



An Alpha's Romance

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Description: They say that opposites attract, but these two opposites definitely repel.

She owns a bakery, and is allergic to working out.

He owns a gym, and thinks sugar is a sin. She likes cookies, treats, and is really quite sweet.

He likes weights, protein, and is really quite mean.

Will the stars align for Keisha Love and Conner O'Bryan, or will spiteful, conniving, dangerous exes continue to keep them apart?

Total Pages (Source): 36

CHAPTER 1

Keisha

“What kind of person orders three hundred specialty cookies, and wants them in two days?” Keisha Love questioned her assistant, April. Keisha was flustered and sweating, and working way too hard for this to be after her busiest time of the year.

April shrugged her shoulders, “Beats me... but we can’t complain. Normally, we are twiddling our thumbs until the Valentine’s Day rush.”

Keisha wiped her brow with the back of her hand and nodded. After Christmas and the new year, specialty orders were very slow until February, so to have such a large order was a blessing.

“And you know you can’t turn down the substantial amount of money the customer is willing to pay because it’s on such short notice,” April added with a smile.

Keisha knew that April was right. They had charged an obscene amount of money for the specialty order, and the customer had agreed. Now Keisha was hit with the task of making hundreds of her “healthy” cookies.

Since Keisha opened her bakery Hot Stuff two years ago, April had been an invaluable asset. She was more than just Keisha’s assistant, she was one of her best friends, an awesome baker, and a genius at advertising. When Keisha thought of the idea of doing a healthier dessert option for her diabetic aunt, April had made it into a marketing promotion for the New Year’s resolution folks. It was a big hit, so they

continued with the promotion again this year. And now someone had ordered three hundred of her healthy option cookies.

“I’m definitely thankful for the order. I just can’t believe they want so many. Three hundred is a whole lot of cookies. Especially for the low-fat version.” Keisha’s heart-shaped face was marred with a frown.

“It’s for a gym or something,” April responded. “You can’t very well serve people that are going to a gym to lose weight lots of sugar, now can you?” April chuckled.

“True, but a few regular cookies wouldn’t hurt. I mean, it could’ve been a cheat day or something.” Keisha huffed but amusement sparkled in her eyes.

April chuckled again. “You can’t be mad that people are taking advantage of our healthy options that you advertised.”

“Yeah, but it was your idea.” Keisha pointed at her friend, but there was no real bite to her words. Keisha was proud that her healthy cookies were popular, and that someone wanted so many of them.

“Uh, Keish, we have a problem.” April’s brown face was flushed as she bent her long legs to search through the cupboards of the industrial kitchen. April began to fidget with her light brown hair as she bit her nails nervously.

“Oh no, what’s wrong now?” Keisha asked, still mixing a batch of cookies. Her morning had been filled with mishaps.

First, her alarm had been set to PM instead of AM so she overslept. After that, she realized she didn’t have any cash on her, and she had left her debit card at home. When she was driving back home to get her card, she was given a speeding ticket. Then, she spilled coffee down her white blouse on the way to work. To top it all off,

her douche of an ex-husband had left her several scathing messages about something she had no control over. And all of this happened before lunch, so to say she was having a bad morning was an understatement.

“We are out of the gluten free baking powder and the gluten free vanilla. We are also running low on the semisweet chocolate chips.”

“Well geez.” Keisha exhaled a deep breath. She was doing her best to have her usual positive attitude, but the devil was busy today.

Keisha knew that it wasn't April's fault they ran out of supplies in the middle of an order. This was an unusual request and it was almost a third of the inventory they normally kept for the gluten free option.

“If you can watch the batch of cookies I just put in the oven, I will run to Organic Foods grocery, and buy some. But make sure you put in an order to our supplier, so this doesn't happen again.”

April nodded in response, a smile returning to her face.

After all of the craziness of her morning, Keisha was glad there was an easy fix for this particular problem. Maybe my day will get better.

Keisha rushed through the aisles of the grocery store as she did her best to gather up her much needed supplies. She was a baker who loved to cook with pure sugar and good ole' butter. Kroger and Walmart were good enough for her, so being in an organic store, Keisha was completely out of her element.

She carried an arm full of supplies when she finally found the semisweet chocolate

chips that she had been searching high and low for. She was able to shift the gluten free items to one arm as she reached to get the chocolate chips. Keisha managed to get them off the high shelf without dropping her other items.

She smiled in triumph. “Maybe my day is beginning to turn around.” She did a little celebratory shimmy, wiggling her behind and dancing to the beat of her own drum. Then she turned smack into a wall.

“Dang it!” Keisha dropped all of her supplies on the floor, and she looked up into the bright blue eyes of the human wall she had just run into. Well, hot damn!

Keisha smiled at the man before she crouched down to gather her things. She couldn’t be sure just how tall the man standing in front of her was, but he was damn near a giant.

“Sorry about that.” Keisha’s bright smile died on her lips, and she shifted her gaze to her scattered groceries, but the giant man just stood there with a frown covering his handsome face.

Keisha looked up again, and although the scowl was intimidating, it didn’t take away from his gorgeousness. His dark brown hair fell to his shoulders in luxurious waves that any woman would be jealous of. He had thick, dark brows that slashed over his crystal blue eyes, an aquiline nose with pouty lips, and a clean shaven chiseled jaw. He was an Adonis in every sense of the word.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:02 am

“I’m so sorry. I didn’t see you there.” Keisha apologized again, but the man just continued to stare at her, his frown growing deeper by the second.

After a few more seconds of staring, the man grunted. Keisha frowned. The least he could do is help me. Geez.

When the man started to walk away without saying anything, or helping her, Keisha lost her normal cool demeanor.

“You could at the very least help me you know?!” She fumed. “I didn’t see you because my back was turned, but clearly you weren’t watching where the hell you were going to bump into me. I’m small, but I definitely can’t be missed.”

The man eyed her with a thick, cocked brow and his frown turned into a sexy smirk. Both served to make Keisha mad.

“You know what... people like you piss me off. Manners are free, and excuse me goes a long way. There’s no need to be such a freakin’ caveman, grunting and staring at folks.” Keisha normally wouldn’t be so vocal about her displeasure of people, but today was just one of those days.

The man just continued to stare at her through her rant.

“Still nothing to say?” Keisha shook her head in exasperation. “So freakin’ rude!” Keisha finished gathering her things and headed to the check-out. The sooner she was back at her bakery the better.

As she got in her car, she tried to calm down. She was still fuming over the rude caveman. Why do the bastards all have to be so damn fine?

Keisha took a deep breath, and backed out of her space, and right into a large Chevy Silverado.

“Well, shit!”

Page 3

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:02 am

CHAPTER 2

CONNER

Conner O'Bryan was having a very bad day. First, his trusted personal assistant and all around savior was sick. And that left him to actually run his own business. His day-to-day operations were normally handled by Gloria; she was a nonstop workaholic, but now the flu had her down for the count, at the worst possible time.

Conner was the owner, CEO, and the face of Get Fit 24, a string of popular gyms that he turned into a multimillion dollar corporation. Get Fit was opening another location in Dallas, and it was one of the busiest times of the year for them. Normally, Conner's days were smooth sailing, but today, not so much.

The caterer for the employee appreciation party cancelled at the last minute, and although they gave him a full refund, it still left him in a bind without food for their luncheon.

Although he'd wanted to panic and cancel the entire event until Gloria was better, he decided to man up and do what needed to be done. In the past five years he'd had everything done for him, and on his whim, in return, he had become overtly spoiled.

"Carson, do you know of someplace that we can get food platters made-up at the last minute?" Conner asked his cousin, and COO.

Carson lived in the area, so he was definitely the person to ask.

“Yeah, why do you need food platters?” Carson’s face held a curious expression.

“The caterer cancelled. The event is in two days. We need food.”

“Wow.” Carson rubbed his face in contemplation before snapping his fingers. “There’s an Organic Food Grocery store not too far from here. I even know of a place that has a special on healthy cookies.”

“Healthy cookies? No such thing. They probably taste like trash.”

Carson chuckled. “No, actually they’re really good. I can call in an order.”

“Alright. You do that, and I’ll call the grocery. Hopefully, they can help us.”

“I’m shocked you can actually function without Gloria.” Carson smirked.

Conner narrowed his eyes at his smartass cousin. He wasn’t wrong, but he didn’t have to point it out. Conner was the boss after all. He had started his business from the ground up with hard work and determination. He could handle a simple task.

Instead of letting his cousin continue to wind him up, he just grunted his response. Carson laughed and left the office, throwing over his shoulder that he would order the dessert for the event.

The next day wasn’t going great for Conner either. After he’d had a long tedious day, he thought the next day would bring him a reprieve. However, that was not the case. Although he was able to work out the food situation, he forgot to buy a new charger for his phone, and it died in the middle of an important call with his investors. He was able to call them back when he got to the office, but on his way there, he ran a red

light and almost caused an accident. He was lucky that no one got hurt, but he was positive he would get a ticket in the mail. Then on top of everything, Carson was paying an arm and a leg for some cookies that Conner was sure would be a tasteless monstrosity.

But at least it can't get much worse, Conner thought as he pulled his Chevy into a parking spot at the Organic Food Grocery. He was lucky that his cousin was a regular customer, and they were able to basically cater his entire event. The only catch was he had to pick the food up a day earlier. Conner was okay with that because the other alternative was for Conner to host a luncheon without lunch.

Conner was making his way through the massive store, trying to find his way to the onsite meals and catering department when he was literally run over by a gorgeous petite ball of energy.

If he wasn't so distracted by the little dance she was doing, and the jiggle of her juicy ass, he would've avoided the collision. However, that wasn't the case. His eyes had been trained on the heavenly bounce that put the round curves of her luscious body on display. Conner told his feet to keep walking, and not stop for the strange woman dancing in the grocery store, but they didn't get the memo.

He was rooted to his spot watching her in amusement and annoyance because now his manhood was beginning to grow in interest to the ebony-skinned beauty. Before he could convince his feet to move, she whirled around and slammed her soft body into his.

The few items that she held flew to the ground, and her big brown eyes went wide. Conner was stunned into silence. The woman was absolutely breathtaking. Her heart-shaped face held unique features that on anyone else wouldn't have been so alluring. But on this woman they were captivating. Her nose was small and upturned just slightly, but it complemented her face. Her lips were lush, with the bottom slightly

larger than the top one. However, her almond shaped dark brown eyes were what held his attention and if he wasn't mistaken, they were currently filled with lust.

"I'm so sorry. I didn't see you there." The woman apologized, but all Conner could focus on was the sound of her voice.

His manhood grew harder, and if he didn't get away from this woman, he would surely be labeled a pervert. All Conner could do was grunt in response as he started to walk away.

"You could at the very least help me you know?!" The politeness had all but left the beautiful temptress. "I didn't see you because my back was turned, but clearly you weren't watching where the hell you were going to bump into me. I'm small but I definitely can't be missed."

She was undeniably correct; there was no way on God's green earth he would ever be able to miss her. Conner's automatic response was a cocked brow and a smirk. Which set the sexy vixen off.

She's got fire. Her body was so soft. I wonder what those lips taste like...Conner shook his head to rid himself of that train of thought. The last thing he needed was to be pervy over some stranger in a grocery store, no matter how attractive she was.

The woman continued to lay into him, but Conner couldn't have repeated what she said if someone paid him to. All he could do was stand there staring into her beautiful face, and hope like hell that she wouldn't notice his growing member.

Once she finished her rant, she sashayed away with so much sass, Conner groaned. He ran his hand down his face, and subtly adjusted himself. He was usually a grumpy ass and a grunt was his normal response, but for some reason he wished he could've smiled and started a conversation.

“This day could not get any worse.”

After Conner picked up his order, he headed to his truck. He couldn't for the life of him get the sexy stranger out of his head. The sooner he got back to the gym the better. He pulled out of his parking spot and right into the rear of a black Dodge Durango.

“Well, shit!”

CHAPTER 3

KEISHA

The next day, Keisha was in a much better mood, and at least the cookies were done. But she couldn't get the gorgeous caveman out of her mind. Her quick trip to the grocery store had turned into a nightmare. However, she was determined to let all of the mishaps from yesterday go, and make today into a better day.

She plastered a smile on her face and walked into her already opened bakery. Keisha greeted her customers, and her part-time employees, Tracy and Sabrina. Both ladies were busy taking and filling orders.

The bakery was already packed, and they had only been opened for an hour. Hot Stuff was a popular breakfast spot because of their fresh pastries, herbal tea, and some of the best gourmet coffee in Dallas.

Keisha took in her business and all of her customers. Suddenly, the fake smile she'd plastered on her face became a sincere and grateful smile. She was blessed to have accomplished so much after her nasty divorce.

