a life of hurt and misery.” She wiped the lone tear that slipped down my cheek. “I no longer have to dream about a happily ever after—I’m living it. I love you, Jordan. Now and forever. Just like you know how I’m coming behind you, I’ll never have to question how you’re coming about me. And because of that, there’s nothing more I want in this world than to become Mrs. Mills.”

Slamming my lips onto hers, our families clapped and cheered. I stood to my feet, bringing her with me, before sliding the ring on her finger. She beamed through her tears as the ladies pushed me out of the way to get a look.

“You did good, son,” my father said as he walked over, slapping my shoulders. “Noemi is a good woman.”

“A great woman.” I nodded, watching as she scooped Gianna in her arms and kissed all over her. “It doesn’t get any better.”

“I now pronounce you husband and wife. I guess you can kiss my sister, nigga.”

Darting my eyes to Jules, I didn’t have time to be annoyed about his bullshit as I pulled my wife into my arms and tongued her down. Once she agreed to be my wife, I didn’t want to leave this island without making it happen. It took us two days to get

everything together for our ceremony. I can now say Noemi Boudreaux—excuse me—Mills was mine in every way possible.

“I love you so much, Mr. Mills,” she said through a smile between small pecks. “You’ve made me so happy.”

“I plan on doing that until the day I die, Mrs. Mills,” I stated honestly. In her eyes, I saw all the love she had for me. “Even after.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

“Daddy!” Gianna came running over with her cute, little white dress that matched Noemi’s. “Now that you and Mommy are married, are we going to live together forever when we get home? She won’t have to leave us again, right?”

Two days ago, when I asked Noemi to marry me, Gianna asked if she would be her new mommy and if she could call her that. Of course, Noemi cried and told her she could call her whatever she wanted. We took the time to explain to her that her mother was gone and was never coming back. My daughter wasn’t the slightest bit sad about the news. If you were abused and mistreated by the one who was supposed to love and protect you, I assume you wouldn’t be sad either.

“She sure is, baby girl.” I kissed her face, causing her to squeal. “We’re going to surprise her with a big house when we get back home.” Glancing over at Mimi, I watched her and smirked as she received love from both of our families. They all played a part in making our impromptu beach wedding a success, and I appreciated them all. I would do anything for her to live in this moment forever. “Can you keep that a secret?”

“I won’t tell, Daddy! I promise!” She held her pinky out to me before wiggling out of my arms and running over to Big Bri. I chuckled once I saw her whisper in her ear because I knew for sure she was telling her the secret.

“Welcome to the family.” Rosier walked over, pulling me into his embrace. “Thank you for loving my sister the way you do. I don’t know how I would have lived with myself had she gone through with the marriage to Chandler.”

“Well, we will never know, nigga.” I smirked, causing him to do the same. Looking

around, the sun was setting, and the real party was about to begin. “Let me make sure my wife enjoys her night so we can work on your nephew later.”

“Bitch—” Rosier placed me in the headlock, but I wrestled his big ass off me. “I’m sick of you, nigga.”

“Too bad this shit is for life, brother.” I chuckled and made my way over toward the rest of the family.

Tonight was a celebration of life and love. We paid for a live band for entertainment as well as more caterers. Noemi wanted steak and seafood, so I made sure we had it in abundance, plus alcohol. She would have to drink with us fellas tonight since all the women were knocked up. The way she and Dre were already throwing back shots, I knew I was in for a wild night.

“Thank you so much for all of this, husband.” Noemi giggled as she and I rocked to the band playing the Isley Brothers. “I’m in the fuckin’ clouds, and I never want to come down.”

“You’re married to a Mills, baby.” I winked as I gripped her ass. “You never have to.”

There was a time when I didn’t think love would ever be in the cards for me again. There was a time when I smiled maybe once a week. There was a time when I felt misunderstood and never tried to be understood. None of that was true anymore. As I peered down at my drunken wife with her head thrown back as she sang “For The Love Of You,” I thanked God she bulldozed her way into my life and my heart.

“Jordan, do you mind if I share a dance with my little cousin?” Dre walked over and interrupted. His eyes were glassy as hell. “I just want to tell her how proud I am of her. Also, thank you.”

“For what?” I frowned before kissing her forehead and letting her go.

“Giving her the love she’s always wanted.”

Nodding, I told my baby I was going inside to check on business. Money and Jerome were holding down the fort until I came back home. I had a bag for those guys because they have really stepped up and in for me these past few months.

“Bro...” Money answered as soon as the call connected. The voices in the background let me know he was on the block. “Are congratulations in order?”

“Hell yeah.” I smiled as I looked down at my diamond-encrusted wedding band. “A nigga is married as fuck.”

“I know that’s fuckin’ right.” He inhaled deeply, indicating he was smoking. “Give sis a hug for me.”

“Got you.” I entered the small study, turned on the light, and closed the door behind me. “How’s business?”