"Hey, ladies," Keisha waved at the hard working women, "I'll be out in just a minute to help." Both ladies smiled and waved back as Keisha made her way to the office to put down her bag.

April was in the kitchen putting the finishing touches on their large specialty order, and Keisha's sister, Bell was mixing up one of her concoctions.

“Hola, mamacitas,” Keisha greeted her sister and friend.

“Hey, chica,” Bell smiled brightly at her sister. “I hope the extra few hours of sleep helped you have a better start to your day.”

Bell was Keisha’s older sister, but people often thought they were twins. Bell was slightly taller and thinner, but they had the same smooth ebony complexion. They also shared the same natural thick coily black hair.

“Yeah, no tickets or spilled coffee. I’m off to a glorious start already.” Keisha chuckled. “Thanks for coming in and covering for me. I appreciate you.”

“No worries. A speeding ticket and a car accident all in one day is a pretty good excuse,” Bell stated with a sympathetic smile.

“We should all be so lucky,” April snorted. “Let me run over a fine man at the grocery store.”

Keisha rolled her eyes. “First of all, nobody said he was fine. And second, he ran me over.”

April waved her hand dismissively. “I could tell by the way you were acting he was fine. You were all flustered and outraged about how he was acting like a ‘caveman,’ and how he was staring and grunting at you. I mean, you described his eyes and hair. Hell, you almost forgot that you ran him over with your car.”

“Again, he hit me.” Keisha crossed her arms over her chest. “And I never said he was fine,” she added as a second thought.

“Uh huh.” Bell and April giggled.

“Whatever heffa’s.”

“Soooo, did you exchange information? I mean for insurance purposes, of course.” Bell grinned mischievously.

Keisha rolled her eyes again. “No. There wasn’t any damage, so there was no need to do any of that.”

“Come on, Keish. You literally run into a fine ass man, you have an excuse to get his info, and you just leave without it?” April threw up her hands in irritation.

Ever since her divorce, Keisha’s friends were always trying to set her up. However, she had been on several horrifying dates, and she wasn’t so eager to jump back into dating again head first.

Keisha shrugged off their disapproving groans. “The man had to literally hit me with his car before he would do more than grunt at me. I don’t think he would’ve been interested in a date.”

“What about our annual V-day soiree? You’re coming this year, right?” Bell asked with a hopeful tone.

“Uh. Probably not.” Keisha grimaced.

Every year, her friends all got together to celebrate the lover’s holiday. They all brought dates, went to dinner and dancing. And every year she made up an excuse not to go.

“Listen, Keisha, you have got to get out more. You have plenty of time to find a date, or I will find one for you. Either way, you’re coming to the soiree this year.”

“Bell, I just don’t wa—”

Her sister cut her off before she could finish. “No. No more excuses. When you were married, it was your husband that didn’t want to come. Right after your divorce, it was too soon. It’s been nearly two years. You’re coming... even if I have to drag you there kicking and screaming,” Bell replied with finality.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:02 am

There was nothing else Keisha could say to convince her sister, so she left it alone for now. “I’m going to help up front. Holler if you need me.”

Keisha headed to the front of the bakery where she tried to let the morning rush distract her from her conversation with Bell and April. However, her thoughts not only ran the conversation back continuously, but she couldn’t get the thought of her disastrous encounter with the gorgeous stranger out of her mind.

“Well, shit!”

Could this day get any worse? Keisha just wanted to crawl into bed and restart her day. But now she had to make sure that the other person wasn’t hurt and there wasn’t any damage to her car.

She made her way to the back of her car to inspect the damage. Who she came face to face with was beyond her comprehension. The universe must’ve been playing some cruel joke.

“Really?” Keisha huffed out loud.

“Sweet baby Jesus. Why have thou forsaken me?” The giant caveman looked to the sky.

“So all I got were grunts, and now you’re talking in biblical terms?” Keisha wondered if the man was some kind of weirdo. It would be just my luck... big, fine,

and crazy!

She watched as the man heaved a deep breath. The plain long-sleeved black t-shirt stretched beautifully over his sculpted chest, and even with the cool temperatures, Keisha found herself heating up from the inside out. She was mesmerized by his flexing muscles, and clear blue gaze. She shook off the lust fog, but his intense stare was spellbinding.

“Are you okay, ma’am?” Now that he was addressing her directly, she noticed that his voice was deep and hypnotic, and she found herself slipping back into the fog.

“Uh... yeah, I mean, yes. I’m fine. Are you... uh... okay?” Keisha could’ve smacked herself for all the bumbling and stumbling she did. Less than fifteen minutes ago she was laying into him with all the sass she could find, and now she was stuttering like a teenager with a crush.

“Good. I’m Conner.” He held his hand out for a shake.

“Keisha.” She took his hand, and shook firmly.

Maybe this is his peace offering. Keisha thought to herself. She was normally a friendly person; she was just having an unusually bad day.

I’m friendly, and I will be friendly to this man. She gave herself a silent pep-talk.

“Let’s take a look and see if there’s any damage, Keisha.” Damn the way he said my name! Keisha watched his long strides that led him away from her, the warmth of his body left her feeling bereft, but the view of his tight ass encased in his loose fitting jeans was a sight to behold.

“Dear Lord, let me stop ogling this man.” Keisha mumbled to herself.

“Looks like there isn’t even a scratch. You didn’t cause any damage.” His smile and deep voice almost distracted Keisha from his words. Almost.

“What’d you just say?” Keisha asked placing her hands on her ample hips. “I didn’t cause any damage because you hit me.” Every man thought they could control her. She would not take the blame for something that wasn’t her fault.

“Look, lady...” Conner started but Keisha interrupted.

“Keisha is my name, not lady. And you hit me.” Her frustrations were rising with each passing moment.

“Keisha. Look. There isn’t any damage, but if you want to drag this out... I’ll be happy to exchange insurance information with you. We can leave it to them to figure it out.”

Even though he proved to be a jackass, blaming her for his obvious reckless driving; he was right, there wasn’t any damage to either her SUV or his pickup, so it was best to cut her losses. And she didn’t want to waste another second with this man, or on this situation.

“No, it’s fine. No damage... No problem.” Keisha took a deep breath. There was no need to get all upset, and be a bitch. The incident could’ve been much worse. “I’m sorry. There’s no need for the insurance company. I hope you have a better day.”

With those parting words she got back into her Durango, and carefully drove away.

CHAPTER 4

CONNER

“I’m sorry... I hope you have a better day.” Keisha’s sweet voice was ingrained in his mind. Conner could think of nothing else but the infuriating woman. She was a conundrum.

One minute, she was ranting and raving, and the next her voice turned sweet almost shy. Conner wasn’t sure if she was some kind of crazy person, or hell?he wasn’t sure what she was.

However, he was starting to think that she was the crazy one, because from the moment he saw her little shimmy dance until she walked away defeated from their little accident, he wanted her. After his ex-girlfriend, he hadn’t wanted to deal with any woman, but there was no doubt that he wanted her.

He never felt such a pull towards a woman before. It could’ve been her sassy mouth or even the sweet demeanor she had, Conner wasn’t sure what it was about her. And that was reason enough for him to want to pursue her.

If only I got more than her first name. And if you weren’t such an ass both times she talked to you. He vowed to himself that if he ever saw her again, he would do everything in his power to redeem himself with her.

However, right now, he had to keep his mind focused because today was the day of the party. So maybe the distraction of the festivities would keep him from thinking of

the gorgeous spitfire. But the memories of her continuously danced at the edge of his mind. The thickness of her thighs when she crouched down to gather her spilt groceries, the jiggle of her round ass when she danced, the brightness of her brown eyes, her cupid bow shaped lips, and even the little dimple in her chin.

Shit... I'm supposed to be distracting myself. Conner sighed deeply, and shifted in his seat trying to relieve the uncomfortable hard-on that popped up thanks to his wandering thoughts.

"What are you in here breathing so loud about?" Carson walked into the office taking Conner out of his thoughts.

My cousin is finally good for something... distractions.

"Nothing, did you pick up the cookies for this afternoon?"

"No, they won't be ready until ten." Carson looked at his watch. "I'll go in a little while to get them. No worries, I got this."

"Yeah, okay. But if you don't supply the only dessert for our employees, and they revolt, I'm throwing your big ass under the bus." Conner chuckled.

"Listen, you don't have to tell me. Our employees may be gym rats, but everyone likes a treat every once in a while." Carson chuckled.

"Yeah, but are they really going to be a treat if they are 'healthy' cookies?" Conner eyed his cousin. He was still unconvinced that these cookies were as good as his cousin claimed. He initially wanted to just get regular sweets, but knowing his staff that would've caused more than a few raised eyebrows.

"I promise these cookies are legit." Carson leaned over and rubbed his hands together

like a supervillain in a comic book.

“I don’t even want to know what’s going on in that diabolic brain of yours,” Conner stated, shaking his head.

“How bout’ a little wager...” Carson responded.

“Not just no, but hell no.” Conner shook his head more vehemently.

“Come on cousin... where’s your sense of adventure?”

“It disappeared when I gained common sense,” Conner replied with a smirk. Carson was always getting him to do something foolish when they were younger. All he had to do was make a bet, and like an idiot Conner fell for the trap.

“For old time’s sake. You used to be fun.”

“I used to be young and dumb and full of cu...” Conner was cut-off by the raise of Carson’s large hand.

“There’s no need to finish that crude ass statement,” Carson’s face was screwed into a frown but a smile danced on the edge of his lips. “If the cookies are good, then you owe me a favor.”

“What kind of favor?” Conner asked, giving in to his cousin’s nonsense.

“A favor of my choosing, but nothing too outlandish. We’re adults now.” Carson’s smile was downright devious, but Conner had to admit that his cousin’s favors usually ended with a fun time and one helluva story.

“Alright, but if I deem your favor too risky, I reserve the right to decline. And you

ask me to do something else.”

“Yes, yes... that will do just fine.” Carson’s grin grew larger and Conner was already beginning to regret his acquiescence.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:02 am

A few hours later, the gym staff, upper management, as well as a few investors of Get Fit were all having a stellar time. The food was delicious, and everyone loved the cookies. Even Conner had to admit that they were the best damn “healthy” cookies he had ever tasted. He was actually shocked to find out they were low fat. Before he knew it, he had eaten several of the goodies.

Conner was making his rounds, and shaking hands and making small talk with some investors. When he went to grab another cookie, he noticed the smug look on his cousin’s face. He knew then and there that Carson would be cashing in his favor. It didn’t matter Conner was an adult, and he wouldn’t do anything he didn’t want to. Hell, he had never done anything he didn’t want to do, even as a kid when Carson bet him.

Conner was the kind of man that did what needed to be done. He took no prisoners, and made no apologies. He was known to be a hardass in business, but he had learned from the time he was young, if someone couldn’t hold you down, then they were holding you back. And oftentimes, you had to let those people go without looking back.

Speaking of not looking back...“What the hell is she doing here?” Conner spoke through gritted teeth.

“Aww hell. I don’t know how she even knew about today. Do you want me to take care of her?” Carson asked, looking concerned.

“Naw man, I got it,” Conner responded.

“Don’t lose your shit, and make a scene. We have investors here.” Carson looked around at the gym full of people.

“I said I got it.” Conner sauntered toward the woman that he swore wouldn’t grace his presence again.

The woman was beautiful; Conner could admit that the attraction he had for her wasn’t unfounded, but the malevolent being that hid just beneath the surface was a definite turnoff.

“What are you doing here, Brooke?” Conner questioned in a low voice.

Brooke flipped her long blonde hair over her tan shoulder, and batted her long lashes. “I came to congratulate you on your new gym, sweetheart.”

Conner stared at the woman in disbelief. She must’ve hit her head and lost all of her damn mind. Or maybe the bleach she used to dye her hair had seeped into her brain. In either case, the two of them certainly weren’t using terms of endearments, and the last time he saw Brooke, Conner kicked her out of his house with a “Do Not Return” slip, so the audacity of his ex-girlfriend to show up nearly six months later was beyond his reasoning.

“I don’t know what you’re doing here, and I don’t care. Leave.” Conner wasn’t the type to mix words. Unless he’s trying to talk to a sweet and sassy husky voiced goddess.

Brooke’s green eyes went ice cold, but her beautiful face remained smiling. “I thought you had enough time to get over whatever your problem was.”

“I’m not doing this here. Leave.” Conner discreetly waved his hand to alert security. He would have her ass escorted out so fast her head would spin.

“Fine. I was trying to surprise you, but I guess you need more time. I can’t believe you’re acting like this.”

Conner just shook his head. The woman was delusional at best, but he didn’t have time for her dramatics, especially on such an important day.

Conner stared at his ex, the hard-set of his face giving no room for argument as he waited for her to leave.

“Fine.” Brooke huffed again. “I’ll contact Gloria and set-up a proper meeting, so that we can have an appropriate conversation about us.”

Conner felt his anger at Brooke’s audacity begin to boil. He was his own man, and he didn’t owe anyone a damn thing. However, his ex-girlfriend thought the world owed her everything. She was a spoiled princess with too much time on her hands. And after six blissful months, it looked like Conner would once again have to rid his life of Brooke Clarke.

CHAPTER 5

KEISHA

“It’s been a few days since the gym hottie came in here, any news? Are you going to invite him to the V-day soiree?” April wiggled her eyebrows up and down at Bell.

Keisha laughed as her sister screwed her face up in a “mind your business” pout. The women of the bakery had been going on about the tall handsome blonde since he sauntered his way into Hot Stuff to pick up the specialty order.

The man was huge with muscle on top of muscle. He stood at least six-five with close cropped blonde hair and a lumberjack beard. His blue eyes were bright and clear, and his laugh was contagious.

“I always have a date for the soiree, don’t worry about me.” Bell placed her hands on her hips with a sly grin. “Why are you all up in my Kool-Aid anyway?”

“You know why. If I had a tasty treat after my goodies, I wouldn’t have to be all up in your Kool-Aid. You know I have to live vicariously through your shenanigans,” April responded with a wink.

Both Bell and Keisha laughed. April always pretended she didn’t have juicy stories about her dating life, but all of the women knew the truth. She didn’t have to imagine anyone else’s experiences because April was a freak.

“Actually, he invited me to the gym he works for. He gave me a few passes, so you

know what that means!” Bell’s face lit up with glee, but the two other women groaned their unhappiness.

“Sister, you know I love you. And I would do just about anything to help you get a man... but for the love of all the chocolaty treats that I’ve ever made, please don’t make me work-out,” Keisha pleaded with her sister.

There weren’t many places Keisha hated going, but the gym was definitely number one on that short list. At five-three, her stature was petite, but her curves made up for her lack of height. She didn’t have rock hard abs or a tiny waist, but she wasn’t out of shape.

Although Keisha indulged in more sweets than she probably should, she still made sure to eat a mostly healthy diet, and walk a few miles twice a week at the park by her house. Her family had a long history with health related illnesses, and she wanted to be in her best condition to maintain her well-being.

However, going to the gym with all those muscle bound men, and skinny perky women judging her, was not her idea of a good time.

“It’s a new year, don’t you want a new you?” Bell asked with a smile.

“No, no I don’t.” Keisha stated with a straight face while April snickered behind her.

“I don’t necessarily find joy in a gym, but if we can help Bell’s dry spell then I’m down,” April spoke up. “I mean; how often do we get men in here that look like a Greek God?”

“That is true.” Keisha smiled, giving in. She knew she would end up at the gym working out no matter how much she would hate it, just like she knew she’d be at the soiree.

“He does kinda remind you of Thor doesn’t he?” April continued as she salaciously licked her lips.

“Could you stop drooling over my potential ex-husband?” Bell laughed.

“You know; he does remind me of somebody. I just can’t put my finger on who...” Keisha said thoughtfully.

“Well, he’s going to remind me how to get my groove back.” Bell did a little hip thrust and laughed.

“I’m pretty sure nobody has to remind your fast behind how to do that.” Keisha smirked.

“Annnnywaaay.” Bell put her hand in Keisha’s face, but laughed when Keisha slapped it away. “Carson is going to meet us at Get Fit 24 at the new Main Street location this evening, so get your work-out gear together, ladies.”

I guess my ex-husband’s old t-shirt and my jogging pants from college won’t be acceptable work-out attire. Keisha frowned.

“Dang... I need to go shopping then,” Keisha mumbled, but the other ladies heard her.

“Ooooh, we can all go shopping. I can get something hot to impress my new boo.” Bell jumped up and down, clapping like a child.

Okay, that’s settled... I’ll be spending my evening in my own personal hell... the gym!

Keisha couldn't say that she was uncomfortable in the spandex Capri pants, and the fitted tank-top. After all, the outfit was made for comfort. But to say she felt all kinds of awkward was an understatement. Obviously the gear fit her, but Keisha wasn't the type to wear tight clothes.

As the trio made their way to the front desk, Keisha couldn't help but notice a few stares from both men and women. I knew I should've worn my joggers. Keisha nervously pulled down her tank-top. Her old insecurities had started to resurface. She could hear her ex-husband, Dylan's voice telling her to push away from the table.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:02 am

Her ex's hurtful words always popped up at the most inopportune times. Keisha had to be mindful to keep the negative thoughts away. She was a better person now... stronger, and the weak insecure woman that let her husband treat her like trash was gone.

Keisha stopped fidgeting, threw her shoulders back, and held her head up high. If today was the only day she was going to work-out, then by golly, she was going to rock the shit out of her spandex.

"Hi, we're guests of Carson's. Can you be a peach and page him, please?" Bell batted her long lashes as she flirted with the front desk guy. Her sister was such a flirt, and Keisha almost didn't contain the giggle that tried to escape.

"Actually, he's in his office. I'll just give him a ring." The attendant's smile was slow as he scanned Bell from head to toe.

"Office? Looks like gym hottie is important. Maybe you can have some naughty office sex with the boss," April whispered loudly, and Keisha could no longer contain her amusement. She busted out laughing, right along with her sister.

Before she could get a hold of her laughter, a familiar face appeared from around the corner. Keisha's laughter died in her throat, and her body instantly heated.

"You!" They both exclaimed at the same time.

CHAPTER 6

CONNER

“You!” Conner exclaimed at the same time as Keisha.

He couldn’t believe that the woman that had been dancing through his mind for nearly two weeks was standing in his gym.

Normally, Conner would be at the corporate office and he would’ve never gotten the chance to see Keisha again. However, since this was a new gym, both he and Carson were on hand for at least another two months to make sure that everything ran smoothly before they handed the reigns over to their manager.

Conner was never so glad that he was stuck in one location. But the way the gorgeous woman narrowed her brown eyes at him made him suspicious that she wasn’t as happy as he was at their little reunion.

“Ooh wee! I just might need to become a member here. All this man candy floating around.” A tall, attractive, brown skinned woman with light brown hair that stood beside Keisha smiled seductively at Conner.

He couldn’t help but smile at the woman, and also at the way Keisha gave her friend the side-eye.

“We offer all kinds of memberships here, and I don’t mind giving you a tour... if you’re really interested.” Conner lowered his deep voice another octave. He didn’t

miss the heat that flashed in Keisha's beautiful eyes, because although he was talking to her friend, he was staring directly at her.

Conner watched with humor as Keisha cleared her throat, and fidgeted with her tank-top. "We are actually waiting on Carson, so I think we're all set."

I need to talk to my cousin. How in the hell does he know Keisha?

Before he could respond, he saw Carson making his way toward them. His ever present smile was plastered across his face, and his eyes were lit up like a Christmas tree.

"If it isn't the future, Mrs. O'Bryan," Carson commented as he sauntered up.

Conner wasn't sure how Carson knew Keisha, but the fire in his belly was about to erupt, and his hands were clenched into tight fists at his side. He and his cousin were close, they were more like brothers, but seeing Carson with Keisha would be detrimental to their bond. There would be no way in hell he could watch her kiss and love on his cousin and not be jealous.

But his thoughts were put on pause when Carson leaned down and hugged the other woman that was standing next to Keisha. Conner noticed for the first time that the two held an uncanny resemblance. Their body shapes were similar, however the other woman was slimmer and slightly taller. Their heart-shaped faces and sultry brown eyes were nearly identical.

After she greeted Carson, the woman turned her attention to Conner with a mischievous smile on her pretty face. "I'm Keisha's sister, Kaybella. But everyone calls me Bell. And who might you be?"

He smiled brightly, liking her vibe. "Kaybella is an interesting name." Conner took

her small hand in his and shook it.

“Yeah, our mom had a thing for princesses.” She looked at her sister and winked, and it intrigued Conner even more.

“Really? Princesses, huh? So how’d you get Kaybella, and your sister got Keisha? I don’t remember any princesses with that name.”

“Actually, Keisha is not her full...”

“Anyway,” Keisha butted in, staring at her sister with wide eyes. “What are you doing here, Conner?”

“Wait.” Bell looked at Keisha and her smile grew. “Is this the Conner?” she asked as she took him in.

He looked at Keisha with an arched brow, and she shifted nervously from foot to foot looking everywhere but at him. “Yeah. It’s the Conner,” she finally responded shyly.

“I’m sorry, am I missing something? Do you two know each other?” Carson looked at them curiously.

“This is Keisha.” Conner pointed in her direction. “She was the woman that had the misfortune of meeting me when I ran into her at the grocery store a few days ago.”

Conner loved the way she smiled up at him. Sometimes in life you had to admit to your wrong doings to appease others... even if you weren’t wrong. She hit me, but I’ll take the blame to see her smile.

Carson flopped down in the leather chair that was adjacent to the large sofa where Conner was relaxing. He loved his cousin, but he couldn't figure out why Carson was always at his house.

“Sooo... I need to cash in my favor.”

“I knew it was some reason you were here.”

Page 11

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:02 am

“I need you to go on a double date with me.”

“The hell? What are we twelve? I’ll pass.” Conner shook his head.

“You owe me a favor.” Carson pointed at Conner. “I’m cashing in. This isn’t anything detrimental to your character, so you can’t decline.”

“Why does a grown man need another grown man to go on a date with him?” Conner asked as he left the couch, and made his way to the kitchen with his cousin hot on his trail.

“Bell is still a little skittish...”

“Bell doesn’t seem like the skittish type at all to me, maybe it’s you,” Conner interrupted.

“As I was saying...” Carson narrowed his eyes, “Bell is skittish, so I told her she could bring Keisha along and we could do a double date. To make her feel more comfortable.”

“Hmmm.” Conner pretended to think it over, but he knew he was going to go as soon as Carson mentioned Keisha’s name. He had been trying to figure out a way to see her again since she’d unexpectedly shown up at his gym a few days earlier.

“I guess it wouldn’t hurt for me to keep Keisha company.” Conner smiled.

“Yeah, I bet you it wouldn’t.” Carson laughed, but he sobered quickly. “Just don’t be

a dick. I really like Bell, so whatever is going on between you and Keisha, be nice.”

“What does that mean? Going on between us?”

“Man, you know exactly what I mean. Watching the two of you interact was like waiting for an active volcano to erupt. You could feel the heat, see it boiling, and you know it’s only a matter of time before the lava oozes out over the top.”

“Damn! I didn’t know it was that obvious.” Conner had mumbled, but he couldn’t help the smile that graced his lips.

“It was very obvious. And I don’t know if it’s a good or bad thing, so be nice.” Carson pointed an accusatory finger at him.

“Oh I will be more than nice.” Conner licked his lips at the thought of seeing Keisha again.

CHAPTER 7

KEISHA

“I can’t believe you talked me into this,” Keisha complained as she paced her walk-in closet.

“I didn’t have to talk you into anything. You know you want that man.” Bell laughed and then coughed. Keisha could hear her sister’s wheezing through the phone.

“I am sorry though. I can’t believe I got sick.” Bell coughed again.

“I know, you’re never sick. Now our double is now a solo, and I’m stuck.” Keisha was nervous about going out with Conner alone. She was okay with having her sister and Carson there, but alone with a man who made her heart race, and body temperature rise with just a look was bound to be disastrous for her.

“Girl, please. Any woman would love to be ‘stuck’ with Conner O’Bryan. Besides, he’s proven he’s not the caveman you thought he was. And anyway, you still need a date for the soiree.”

Bell did have a point. After the initial shock of Conner being the owner of the gym, he insisted on taking them on a tour. He was charming and articulate and exuded more sex appeal than Keisha could handle. The caveman that grunted and smirked and made smartass remarks was nowhere to be found. He even admitted in so many words that he had run into her.

That thought made her smile. Conner didn't seem like the type of man that apologized or readily admitted that he was wrong, so his little acknowledgement didn't go unnoticed.

"You don't have to remind me about the soiree every time we talk you know." Keisha flopped down on the floor of her closet. "You know better than anyone the reason I'm a little gun shy when it comes to dating. I've been on some unusual dates since my divorce. My track record with men is garbage." Keisha sighed.

"That is true," Bell responded.

"Thanks," Keisha grumbled.

"No, not your track record with men. I meant about your dates. They have been downright horrible. And that ex-husband of yours is a colossal douche, so maybe it's your turn to have some good luck with men."