For the time being, we only had one house up and running until I was back home to put together another team. I didn’t trust the niggas, so I let Money and his brothers run it all for me. Those boys were as close to me as Wild and Uno were, so I had no worries anymore.

“Everything is what it’s supposed to be.” I placed the phone on the counter, muting it while I relieved myself in the bathroom. “We’re good until you come back, but I need to know about the rat problem. I still have six of them isolated.”

Listening to him, I knew he was asking in code what to do about the niggas we found who were helping Lew. I’d had him grab them and hold them at the warehouse in

Sunset Valley. It was time to rid myself of everything that didn't mean me and mine any good, once and for all.

"Exterminate them all." I smirked, not missing a beat. "I hate rodents."

After making sure he didn't need anything else, I checked in on Jerome. When I left Florida and returned to the Grove, I made him the official manager of Club Honey. That was all he needed, besides the pay, to go into full boss mode. The girls, as well as the customers, loved his humor and hospitality. We've seen income triple some weekends since he's been there as the boss. I was willing to make any demands he had as long as they didn't involve me, my brothers, or my sanity.

"The fuck?" I looked around the dark study, confused. I was feeling good, but I wasn't drunk, so I knew damn well I had turned the light on when I stepped inside. Stumbling through the room in the darkness, I heard a lighter flicker, causing me to pause. Slowly, I looked behind me and saw the light emitting from the corner.

"Jordan Mills..." I could have sworn I heard Jules' voice say. "The Spirit of Bonye welcomes you. Protect and love your wife with your heart and soul, and the ancestors will always welcome and protect you both."

I tried my hardest to move my feet, but it was as if I were bolted to the floor. Just when I found my words, I was stunned into silence when the light became brighter and a silhouette of Jules emerged from the corner. Dressed in a long, white gown with piercings and markings over his face, he smiled at me before speaking in Haitian, then fading back into the darkness.

"Oh hell naw!" The lights flicked back on as I opened the office door and got my ass the fuck out of there. Running through the house, I made my way back to the beach. Once the family saw the panic on my face, all merriment stopped as they eyed me with worry.

“What the fuck is up?” Dre was the first to reach me. Looking around, I found Mimi near the band, dancing with my father. Dragging my eyes around the beach, my eyes stretched as they landed on Jules. He was cool as a fan, having the time of his life, laughing with Uno, Harley, and Bridgette.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 9:23 pm

Following my line of sight, Dre sighed, waving everyone off and letting them know I was fine.

“Here.” He pulled out his cell phone. Shakily, I grabbed it before dragging my eyes back to Jules. This time, he was staring dead at me, smiling. “Call Sweets and tell her you need the Witch Boy special. She’ll get you right. You’ll be fine, bro. Welcome to the fuckin’ ghetto.”

“Mommy, Kenyon is up, and he is so funky.”

Trying my best to mute the microphone, I knew my colleagues heard Gianna as she burst into the room. I’ve told her time and time again that when I’m working to knock first, but much like her father, the words went in one ear and out of the other.

“Motherhood looks good on you, Mrs. Mills.” I beamed as Chester nodded. “Make sure you tell the family we said hello.”

“You can literally walk across the hall and tell me that,” Andre chimed in, with Jules nodding in agreement. “Don’t get weird.”

Sharing a laugh, Rosier reeled us back in so we could wrap up our quarterly meeting. After dismissing everyone, my brothers and I stayed on camera.

“How are you doing, sis?” Rosier was the first to speak as he stared intently into the camera. “How’s our niece and nephew?”

Smiling, I connected the call to my phone and walked across the hall to my three-

month-old son, Kenyon. Jordan stayed true to his word and made sure I was pregnant before we left Barbados. I wasn't even mad because I loved the son we created. He was every bit of his father, and I fell more in love with him every day.

"Gianna is the princess that we all have molded her to be." I giggled as I propped the phone on his changing table. "You guys need to come and visit your nephew." I picked him up and placed him into the camera. "He's gotten so big."

Kissing all over my baby, I didn't care that he smelled rotten. He was absolutely perfect in my eyes. Every time I looked into his little face, I was in awe that God saw fit to give him to me. He was the best part of me, and I would never let him go a day without feeling his mama's love. That same love was poured into Gianna. Strangers thought she was mine because she was. I've never tried to replace Gia, but with the love and care that we give our Gi Baby, she doesn't even ask about her biological mom or care that she is gone.

"Shit, we can be on the jet tomorrow." Jules leaned into the camera and smiled. "I wonder if I can talk Bridgette into giving me another one."

As I listened to my brothers make plans to come to Milly Grove this weekend, I cleaned my son's soiled diaper and reminisced about this past year. So much had happened, but if all the roads led to this moment with him, Gianna, and Jordan, I would do it all over again.