Keisha nodded even though her sister couldn't see her. She had the worst luck with men. First, it was the guy who'd had a foot fetish, and the way she found out was unusual. It was their fourth date, and he had been a perfect gentleman, so she invited him over for dinner and a movie at her place. She was even thinking she might give him the cookie, then she fell asleep on the couch and when she woke up, he was dry humping her feet.

Then it was the guy who'd invited her to one of the most expensive restaurants in Dallas. The atmosphere had been wonderful, and Keisha was having a great time. When the check came, her date smiled and slid it toward her. Now, as an independent woman, she could have paid for her own meal, but if someone invited her out, she expected him to pay. So she paid for her portion and left him sitting there. Needless to say, she never saw him again.

Then it was her ex-husband, Dylan Curtis. Keisha had once thought the world began and ended with him. They met in college and married right before graduation. Dylan was six foot two with light brown skin that reflected his heritage of a white mother and black father. He wore his curly hair in a low fade that complemented his meticulously groomed goatee. His gray eyes stood out beneath thick dark brows that slashed across his forehead. Keisha could admit that he was a very handsome man. He was also a very large asshole.

Dylan was an investment banker, and very entitled. He thought that Keisha should wait on him hand and foot, and that she was there specifically for his needs. And she was. Keisha waited on Dylan hand and foot and did everything he asked, but it still wasn't enough. Dylan was used to his mother doing any and everything he needed as a stay at home mom, so he didn't want Keisha to work, and she agreed.

However, every chance that he got, Dylan threw it in her face that she was dependent solely on him, and how her only job was to please him. She worked hard to do that, but no matter what she did, Dylan was never satisfied. Keisha figured that Dylan took some cruel pleasure in degrading her on a daily basis. Breaking her down with his hurtful words, and withholding his love and affection. When she caught him cheating, that was the end for her. She filed for divorce, and because they had a prenup, Dylan thought that he wouldn't have to pay her anything. However, he forgot about the infidelity clause, and Keisha opted to take a lump sum of money instead of alimony payments. Dylan was incensed and couldn't get over the fact that Keisha left him, and was able to take "his" money.

Dylan had still called her from time to time to berate her about one thing or another, but Keisha never answered his calls, and often directed his concerns to her lawyer. She hadn't spoken to Dylan in over a year, and she was determined to keep it that way.

So, it was understandable for Keisha to be a bit leery about dating.

“Your date will be fine, chica. Just relax and have fun.” Bell’s positive words brought Keisha out of her musings.

“Sweet baby Jesus, I hope you’re right.”

Keisha was nervous as the hostess led her through the restaurant. Her five inch heels clicked against the wood flooring of the elegant eatery. Keisha took her time getting ready and chose the perfect outfit. Her sleek long sleeved black dress hugged her every curve without being obscenely tight. The neckline and sleeves were made of a see through lace material that matched the hem of the dress, and hit right in the middle of her thigh. She paired the dress with black t-strap round toe Mary Jane stilettos. The entire ensemble made her feel confident and beautiful.

As she made her way to the table, she couldn’t help but take in the beautiful and expensive décor. Keisha had never been to this particular restaurant, but she heard rave reviews from her friends. I just hope I don’t have to pay tonight.

When the hostess stopped in front of the intimate table for two, and she got a good look at Conner as he stood to greet her, she knew that she was in trouble.

“Hi, Keisha. Glad you could make it.” Conner pulled her in for a warm embrace that had her instantly melting into his muscular body.

Damn, he smells good. Keisha pulled away and her body heated even more at the predatory smile that graced his handsome face.

Conner was immaculately dressed in a tailored dark gray suit with a crisp white shirt underneath. The top button was undone displaying his smooth, tan skin. His brown wavy shoulder length hair was styled away from his clean shaven face. And not for

the first time, Keisha zoned in on his crystal blue eyes.

She cleared her throat and smiled, hoping that he didn't notice her perusal of his body. But the sly grin that covered his face told her she had been caught. Keisha blushed as he came around and pulled out her chair.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:02 am

“Thank you.” She smiled up at him shyly as she lowered into her seat.

“Of course, beautiful.” Conner bent down to push her chair under the table, and Keisha could’ve sworn that she felt his lips on her neck, but her body was already out of whack, so she couldn’t be sure.

After the waitress had taken their drink order, they sat making small talk. Keisha still couldn’t get over the fact that this was the same grunting man she had met in the grocery store. Conner was actually a really nice guy, and she had totally misjudged him.

“You know, you’re not who I thought you were,” Keisha commented as she sipped from her water glass.

Conner nodded. “You have to admit that we didn’t exactly meet under the best circumstances.” He chuckled.

“True. But the grunting kinda threw me off some,” Keisha joked, and Conner laughed with her.

“It’s not every day that I literally run into a beautiful dancing stranger in a grocery store, so a grunt was all I could manage.” Conner winked.

Keisha could feel her face heat in embarrassment. “You saw me dancing? Oh Lord... you must’ve thought I was some kinda weirdo.”

Conner’s laugh was deep and melodic. Keisha could listen to the sound all day. She

found herself leaning forward just be closer to him.

“No I didn’t think you were a weirdo.” Keisha gave him a disbelieving look, and Conner looked up as if he were thinking, “Okay, maybe a little.”

They both laughed. As their amusement died down, the waitress brought out their appetizers and drinks.

“I propose a toast.” Conner raised his glass, and Keisha mimicked him.

“To first impressions...” Conner started, and Keisha puckered her lips in disagreement, but she didn’t comment.

“Wait, let me finish.” Conner laughed. “To first impressions being replaced with lasting good memories.”

Keisha smiled, and they tapped their glasses together in agreement.

“Cheers.” They said in unison.

The conversation continued with light teasing and witty banter. Although Keisha was having a great time, she exhaled a nervous breath when Conner excused himself to the restroom. Her attention was on her phone as she sent her girls a group message that her date was going well so far, so when someone besides Conner slid into the seat opposite her, she was caught off guard.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Keisha whispered in shock.

“Why haven’t you been answering my damn calls? You want to take my money, and now you feel like you don’t have to talk to me? Is that it?”

Her ex-husband looked the same in appearance. His suit fit him perfectly, his haircut was fresh, and his goatee was lined to perfection. But his gray eyes had a deranged look that Keisha didn't like. And Keisha knew that the good memories of tonight would be replaced with more bad ones.

CHAPTER 8

CONNER

Conner was having a great date. Of course, he knew that he would. Keisha was just as mesmerizing now as she was when she slammed into his life unexpectedly. Everything about her from her voice to her laugh had seduced him.

When she walked in, his heartbeat sped up. The black dress she wore hugged her body so right he was jealous of the material. He wanted to be draped around her curves, caressing her body everywhere. He ran his hands through his hair, and adjusted himself.

Get it together, O'Bryan.

As he washed and dried his hands, he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror and smiled. He looked truly happy, and for the first time in months, he could say that he was. With the newest gym opening, and dealing with his crazy ex-girlfriend, Conner had been under a lot of stress. However, one trip to the grocery store, and his whole outlook had changed.

Conner hummed as he exited the restroom, but the tune died on his lips when he eyed a man sitting in his seat across from his date. Conner had no idea who the man was, but the way he was leaned in smiling at Keisha let him know that she was at the very least familiar with him.

However, the closer Conner came to the table, the better he was able to see that the

man wasn't smiling at all. In actuality, he was baring his teeth at her like a wild animal. Conner didn't like that; he also didn't like the way Keisha was holding onto her chair. Her knuckles were damn near white from her tight grip.

When Conner touched her on her back, Keisha nearly jumped out of her seat. He frowned and narrowed his eyes at the man. When Keisha cleared her throat, Conner smiled down at her in reassurance. But her eyes were telling him that whoever this guy was had scared her. Conner could feel her lightly tremble as he left his hand on her back.

"Everything okay, baby?" Conner used the pet name to stake his claim in front of the asshole, but it felt good to use the endearment.

Keisha shook her head and cleared her throat nervously. "No, it's not."

"Who the hell is this?" The man's voice stayed even but the menace that covered his face was obvious.

Keisha looked up at Conner with tears in her big brown eyes, and it broke his heart just a little. She was such a strong woman, and she had stood up to Conner, a perfect stranger, without batting those long lashes of hers. And Conner was not a small man. So to see her so upset, made him upset.

"Sweetheart, why don't you go to the ladies' room, and I'll take care of our visitor here," Conner stated as he pulled out Keisha's chair.

Keisha shook her head and she finally found her voice. "No, Conner. This is my ex-husband, Dylan. He was just leaving."

"No, the hell I wasn't. Who is this damn guy?" Dylan's voice began to rise, and Conner raised a brow at Keisha silently asking her what she wanted.

She dropped her head and took a deep breath before rising from her seat. “Please, don’t do anything crazy. He’s not worth it.”

Conner nodded, but he didn’t really agree to anything. He would tear the whole restaurant down if it meant not ever having to see that solemn look in Keisha’s eyes. Keisha took a step, but stopped short, and turned back to him.

“Nothing crazy,” she whispered, and then she kissed the corner of his mouth. Before she could leave, Conner pulled her back and kissed her on the lips.

There were several reasons that he didn’t deepen the kiss and let her walk away; one being they were in the middle of a restaurant; two they had an audience of a crazy ex; and three, it was their first kiss. The taste of her plump lips had him watching like a stalker until she was out of sight.

Even with such a small taste of her, he could understand why her ex-husband wouldn’t go away. However, that didn’t mean that he held any sympathy for the douchebag.

Conner slid into Keisha’s seat, and looked the man directly in the eye. “Is there a reason you are so rudely interrupting my date?” He questioned.

“Who the hell are you to datemywife?” The façade was slipping fast, and Dylan’s crazy had started to show.

“Ex-wife.”

“Wh-what?” Dylan stammered before he gathered his composure.

“Keisha is your ex-wife. She’s my current girlfriend. Keisha doesn’t want you here, and you don’t have any reason to talk to her, so leave.”

“Who the hell are you to tell me to leave? You can’t tell me shit!” Dylan smugly replied.

Conner chuckled. Dylan was playing at being hard. But Conner actually was hard. He would turn Dylan’s little world upside down with a flick of his wrist. But today, he wouldn’t play games with the petulant man. Today, he would get straight to the point.

Conner leaned in and smiled wickedly. “I’ll tell you who I am. I’m the man who will fuck up your entire world behind that woman. Now what I suggest you do, is find your way out of this restaurant before I kick your ass.”

Conner calmly sipped from the glass of water that was in front of him as he watched the man’s eyes flash with uncertainty. Conner knew Dylan’s type; he was a bully. A mean-spirited asshole that picked on people he deemed unworthy. However, his time to pick on Keisha was over. It would never happen again if Conner could help it.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:02 am

“That was an interesting date,” Keisha replied casually as Conner walked her to her car.

Conner smiled, knowing that she probably felt all kinds of awful that her crazy ex-husband had tried to ruin their first date.

“I’ve had worse.” Conner shrugged, and smiled. However, when he looked at Keisha’s face his humor dropped.

“Hey, don’t cry. I know that being in my company isn’t that horrible.” Conner joked as he pulled her into his arms.

He’d been wanting to hold her since she’d come back from the restroom with a worried look on her beautiful face. But once she had seen Conner sitting alone, relief flooded her face.

“I’m so sorry.” Keisha sniffled into his chest. “I haven’t seen or talked to Dylan in over a year. I don’t know how he even knew where I was.”

“It’s not your fault that your ex-husband showed up. Like you said... you haven’t seen him in over a year. There’s no need for the apology or the tears.” Conner stepped back and placed his large hand under her chin and lifted it up to see into her red rimmed eyes.

“Not your fault.” At that moment, she looked so vulnerable, and if he wasn’t such a

bastard he might've just opened her car door, and let her go home. But he just couldn't resist her lips any longer.

He leaned down slowly, giving her a chance to step away. But she didn't. She stood on her tip-toes, meeting him. He pushed his lips against hers softly with a feather light touch. Then he felt her tongue against his lips, and his control snapped.

Conner pressed Keisha's succulent body against her large SUV for support. His hand wrapped around her waist, pulling her closer to his growing manhood. He deepened the kiss, tasting the chocolate and strawberry mousse she had for dessert. He devoured her mouth, his tongue dancing with hers in an intimate tango.

Keisha moaned, and Conner tightened his grip on her waist. His other hand instinctively pushed into her massive curls. Her body seductively moved against his, and he pressed harder into her, he loved the feel of her body against his.

A couple talking loudly and laughing broke through the haze of lust they were surrounded in. Conner slowed the kiss, but he didn't step away. He licked her bottom lip before kissing it lightly one last time. He put his forehead against hers and tried to slow his breathing. When he inhaled, her scent of vanilla engulfed his senses.

"Conner?" Keisha's voice was low almost shy.

"Yeah, baby?"

"Does the kiss mean that you accept my apology?" Conner could hear the smile in her voice.

"If I say yes, will you keep kissing me?" He smiled as he took a step back to look in her face.

Keisha giggled. “Yes.”

“Then, hell yes. Apology accepted.”

CHAPTER 9

KEISHA

“I can’t believe that bastard had the audacity to show up, and then stay. He definitely tried to ruin your date!” April fumed from where she lounged on Keisha’s soft throw pillow on her floor.

“I know. That asshole has been MIA for over a year, and then poof he’s at the same restaurant you’re in at the exact same time? I call bullshit,” Bell added, sipping her cocktail.

The ladies had decided to come over to Keisha’s place to get a play by play of the drama that unfolded on her date two nights ago. While she was in the restroom, she had frantically texted them that Dylan was there at the restaurant. Of course, her girls were ready to jump in the car and come wreak havoc, but she convinced them that Conner had it handled. Keisha still couldn’t believe that Dylan had chosen that date to pop up on. He could’ve at least ruined my date with the foot defiler.

“Listen, nobody was more surprised than I was to see Dylan. I still don’t know how he knew I was there.” Keisha sipped her own drink as she contemplated the ridiculousness of her ex.

“He must’ve been stalking you. How else would he have known?” Bell stated matter-of-factly, still sipping from her drink.

Keisha rolled her eyes at her sister’s dramatics. “He wasn’t stalking me. I think it was

just a horrible coincidence. He was probably on a date or something. Or maybe he passed by the window and saw me.”

“Whatever.” Bell dismissively waved her hand. “I think his ass is a stalker,” Bell responded with a serious face.

Keisha did consider that her ex had followed her, but she dismissed the idea. If he wanted to confront her, all he had to do was show up at the bakery like he did when they were first divorced. Keisha knew that Dylan seeing her was a coincidence, and the entire reason he had come into the restaurant was to berate her. As usual.

“Anyway, sounds like Conner handled the situation better than you thought he would,” April commented.

“Yeah, you don’t know how relieved I was about that. I just knew that the caveman I first met was going to club Dylan over the head.” Keisha chuckled. “Here I am in this nice restaurant, and my ex-husband shows up acting a fool.” She shook her head. “By the look on Conner’s face, I knew that he was a millisecond away from kicking Dylan’s ass.”

“Damn! I wished he would have. Now I’m really sorry I got sick.” Bell frowned.

Keisha playfully swatted at her sister. “I, for one, am glad that Conner didn’t fight him. I never realized how skinny Dylan was until I saw him next to Conner.”

“Dylan’s not that skinny. Conner is just freaking gigantic.” April laughed as she shook her head.

“I wonder if everything on him is gigantic...” Bell wiggled her eyebrows suggestively before laughing.

“You are so crude, Kaybella,” Keisha responded in mock disgust as she clutched her imaginary pearls.

But I wonder the same thing.

After the girls left, Keisha found herself lost in thoughts of Conner. She had already admitted to him that he was nothing like she first thought. But the way he swooped in to save the day for her, made her truly reevaluate their initial meeting.

She was having a really bad day, but that wasn't an excuse for how she had behaved toward him at the grocery store. She could admit that when he walked away, she could've just let it go. Gathered her things and went about her day. Instead, she acted like a child ranting and raving about how rude he was. Now, granted it was rude of him not to offer his help, but Keisha had learned a long time ago that you can't put your expectations of what you would do onto other people.

In the end, though, their continued run-ins had to be destiny, serendipity, or fate. It had to be one if not all of those things because she had never in her life had so many chance encounters with one man. Her mother may have been the one obsessed with princesses, but Keisha was the one who still believed in fairytales, not that she would admit it to anyone. So, she decided to listen to the universe and see where things led with Conner O'Bryan, and maybe she would finally get her very own happy ending.

The chime of her cellphone brought Keisha out of her thoughts, and back to reality. When she saw the voicemail icon appear, dread automatically filled the pit of her stomach. She clicked on the icon and replayed the message.

Why don't you answer the damn phone... huh? You were so big and bad the other night. You thought you could sick your little guard dog on me, and I would just go

away. Is that what you thought? You are still a worthless bitch, and your little boyfriend won't always be around. You think you can just take my money and then move on? Then you are very mistaken.

Dylan's scathing hate filled words were slurred, but she received the message loud and clear. It was time to forward all of his harassing messages to her lawyer, but this time, she would take her attorney's advice; it was time to get the restraining order and block his number.

Even though they hadn't seen each other in a year, Dylan had still called every few weeks. His calls would consist of him asking for some nonessential document from when they were married, and when her lawyer would give him whatever he asked for, he would call back reprimanding her about being too lazy to get what he needed. It was all a mind game, a way for him to try to keep her in her place.

It was past time to let go of Dylan and his foolishness, she was stronger and better and she would not continue to let him manipulate her.

Keisha scrolled through her contacts and dialed the number for her attorney.

"Yes, may I speak to Ms. Morgan Matthews, please? It's Keisha Love calling."

CHAPTER 10

CONNER

Conner had a great date with Keisha, even though her asshole ex-husband tried to ruin their fun time. There was something off about the man that he didn't like at all. However, once he told him to get lost, the date got back on track. It was a little awkward at first, but the tension eventually died, and their conversation picked up right where they had left off before the intrusion.

Although the conversation that they'd had was interesting and even enlightening, Conner couldn't get the kiss with Keisha out of his head. She was so sensual without even trying. The way her breath had caught when he'd pushed his erection against her soft body drove him insane. But it wasn't just her body or her reaction to him. It was her overall sweet nature that attracted him like a moth to a flame.

He picked up the phone. He had made a decision. "Hello?" her sweet voice reverberated through the line.

"Hey, it's Conner."

"I know who it is silly." The sound of her giggles made Conner smile.

"Right." He chuckled. She always made him feel like a teenager. "I was wondering if you would like to go out with me tonight... if you weren't busy that is."

"Yeah. I mean yes. I would love that."

Conner could picture the smile on her face because he could hear it in her voice.

“How about I pick you up around seven? Dress warm.” Conner wanted this date to be better than their first. He wanted it to be special.

“Okay. That sounds cryptic though. Are we going to be outside? Because I have to tell you, I’m not outdoorsy at all,” Keisha replied, and Conner could hear the slight worry in her voice.

Conner laughed. “Don’t worry, we’re not rock climbing or anything like that. Just wear something warm and comfortable. I promise to take care of you.” And he meant those words.

Keisha chuckled softly. “Great. I can’t say that I’m good at rock climbing, but I’m glad you’re going to take care of me.”

Once the words left her mouth, Conner wanted her to believe them as much as he did. He would prove to her and himself that he was more than the grumpy stressed out man she met at the grocery store. He was a man that could offer her compassion, and conversation.

“I will always take care of you.” The words left his mouth before he could stop them, but that didn’t make them untrue.

“Wow, umm... you’re really not the guy I thought you were...” He could hear in Keisha’s voice that it was a statement, and not a question.

Conner cleared his throat to break the intensity of the moment. If he was going to have a deep conversation with Keisha, he wanted to be able to look her in her face. Or more importantly, those big beautiful brown eyes. He wanted to see all the emotions she couldn’t hold back because they were written all over her beautiful face.

“I’ll pick you up at seven then?” Conner confirmed.

“I’ll see you at seven.” Keisha disconnected the call, and Conner was instantly excited about the prospect of seeing her again.

Conner had everything all planned out. He would make it up to Keisha that their first date was semi-ruined by her ex-husband. He was determined to make this date memorable. Because it was the middle of January and surprisingly cold for North Texas, he wore loose fitting jeans, a big sweater, and a heavy coat. His long hair was tucked beneath a gray beanie.

When Keisha opened her door, she was dressed very similar except she was wearing furry boots, and a pair of earmuffs.

“I dressed warm,” she said with a shy smile.

“I see that. Good thing, cause it’s pretty cold out. You ready?” Conner smiled down at her.

She was a petite little thing, and he had the urge to scoop her up in his arms and kiss her senseless.

“Yep.” Keisha grabbed her keys and slid a wallet into her pocket. He watched her lock the door, and turned to him with a bright smile. He could watch her do mundane things and be satisfied just to be in her presence.

Conner grabbed her hand out of necessity. There was no way he could be so close to her, and not touch her in some way. He led her to the passenger side of his pickup, and helped her inside. Once he hopped into the driver’s side, he gave her a grin.

“Ready?” Conner questioned.

“I am!” Keisha’s smile was wide, and he loved the twinkle in her eyes. “I love surprises.”

Page 18

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:02 am

“Well, I hope I don’t disappoint, then.”

They drove to the outskirts of the city. Conner had a friend that was the owner of a tree farm. Mr. Owens always kept a little special part of his farm decorated until February. He always said that the time between New Year’s and Valentine’s Day could be sad, and he wanted to save a little cheer.

When they drove up to the farm, Conner looked to see Keisha’s reaction. Her face was lit up like the trees that were in front of them.

“Oh my God!! It’s not Christmas anymore...” She looked at him her eyes round with both curiosity and excitement.

“Do you like it?” Conner asked, but he could tell by the look on her face that she did.

“I love it!” Keisha exclaimed.

Conner hopped out of his truck, grabbing the blanket that he’d stashed in the backseat, and rushed around to the passenger side. However, Keisha had already made her way out of the truck, and he could tell she could hardly contain her eagerness to see the lights. Conner placed his arms around her delicate shoulders and pulled her into his side. She fit perfectly, and he was relieved when she simply melted against him like she belonged.

He led her to the entrance of the farm where there was a humongous tractor with a large wooden wagon attached to it. In the Fall, Mr. Owens did hayrides, but this time of year, the wagon was cushioned with large quilts and blankets.

Conner steered Keisha toward the small line of people that were waiting to get on the ride. When it was their turn, he helped her onto the spacious wagon, and made himself comfortable beside her. He placed the blanket over their legs and once again, she snuggled into his side.

The grove of trees were all decorated with white lights, and Mr. Owens had a little stereo that played Christmas songs. Although it was the beginning of January, with the music, lights, and Keisha snuggled against him, Conner was feeling quite jovial.

“I’ve never done anything like this before,” Keisha whispered, her face full of awe.

“I’m glad I could be your first.” Conner winked, and before she turned away he could see the light blush on her brown cheeks.

The rest of the twenty-minute ride through the farm was spent with them whispering and giggling to each other like teenagers. Conner couldn’t remember a time where he felt so light and carefree.

Once the ride was over, Conner took Keisha to a small bistro not far from the farm where they indulged in some of the best chicken pot pie, and hot chocolate that Conner could ever remember having.

“I was kinda shocked that you wanted a second date.” Keisha looked shyly over the rim of her mug.

“Why? Our first date ended well.”

Keisha blushed again, and Conner knew that she was thinking about the heated kiss they shared. “Yes, but with Dylan showing up...”

Conner nodded. “Your ex-husband is a nonfactor when it comes to my feelings about

you. I enjoyed our date, and I hope you give me the opportunity to take you on many more.” Conner’s chiseled jaw was locked into a serious expression as he looked into her beautiful face.

Her smile was slow, and she looked away shyly before she turned back to address him. “Thanks. I’m glad he didn’t ruin our chances of getting to know one another.”

Conner took Keisha’s hand and held it as he looked into her eyes. “I would never let anyone ruin our chances, beautiful. Nobody.”

They stared intently at one another before he tugged her hand, making her move toward him. He leaned over the middle of the small table where they were seated, and she met him in the middle where they shared a sweet kiss.

CHAPTER 11

KEISHA

It had been three weeks since their first date, and Keisha and Conner had seen each other almost every day. On the days that they weren't able to get together, they texted like two high schooler's with new phones.

Keisha never thought that such a gruff man could be so romantic. Conner could easily come across as a big goon, a muscle bound gym rat that only cared about working out. However, that was not the case at all. Yes, Conner could be grumpy, but he was far from a goon. He was dedicated to his gym and the people that worked for him. Conner worked countless hours to ensure that his business was a success, which was why Keisha was surprised by the amount of time he was able to spend with her.

Conner would sometimes drop by the bakery with tulips, which was Keisha's favorite flower. He would send sweet text messages throughout the day just to say hi, or check on how she was doing, and the dates he planned were the most romantic Keisha had ever been on.

One day Keisha mentioned that she had never been ice skating. So she wasn't surprised when he took her to an ice skating rink for a date. However, when they passed the main rink where people were laughing and skating, and entered another smaller empty rink, the sight before her left her mind instantly blown. Waiting on the side of the rink was a small candlelit dinner for two with a large throw blanket.