With the ties we had in Haiti, we were able to mask Chandler and his family's deaths as a murder-suicide. Authorities presented the company with a detailed letter that was emailed from Chandler's company domain stating that after he killed his father and buried him, his life spiraled out of control. After being blamed for negligence, causing his building to explode, he couldn't take the backlash. He admitted to killing his parents, sister, and farmhands. He took responsibility for the lives of his employees who died due to his poor decisions. All of his assets were liquidated and used to pay as many families as possible, but it was too much for his estate. Though

his family lineage had been erased, the legal troubles still lingered as the money dried up to cover all the debt.

“I hope my boy saved some titty milk—oh.” Jordan burst into the room right as I was picking up my crying son. “What’s up, fellas? Jules?”

Grimacing, I watched as Rosier scowled at his outburst while Jules smiled like a Cheshire cat. It took a few weeks for Jordan to tell me what had happened on our wedding night. I wanted to take my brother’s head off for playing with my man like that. He assured us it was all in harmless fun, but Jordan wasn’t convinced. He saw firsthand what Jules could do with his Uncle Carlos, so I understood his apprehension. Still, Jordan loved my brothers, and all of our siblings and wives had become a unit. That didn’t stop him from being fifty feet from Jules since we left Barbados. Dre would be right beside him with Sweets and Pastor on speed dial.

“Skip, my man... we were just telling Mimi that we’re coming up this weekend to see the kids,” Jules stated as he moved around his office. It was closing time at Boudreaux Enterprises, so I knew everyone was about to call it a day. “Is that all right with you?”

“Man, get out of here.” He waved him off before sanitizing his hands and grabbing Kenyon. “You know you don’t have to ask. Just leave that spooky shit in the swamps.” Peering down at me, he pecked my lips three times, with the last one lingering. “How are you feeling, Mama?”

“Tired,” I admitted. “Working from home is just as exhausting as going into an office.” My eyes followed him as he sat in the rocker to bottle-feed the baby. “I can do that if you need me to.”

Before our family trip to Barbados, I was back and forth between Milly Grove and South Florida. Skip had made it more than clear that I would end up being a resident of Milly Grove; it was just a matter of time. The day after we returned from the trip, I

was confused when we pulled up to a picturesque, newly built home in Mills Manor. As I toured the house, I was moved to tears when I found out he'd started building the day he dragged me out of the hookah lounge by my bun. He knew well before I'd attempted to marry Chan that we would be together in the end. That first night in our new home, every hole I possessed belonged to him.

"I got it, Mi," he assured me, chuckling as he peered down at my son. The love that shone through his eyes brought tears to mine. "Tell Mama we got this."

My baby boy cooed lovingly as he latched onto the bottle nipple. For him to be so little, he was very responsive to his daddy. I didn't want him to grow too fast, though. The ladies had already warned me that these men enjoyed keeping their women stress-free yet pregnant. Once Kenyon showed an ounce of independence, I knew I was in trouble.

"Noemi, you're going on leave until further notice." I jerked my head toward Dre's voice. I'd forgotten they were on the phone. "You do a great job, baby girl, but you have a team under you that is just as good. If we need you for special assignments, we will let you know. Other than that?—"

"You can't make me take a leave." I rolled my eyes and leaned into the camera. My bun almost fell, and I reminded myself it was time for a retwist. I'd been neglecting my self-care a little to keep the kids, Jordan, and work in the forefront. "I have to work, Andre."

"I'm the boss, and I agree with Dre," Rosier chimed in as he stepped onto the elevator. "Unless we have a more sensitive matter, you're unavailable. As your boss and leader of the family?—"

"As your husband, I'm telling you the same," Jordan said over my shoulder. "Your man's got you for whatever you need. That job will be okay without you for a bit. You're a wife and a mother now. It's time you get back to Noemi, too, the one before

I slid?—”

Beep. Beep. Beep.

Seeing that all three of my brothers disconnected the call, I couldn't help but fall over in laughter. I don't know why Jordan antagonizes them, but I wish he would stop because the moment Jules started speaking to Iwa, everyone would be complaining about him being a man witch.

“Thank you, baby.” I walked over and kissed his lips. He repositioned Kenyon so I could slide onto the other side of his lap. “For loving us, for loving me, for everything.”

Placing my head on his shoulders, he rocked our son and me as he talked aloud about nothing at all. Still, I was at peace, hearing his voice and feeling the vibration from his chest as he talked to Kenyon like he was a grown man. Before long, Gianna joined us because she wanted to know what was taking so long for someone to come have a tea party with her. She sat at our feet and talked our ears off about the princess party she and Big Bri wanted to throw just because and demanded we all attend. Letting her know that her uncles and cousins were coming to town soon, she was more than excited to tell us her requests.

As we sat there and listened to her list of what we needed to do to prepare for company, my heart smiled at how full it was.

I finally felt as if my life was complete.

The End!