He smiled at her in that special way of his, and whispered, "Do you like it,

beautiful?”

Keisha couldn't help the beaming smile on her face. Of course she liked it, she loved it. And the dinner was spectacular. Nobody had ever done so much for her. They skated and laughed like two kids, and Keisha hadn't had that much fun in a long time.

A few nights ago, he made her his version of dinner.

Keisha shifted the box of her healthy cookies to one hand, as she knocked on the large wooden door. She looked around the massive porch, and she was thoroughly impressed. However, if she wasn't mistaken she could smell something burning.

When the door opened, a frazzled Conner stood wearing an apron covered in food.

“Hey gorgeous! You're early, and you brought cookies!” He smiled down at her, took the box, and pulled her into a passionate kiss that took her breath away.

“Yeah, Carson mentioned that you guys really liked them, so I thought I'd bring you some. Am I too early? Bell closed up for me, since I had a date.” Keisha questioned eyeing Conner.

“No, no. I was just trying to finish up. Come on in.” Conner smiled.

“Are you okay?” Keisha stood on her tip toes to look around him to see what was burning, but his large body effectively blocked her view.

“Uh, yeah.” Conner ran his hand through his disheveled hair. “What kind of pizza would you like to order?”

He took her coat and hung it up, and she followed him through the large foyer with confusion written all over her face.

“If we’re eating pizza, why do you have on an apron...” Her question was left unanswered as they entered the disaster that was his kitchen. There were several dirty pots and pans scattered on the counter. There was something burning on the stove, and the smoke was getting heavier by the second.

Keisha waved her hand in front of her face and coughed. Conner sat the cookies down on the counter, and ran quickly to the stove and turned off the burner. Keisha did her best not to laugh at his efforts, but he was so adorably cute with his shy smile and messy hair.

“As you can see... I’m not yet a master chef.” He grimaced, “it looked easy enough in the video. It just got a little out of hand.”

Keisha grinned, “I see that. How about this, you order that pizza, and I’ll help you clean up this mess.”

They worked in tandem getting the kitchen cleaned just in time for the pizza to arrive. They sat talking about their families, sipping wine, and eating their pizza. Keisha learned that they had a lot in common. They both had an older sibling, and grew up in the area. Both were really close to their parents, and even their extended family. Conner revealed to her how both he and his brother ate dinner with their parents at least twice a month, and how his mom hounded him every chance she got about not being a grandmother yet.

Keisha had similar conversations with her mother as well. Lynn was definitely ready to have grandbabies, and she made her and Bell aware at every turn.

Before Keisha knew it, the conversation had turned away from their families to more light-hearted topics. They laughed and drank at least a bottle of wine.

Keisha was comfortable with Conner, and they were having a great time when their

eyes connected. His bright blue to her sultry brown. Then he leaned over and took her mouth in a passionate kiss. He made love to her mouth in such a way that she was completely and totally lost. His large hand caressed her curves with reverence, and his touches set Keisha's body on fire.

Keisha kissed Conner back with hunger, her small hands finally getting to feel his massive muscles. His body was perfection, and she couldn't get enough of touching him. His large hands made their way under her sweater to her satin bra. He rubbed her full breasts until her nipples strained against the soft fabric. The feeling made Keisha's breath come out in short puffs her head was dizzy with desire.

Everything happened all at once, he lifted his shirt over his head, and then helped her do the same. They were touching each other like they were starved for human contact. Their bodies were grinding together causing Keisha's body to rise to an almost combustible level.

Just when she thought she couldn't take anymore, Conner stopped.

"Wh- what's wrong?" Keisha finally managed to get out through heavy pants.

"My phone keeps ringing." Conner smirked, and she felt her face blush in embarrassment. She couldn't hear anything, but the loud beating of her own heart.

Page 20

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:02 am

Their heavy make-out session was put on pause, when it was discovered that the new gym had been broken into. Conner promised to make it up to her, but Keisha completely understood why he had to go.

That had been the last official date they had been on. Conner had been running himself ragged trying to help the police figure out who had broken into the gym, so their time together alone had been limited. However, they were still able to flirt via text and talk on the phone.

But tonight, they were going to reconnect. Keisha was going to cook him dinner at her house and she hoped like hell that it would go better than the last time she decided to give a man the cookie.

I hope he doesn't have some weird foot fetish.

Keisha could hardly contain her excitement when she heard the knock at her door. She took off her apron and turned the burner on low. As she passed the mirror in the hallway, she fluffed up her hair, and checked her makeup.

When she opened the door, Conner was a sight for sore eyes. He brought her a bouquet of tulips and a bottle of Prosecco. A man after my very own heart.

Keisha greeted Conner with a kiss that quickly turned hot.

“Whoa there, cowboy. Let's eat first.” Keisha giggled, and Conner smiled.

“Oh come on, sweetheart, didn’t you miss me as much as I missed you?” Conner questioned, his eyes sparkling.

“You know I did.” Keisha smiled and pecked his lips once more, then she led him into her spacious home.

As they ate dinner, their conversation flowed as usual. One of the things Keisha loved about Conner was that their conversations were never stale. She laughed loudly when he told her about the time he was being an annoying little brother. His older brother snuck a girl into the house. Conner jumped out to scare the two teenagers, but when he saw the girls boobs he freaked out and turned and ran head first into a wall.

“Hey, it was my first pair of boobs, and I was only eleven.” Conner chuckled.

“I’m sure you’ve seen your fair share of boobs now.” Keisha laughed.

Conner shrugged his large shoulders, then ran his hand through his hair like a fifties heartthrob and winked. Keisha laughed at his antics.

“You’re a mess.” She chuckled.

“Yeah, but I’m your mess.” Conner kissed her and pulled her over into his lap.

As usual, the kiss heated. She could never contain herself when he kissed her. It quickly turned from light petting into heavy groping, and before she knew it, they were moving.

He carried her to her bedroom and sat her down on her feet. He stripped off the dress she was wearing and her lace undergarments. Keisha made sure to wear something sexy, but Conner took them off so fast, she was pretty sure he didn’t see them.

Conner started to strip off his clothes, as she watched him intently. Keisha just couldn't get over his body. He was an extremely sexy man. His tan muscles bulged with his every movement. His large biceps and forearms flexed as he removed his sweater, t-shirt, and then his pants.

Keisha planned to lick the V that led down to his boxer briefs. Her mouth watered at the outline of his large member. Then he took off his underwear, and Keisha couldn't help but swallow... hard.

Conner stalked toward her slowly, and Keisha felt like prey to a large panther. The sight of him sent shivers all over her body. He leaned down and ran his tongue over her neck. He then kissed his way down to her breasts before he licked between them. He slowly sucked one nipple then the other into his wet warm mouth.

Keisha moaned her pleasure when he slid down her body to the apex of her thighs. He kissed her inner thighs and she squirmed. He chuckled, and even that little puff of air from his lips made her core clench in need.

"Please, don't tease me," Keisha pleaded breathlessly.

"I would never tease you, baby," Conner answered with lust in his eyes.

When his tongue finally made contact with her tight channel, she could no longer hold back her screams of desire.

Conner pleased her with his mouth like a starving man. He licked and kissed until Keisha's orgasm hit her like a ton of bricks. She didn't have a chance to come down from her euphoria because he climbed up her body, taking her back up to the highest of highs.

"You are so beautiful." Conner looked her in her eyes, and the intensity that she saw

in his took her breath away.

Because Keisha's senses were on overload, she had no idea when Conner put on protection. He slipped his large member into her hot canal, and they both moaned at the sensation. Conner pushed in as deep as he could go, and then he began to move.

The feel of his large body moving against hers was heaven. Their combined moans of ecstasy got louder and louder with each shift of his pelvis. Keisha matched him thrust for thrust, their bodies moved faster and faster.

"Oh, Conner! You feel so good!" Keisha screamed as another orgasm took over her body.

"Yes, baby! Give me your sweetness," Conner groaned in her ear, then his body tensed as he orgasmed.

Once their sweaty bodies cooled down, Conner deposited the protection in the trash. He climbed back into bed, and pulled Keisha into his strong warm embrace.

Keisha was so content that she fell asleep with a smile on her face.

CHAPTER 12

CONNER

Conner had been on cloud nine since he and Keisha had taken their relationship to another level. Although the sex was out of this world, he knew that she meant much more to him than that. If he thought that she had occupied his mind before, he was mistaken. Because now, it seemed like every time he closed his eyes, he could see her, smell her, feel her very presence. After a month and a half, he could feel himself falling. And there wasn't a damn thing he could do about it.

A knock on his office door brought Conner out of his musings.

"Come in," he hollered, then all he could see was a mass of wild curls as Gloria stuck her head through his office door.

"Hey, Conner we need to talk."

"Uh oh. Is this about the break-in?" Conner asked, hopeful. The police were at a dead-end. Even though there was surveillance in the gym, the person was concealed. However, they slipped up and left a fingerprint. Only thing was, there weren't any matches in the system.

"No, they are at a standstill. Sorry," Gloria replied sympathetically.

"Alright, what's going on?" Conner was a little disappointed that the cops hadn't gotten further in the case, but his gym only had minimal damage. Although his office

suffered the most, his desk had been ransacked. They assumed the offenders were looking for the combination to the onsite safe.

“Brooke.”

Conner frowned as he usually did when Brooke was involved. “What about her?”
Conner gruffly asked.

“She’s been calling nonstop wanting a meeting with you. I told her your schedule was full, but she keeps calling. I have a feeling she’s going to show up here sooner rather than later.”

Even though they were still at the new gym, and their accommodations were temporary, Conner knew Gloria was right. Brooke had already popped up once, and he wouldn’t put it past her to do it again.

“Alright, just set up a meeting with her. I might as well get it over with, otherwise I will have to continue to deal with her, and that’s the last thing I want or need right now.”

“Okay, how about today at lunchtime? Your meeting was rescheduled, so you’re available then.”

“Fine. But not here, just in case things get a little... complicated. Make reservations at a restaurant, nothing fancy. I don’t want her getting the wrong idea. This is a send-off, not a date.”

“I suggest Mickie D’s... no reservation needed.” Gloria smiled sweetly.

Conner just chuckled in response.

“Or Wendy’s. They have a four for four deal, although she’s not worth that much in my opinion.” Gloria mumbled the last part, but Conner still heard her.

“Tell me how you really feel.” Conner laughed. It was no secret that Gloria wasn’t all hearts and flowers when it came to Brooke, unless the hearts were broken and the flowers were dead. She let her disdain be known from the very beginning.

And now that Conner knew what he did about Brooke, he wished he would’ve listened to Gloria. It would’ve saved me a lot of trouble.

The restaurant was nicer than Conner expected from Gloria. The way she was talking, he was sure he’d be meeting Brooke at Burger King. Conner was dressed in his standard gym attire of black bottoms, and red polo with the Get Fit logo, and a winter coat. However, Brooke was dressed in a short tan dress with thigh high denim stiletto boots.

I guess the denim is her idea of casual. Conner shook his head at the inappropriateness of her outfit. Not only was she dressed for the club, but it was January. And even in North Texas it was still too cold for such skimpy attire.

Brooke smiled brightly when he sat down at the table. She batted her eyelashes, and licked her fuchsia painted lips. Once upon a time, that move would’ve turned him on, but ever since the night he learned what kind of woman Brooke really was, nothing she did could wake up the desire he once had for her.

Conner walked into his house exhausted. Although he was finally able to get off early, he knew that the only thing he wanted to do was shower and catch some z’s. Brooke would be pissed because he promised her a night out to Fearing’s, a five-star restaurant that according to Brooke, all of her group of friends but her had been to,

but he would make it up to her another night.

Brooke didn't hear him come in, her phone was on speaker, and he could hear her chatting away. Conner was about to tell her he was home, but he heard his name, so he paused eavesdropping on her conversation.

"I told you, Annalise, Conner is a hard worker, he will do what needs to be done to give me everything I want." Brooke gushed and Conner smiled. Yeah his girl was spoiled, but she was worth it.

Conner could hear Annalise scoff. "Brooke, of course he works hard. He's blue collar at best, and I still can't believe you brought someone like him into our circle of friends."

The smile was wiped from Conner's face as he frowned, he never really got a good vibe from Annalise even though she had been polite, cold... but polite nonetheless. Now, he knew why.

Page 22

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:02 am

Brooke sighed loudly. “He might be blue collar, but he’s a millionaire. Plus, he’ll keep me in the life that I’ve grown up in, I’m accustomed to being pampered, and Conner will make sure that I am. And he’s pretty to look at.” Brooke giggled, but Conner’s frown deepened.

Brooke didn’t defend his character, or his love for her. Shit, she didn’t even claim to love him. All she could say was that he could keep her pampered... The hell?

“Oh my God, Brooke! Your father can take care of you until you find a suitable husband. You can’t just bring any trash off the street into this world.”

Annalise was wrong, and what she didn’t know was that Brooke’s father had cut her off. His newest bride made sure of that. Brooke was given a lump sum and thrown into the deep end to sink or swim on her own. And Brooke was sinking fast.

When Conner met her, she was working in a high end boutique as a clerk. He was well aware that she was struggling with her bills although she would pretend that she wasn’t. Conner didn’t know until months later that she had grown up wealthy.

“Annalise...” Brooke whined like a child, “Conner is suitable. He does anything that I say, and he has money. If I married someone within our circle, I would have to be second best to his family. Conner puts me above everyone else, even his ghastly family.” Conner could see her face break into a triumphant smile.

“It won’t take me long to separate him from them. Once I get that ring on my finger, and we’re married, I’ll be sure to start cutting them off one by one until I’m all he has left.” She cackled like a villain in a horrible low budget movie.

“What about children?” Annalise asked, and he could almost picture a horrified expression on her face.

“Children?” Brooke laughed. “I would never. He doesn’t have the pedigree or the background to raise children in upper society. You can only buy your way in so far. Anyway, my body isn’t made for children.” Brooke said almost absently.

Conner was horrified, but he could finally recognize the person that he had failed to see.

Conner never revealed to her that he heard the conversation. He just told her that things weren’t working out, and he didn’t want to see her anymore. They weren’t living together, and they weren’t even engaged. He couldn’t believe that Brooke was simply using him for his money. It hurt. The thought of him putting his all into a woman that didn’t give a damn about him, cut him deep. But the thing that pissed him off the most, was her plans for his family. No woman would ever come between him and his family.

As Conner sat across from Brooke, he thought that maybe it was time to tell her what he overheard, so that she could understand there was no going back for them.

“We need to work this out between us. We were good together once, and we can get back to that.” Brooke whined with an insincere smile on her pretty face.

Conner could see her so clearly now. How could I have been so blind?

Conner sighed and put his hands on the table. Brooke placed her cold hands on top of his. She smiled victoriously when he didn’t immediately move.

“Brooke, we will never go back... or forward. We. Are. Done.”

Brooke sighed dramatically. “I know you think that...”

Conner shook his head. “I heard your conversation with Annalise.”

The shocked expression on Brooke’s face was priceless. And Conner finally had hope that she would get it.

“You will never get a chance to separate me from my family.” Conner shook his head firmly then smirked. “Or my money.” He removed his hands from beneath hers. “You have a nice life. If you continue to harass me, I’ll take out a restraining order. Just think about what your circle would say about that.”

Brooke’s face turned grim, and then red. She snatched up her purse and coat and stormed out of the restaurant.

Conner knew that his Brooke problem was effectively solved.

CHAPTER 13

KEISHA

“I can’t believe after everything I’ve been through that I have this problem.” Keisha sighed into the phone as she paced back and forth in her kitchen.

“Keish, maybe it wasn’t him,” Bell said unconvincingly. Keisha could hear in her sister’s voice that she didn’t believe her own words.

Keisha bit her lip and shook her head even though her sister couldn’t see her. “I’m positive it was him,” she replied anxiously.

“Are you sure? I mean...” Bell trailed off, and Keisha knew she was at a loss for words.

“I thought I saw Dylan, so I ducked into a restaurant, and there he was... holding hands with some blonde bimbo.”

Bell sighed. “Maybe... You know what? I don’t even know what to say, sis.”

“I felt a connection with him. I thought we both did... but maybe he didn’t feel the same,” Keisha replied sadly.

Keisha hadn’t told anyone that she and Conner had slept together. It wasn’t like she was keeping it a secret; she just wanted a piece of him to herself. The connection they had when they made love was very real. At least it was real to me.

“Oh, honey. It will be okay. I’m sure if you felt something, he felt it too. I mean, hell, I felt the heat coming from you two in the gym that day. If you feel that strongly about him, maybe you should just call him and ask. At this point, both of ya’ll are too old for the guessing games.”

Keisha thought about her sister’s words, and Bell was absolutely right. Keisha was too old for games, and calling him would be the adult thing to do, but she was having a case of the nerves. Conner didn’t seem like the type of man that got the cookie and moved on, but Keisha was not a delusional woman. It had definitely been Conner in that restaurant.

“I think I will meet him. If I call, I won’t be able to see his face when I ask him what’s going on.”

“That’s a good idea, and if he lies, we are all going to ride on his big ass,” Bell replied, and Keisha knew she was serious.

“There’s no need for violence, dear sister.” Keisha chuckled. Ever since they were little, her sister was always quick to act first and ask questions later.

“You know I can’t let anyone hurt my baby sister. Ask Dylan,” Bell stated nonchalantly, and Keisha was reminded of how overprotective her sister really was.

When Keisha had cried to Bell about Dylan’s infidelity, Bell was not happy. And when she ran into him at a club, she showed him just how unhappy she was with his behavior. Although she didn’t lay a hand on Dylan, Bell’s words had cut him deep.

“I appreciate you looking out for me. But Conner is no Dylan,” Keisha said with a confidence she didn’t feel.

I sure hope he isn’t like my cheating scum of an ex.

Keisha didn't get a chance to talk to Conner because as soon as she got off the phone with her sister, the alarm company for the bakery called. When she got there, April, Bell, Tracy, and Sabrina were waiting for her.

The front part of the bakery was in shambles. Two of the front windows were smashed in, and there was glass everywhere. When the police finally let her into the shop, Keisha could only burst into tears.

"Oh, sweetie. It will be okay." Tracy rubbed her back consolingly.

"We'll have this place cleaned up in no time." Sabrina smiled compassionately.

Her friends gathered around Keisha, lending her their strength, and she would be forever grateful for that. She took a deep breath, wiped her tears, and mustered up her composure. Keisha still had to speak to the officers about the details of the break-in.

Once she introduced herself to the officer in charge, he asked her if she had a camera in the store. Keisha headed to her office to log into her computer to pull up the camera feed, and she noticed that the damage had been contained to the front of the bakery. The vandals didn't have enough time to trash the entire space because of the bakery's prominent location, which was a couple of blocks over from the police station, and because of the silent alarm system.

The officer followed her into the office and waited while she logged in. Once she got the video feed queued up, both she and the officer watched with bated breath.

What she watched was unbelievable. A man wearing a hoodie and a scarf wrapped around his face started beating on the front door. It seemed to agitate the man that the door was locked. He pulled and tugged on it violently as if that would make it

magically unlock. Then he pulled a hammer out of his coat pocket, and smashed in the glass of the front door.

“Oh my God! Why does he have a hammer?” Keisha gasped as she leaned closer to the screen of her computer.

The officer shook his head, then jotted something down on his notepad. They continued to watch as the man destroyed any and everything he could get his hands and hammer on. He turned over tables and chairs, and smashed in the display case. He must’ve heard the sirens because he threw the hammer through the large glass window, picked it up off the ground, and ran away.

Page 24

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:03 am

The man's hood fell down a couple of times, but he quickly replaced it. Keisha couldn't tell who it was, and of course with the cold weather, he was wearing gloves.

"Do you recognize the man?" the officer questioned, still taking notes.

"No, I don't." Keisha was perplexed by the idea that anyone would want to do anything like that to her.

"Is there anyone that you've been having trouble with lately? A disgruntled ex-employee or customer? Maybe an ex-boyfriend?"

Then it clicked in Keisha's head. Did Dylan do this? Why in the world would he trash her bakery? He was an investment banker. Surely, he didn't have time to go around throwing hammers through windows.

"I just petitioned the court for a restraining order against my ex-husband," Keisha solemnly replied.

The officer nodded. "We'll look into it and get back to you."

"Thank you, officer." Keisha shook hands with the officer, and he left the office. Keisha sighed as tears again started to roll down her flushed cheeks. She really hoped it had been a stranger that destroyed her bakery, but she could feel in the pit of her stomach that it wasn't.

If it was Dylan, and he came with a hammer, he was there to purposely cause damage. And if it had been any other night, she would've been at the bakery, but

because of inclement weather, the delivery truck was delayed a day, so she closed the bakery early and headed home.

“Who in the hell did this?” Keisha whispered to herself.

At the moment, all she wanted to do was cry and throw herself a pity party, but she couldn’t do that. She had to get the windows at the front of the shop boarded up, and a lock for the kitchen door. There were thousands of dollars’ worth of equipment and supplies that she had to make sure stayed secure.

Just when she had resolved herself to cleaning, her phone rang. It was Conner, and as much as she wanted to hit the red phone icon, she didn’t.

“Hello.” Keisha didn’t even try to infuse her voice with cheer. She needed to talk to Conner about seeing him in the restaurant, but now was definitely not the time.

“Hey gorgeous, is everything alright? You sound... I don’t know, strange.” Keisha could hear the curiosity in Conner’s voice.

“Yeah. Uh, can we talk later? I have some things going on, but I didn’t want to send you to voicemail.”

“Is there anything I can do to help?” Conner questioned, and she could tell that he was sincere, which made her all the more confused about what she saw.

“No, not really. Hot Stuff was broken into tonight. I have to clean up the mess, and...”

“What do you mean?” Conner interrupted her. “Are you okay? Were you there when it happened? Are you there now?” Conner fired question after question at Keisha so fast that her head spun.

“No, I wasn’t here. I was at home, and I’ll be fine once I get everything settled. Which is why I need to go. It’ll probably be late when I finish, so I’ll call you tomorrow.” Keisha heard Conner grunt, but disconnected the call before he could reply.

Keisha wasn’t giving him the cold shoulder. She just had enough on her plate. She would deal with her confusion with the Conner situation later. Right now, she needed to call her lawyer and alert her to what was going on.

I swear if it’s not one thing, it’s two.

CHAPTER 14

CONNER

If Keisha thought that Conner was just going to stand by while she handled a break-in on her own, she was sadly mistaken. There was no way in hell he was going to sit around and let his woman handle something like that by herself.

They hadn't had the talk about their relationship status, and just because they had slept together didn't mean they were exclusive. However, Conner wanted all those things with Keisha. He wanted to be in a relationship with her. He wanted to be exclusive, and he wanted to be the one she called when she needed support. He was determined to make all of those things a reality.

Conner's long legs ate up the distance to his truck. As soon as he pulled out of his garage, he was blocked by Carson's SUV. Conner was in such a hurry he thought about just ramming the damn thing and driving away.

"Yo, dude move your shit. I gotta go!" Conner yelled out the window of his pickup.

"Man, damn. What crawled up your butt? I was jus?" Carson didn't get to finish his statement because Conner cut him off.

"I don't have time, Carson. Keisha's bakery was broken into. I need to get to her. She needs me." Conner hoped that was a true statement. Their phone conversation was odd, and it had never been that tense between them before. But he'd be damned if he let that stop him from going to be by her side in her time of need.

“Oh hell! Let me park, and I’ll go with you.”

“Okay, but hurry the hell up,” Conner yelled at his cousin.

Carson was barely in the passenger side before Conner peeled out of the driveway.

The drive to Keisha’s bakery was fast, and Conner was surprised that he didn’t get a speeding ticket. When he pulled up and saw the damage, anger swelled in his chest and he knew his face was beet red.

“Damn! Who in the hell did this?” Carson questioned as he hopped out of the truck.

Conner was trying to reign in his temper. The damage looked extensive, there was broken glass all over the sidewalk, and both the large window and the front door were covered in large black tarps.

Conner took a deep breath and got out of his truck. The only thing he could think about was getting to Keisha and making sure she was alright. She was such a hard working woman, and she put her heart and soul into Hot Stuff. For somebody to try and destroy that, it royally pissed him off.

Both Conner and Carson entered the bakery with caution. Once they were inside, the damage was even more heartbreaking. Whoever did this was angry. It looked like a tornado had come through and destroyed everything that wasn’t bolted to the floor.

“Gentlemen, you can’t be in here.” A short woman with a red afro stopped sweeping to address them.

“Oh, it’s okay, Sabrina. This is Carson and Conner.” Another woman came from behind the counter. She had long, curly hair and milk chocolate skin. “They are Bell and Keisha’s....” Her words trailed off, and she did a little shimmy with a cheeky

smile on her pretty face.

Conner looked at Carson and shook his head with a smile. Apparently, all the women at Hot Stuff did the same little shimmy dance.

“I’m Tracy, by the way.” She held out her hand and they took turns shaking it. “Keisha, Bell, and April are in the back. I’ll let Keisha know you’re here.”

“Great. Thanks,” Conner responded.

Although the place was in shambles, it looked like everything that was broken could be easily replaced. Conner wanted to run to wherever Keisha was so that he could see her beautiful face and kiss the sadness he’d heard in her voice on the phone away.

Just when he started to pick up a broom and start sweeping, Keisha, Bell and April came from the back. His heart lurched when he was finally able to lay eyes on her. Her shoulder length hair was in a messy bun, and the big brown eyes that he was so fond of were red and swollen.

Conner couldn’t have stopped himself from rushing toward her if he wanted to. Before he knew it, she was in his arms and crying into his chest.

“It’s okay, baby. I’m here,” he soothingly whispered as he held her tight and kissed the top of her head.

Conner could’ve held Keisha in his arms forever. He hated the tears that fell so easily from her eyes, but he was glad to be there to support her. However, Keisha was a strong woman, so he wasn’t surprised when she took a deep calming breath, and looked up at him with a face full of determination.

“Thanks,” Keisha smiled sadly, “but what are you doing here?”

The question threw Conner off a little bit, but she’d been through a lot, so he wouldn’t read too much into it.

“I came because it’s the middle of the night, and somebody broke into your business.” Conner wiped away a stray tear, and leaned down to kiss her luscious lips.

“I came to make sure you were alright.”

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:03 am

Keisha wrapped her arms around his waist and gave him a tight squeeze. Conner rubbed her hair, leaned down, and kissed the side of her neck lovingly.

“How about we get this mess cleaned up, and we can talk about what happened later, okay?” Conner kissed Keisha’s lips again, and she gave him a small smile. He could tell that something else was bothering her, but he would address it later.

Once they got all of the glass swept up, and Carson had installed the locks on the kitchen door, they were all exhausted. It was past midnight, and after Tracy, Sabrina, and April left, Conner knew that the likelihood of him getting to talk to Keisha was slim. But he’d be damned if she spent the night anywhere but in his arms.

Conner threw his keys to Carson. “You can take Bell home in my truck.”

Carson cocked a thick brow, but nodded. “Alright. Bell, you ready?”

“Uh, yeah that’s a negative.” Bell defiantly crossed her arms over her chest. “My sister just went through a traumatic experience because of her asshole ex-husband. If you think I’m...”

“Wait.” Conner cut off Bell’s rant. “Dylan did this?” Conner looked to Keisha, but she turned away. He could feel the fury that he’d tamped down beginning to boil.

“We don’t know that for sure, Bell.” Keisha sighed heavily.

“Who in the hell else would do something like this, Keisha? Let’s be real, he’s been calling and stalking you. It’s him!” Bell’s voice rose with each point she made, and

Conner was thoroughly pissed.

He and Keisha would talk for hours about everything, and the only time she mentioned her ex-husband was after their first date. She never told him that the asshole was stalking her. Conner was beyond livid.

“Carson, take Bell. Keisha, where are your keys?” Conner’s voice was hard as steel and it conveyed that he was not to be questioned.

Bell started to protest, but Keisha held up her hand. “I’ll be fine, Bell. I’ll call you tomorrow.”

“Are you sure?” Bell questioned, and Keisha nodded as they hugged their goodbyes.

Conner knew that Bell was an overprotective sister, but he would never do anything to hurt Keisha. And he would never let anyone else hurt her, either. However, there wasn’t a chance in hell that he was letting her go anywhere without him tonight.

Once they started driving Keisha asked, “Where are we going?”

“My place. If Dylan did this, he might show up at yours and I’m not going to take that chance.”

Conner knew if Dylan showed up at Keisha’s house, there was no telling what he would do to the man. He would end anybody that meant to harm his woman. Although he had worked too hard to go to jail at this point in his life, he would definitely go to jail.

Keisha was silent all the way to his house. Conner didn’t bother her; it had been an emotional night for her, so he gave her the space she needed. He wouldn’t crowd her or question her if she wasn’t ready to talk yet, but he just needed to be near her.

Conner would always put her needs first, and he would always make sure that she was alright. His meeting with Brooke reminded him of the man that he was. Conner had changed because of the hurt his ex-girlfriend had caused him. He became a grumpy asshole that guarded his heart at all costs.

However, that wasn't the man his parents had raised him to be. And meeting Keisha had reminded him of who he truly was. She made him want to be the protective, caring, and loving partner to a woman that deserved it. And Keisha more than deserved it.

Conner pulled in front of his house and cut the engine off. When he looked over, he figured out why Keisha was so quiet; she was sleeping with her head leaned against the passenger side window.

Conner climbed out of the SUV, and he was grateful that Keisha had a large enough vehicle for him to drive comfortably. He walked around to the passenger side and pulled Keisha into his arms. She groaned and snuggled into his chest, but she didn't wake-up.

Conner closed the door and managed to get it locked. He carried Keisha up to his bedroom and placed her gently on the bed. Once he got undressed, he pulled off her coat, shoes, and jeans and tucked her beneath the covers. He climbed in behind her and pulled her into his chest. In his arms is where she belonged, whether she knew it or not.

"I'm falling for you," Conner whispered into the quiet room. And even though their time together had been extremely short, he believed those words with all of his heart.

CHAPTER 15

KEISHA

“I’m falling for you.” Keisha heard the words whispered, but she must’ve dreamed them. That was the only explanation her exhausted mind could think of. They’d only been dating for a few, and she had just caught him on a date with another woman. It wasn’t possible that he was falling for her, was it?

Keisha knew how she felt, and her feelings were growing fast. How could any red blooded woman not fall for a man like Conner O’Bryan? He was sweet, caring, patient, and kind. He was romantic, and kept her laughing. There wasn’t a man on this earth that had made her feel how he did.

However, Keisha wasn’t afraid to admit that after her marriage ended in divorce, she was more than a little gun shy. She had put her all into loving a man that had never truly loved her in return. Hindsight was always perfect, and she could see the mistakes that she made in her marriage. Keisha let Dylan treat her like a second class citizen. She allowed him to degrade her on a daily basis, but she also said enough was enough and got out of the dysfunctional relationship.

Keisha promised herself that she would never let another person run over her again, so in that moment, in the early hours of the morning, she decided that she wouldn’t let another day go by without talking to Conner about seeing him in the restaurant. It was time for her to pull up her big girl panties, and face her issues head on.

“I can hear you thinking.” Conner’s deep voice was sleep laden, and Keisha couldn’t

help but smile as he pulled her closer and kissed the top of her head.

“Sorry, I couldn’t sleep.” Keisha sighed. It wasn’t the most ideal time to have such a deep conversation, but it was no time like the present.

“Umm. So what’s on your mind, beautiful? Is it the break-in?” Conner questioned as he sat up and flipped on the bedside lamp.

Keisha sat up and rubbed her eyes. “I wanted to talk about us.”

Conner exhaled deeply. “I knew it wasn’t just the break-in. I could feel the tension.” Conner ran his hand through his messy hair. “I don’t like that feeling between us.”

“Me either.” Keisha responded in a sad tone. “I saw you the other day in a restaurant holding hands with a woman.”

Keisha just blurted everything out. If she didn’t, she was afraid that the words would get lost.

“I’m sorry. You saw me what?” Conner questioned. His voice was full of confusion, and Keisha hoped he wouldn’t pretend that it didn’t happen. The last thing she needed was her trust in him to be completely destroyed. Keisha didn’t think she could go through another heartbreak like she had when she got divorced.

“I saw you at Bergeron’s the other day.” Keisha paused to read Conner’s facial expression but he still looked confused, so she continued. “It was around lunch time, and I was running errands when I thought I saw Dylan. I had just petitioned the court for a restraining order, so I really didn’t want to see him, even by accident. I ducked into the restaurant, and I saw you sitting at a table holding hands with some blonde woman.”

“So, I didn’t imagine that you were pulling away from me?” Conner questioned, but Keisha didn’t like the smile on his face because she didn’t see anything funny.

“It was you.” It was a statement, but Keisha still wanted him to admit it. “Why were you on a date with another woman?”

“Baby, I wasn’t on a date,” Conner stated slowly as if she were a child, and Keisha could feel herself getting angrier.

Keisha arched her brow and pursed her plump lips. “So what was it?” She waved her hands for him to continue. He smirked and she made the move to leave the bed when he grabbed her waist.

“I’m sorry, beautiful. I just never imagined you being jealous.”

“I’m not jealous,” Keisha argued. “What I am is three seconds from leaving this house if you don’t tell me what the hell you were doing holding hands with another woman. And don’t play with me.”

Conner’s face became serious, and Keisha knew that he could see the tears in her eyes. It had been an emotionally exhausting day, and she wasn’t in the mood for his teasing.

“My ex-girlfriend, Brooke, is who you saw me with.”

“You were on a date with your ex?” Keisha couldn’t hide the hurt in her voice if she wanted to, but she refused to cry.

“No. It wasn’t a date. Brooke has been harassing me, calling the office and showing up unannounced to different events. I needed her to know that we were completely finished. That our relationship was over. For good.” Conner held her hand and looked

deeply into her eyes. “I’m sorry that I made you feel like you couldn’t trust me. I would never hurt you, Keisha. Never.”

Conner seemed sincere, but Keisha wouldn’t play the fool for anyone else ever again. Her hesitation must’ve been written on her face because Conner went on to explain his history with his ex. When she heard the details of their break-up, Keisha wanted to believe him. Conner had never given her a reason not to trust him, but wasn’t that always the case; you trusted somebody until they gave you a reason not to.

“Keisha, I’m not going anywhere. I want us to continue to get to know one another, and grow in our relationship together, exclusively. I know it hasn’t been that long, and we have to build trust, and I’m willing to do that. Are you?”

Keisha had to go with her women’s intuition and trust that Conner was being honest. She would give him a chance, and hopefully they could build a future together. She hoped to the heavens that he wouldn’t make a fool out of her.

“Yes, I’m willing.”

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:03 am

Once the words were out of her mouth, there was no turning back. The desire she felt for Conner came rushing forward, and she wanted to show him how she felt. Keisha climbed into his lap and kissed him passionately.

“Thank you, sweetheart, for giving me a chance.” Conner breathed in between heartfelt kisses. Keisha couldn’t help but feel like she was the one that should feel thankful.

Just like the first time they made love, Keisha’s body was on autopilot, heating up instantly with every touch of his hands. Conner knew just where and how to touch her. He was a skilled lover, and without even trying, he owned all of her desires.

Keisha moaned her pleasure when Conner’s expert fingers found their way to her pleasure button. He circled her clit slowly and reverently as he dipped his large finger in and out of her hot core. Keisha could feel her body building up to a much needed release.

The stresses of the day were long forgotten as Conner pushed her body closer to climax. Conner sucked on her neck as she rode his fingers, bucking her hips to the rhythm he created.

Keisha threw her head back, and she was right on the edge when Conner stopped.

“Not yet, beautiful. Don’t cum yet,” he whispered, still pumping his fingers in and out of her body.

“I can’t h–hold it,” Keisha stammered, still rocking her hips.

“Yes, you can. Don’t cum, beautiful. Hold it back.” Conner’s voice was raspy, and so sexy that Keisha could hardly believe he was asking her such a thing.

How could she not climax when he was doing such wonderful things to her body?

“I promise it will be worth the wait.” Conner slid down her body, and replaced his thick fingers with his skillful tongue.

Well, shit.

CHAPTER 16

CONNER

Conner could spend the entire night just tasting Keisha's goodness. The sound of her moans and mewls of pleasure turned him on so much, he could hammer a nail with his member.

"Conner, I'm not going to be able to wait. Please, I need to cum." Keisha panted and squirmed. Her body was covered in a light sheen of sweat.

Conner decided to give her a reprieve from his mouth by sliding his massively hard cock into her waiting body. When he was seated deep within her pulsating core, he knew the true meaning of heaven on earth.

Their bodies moved together in unison. Conner pumped in and out of her silky heat like a mad man. The feeling of her warm wet core wrapped around him was like nothing that he ever felt before. The emotions of the day, and them reconnecting, was all coming out in their love making.

"Yes, Conner! Ohhh..." Keisha screamed out her release, and Conner followed her over the cliff of bliss.

They lay in bed cuddled together silently, Keisha wrapped in Conner's warm embrace. He twirled a finger around one of her stray curls as he thought there was no place on earth he'd rather be.

Keisha moved out of Conner's arms and stretched. The view of all of her beautiful smooth brown skin, had him watching her intently.

"Where are you going?" Conner asked when she moved from the bed.

"Kitchen. You wore me out. I need some water." Keisha winked at him.

Conner smiled because she had no idea that was just the warm-up. He'd planned to do much more to her before the day was over.

"I'll get it. You get comfy, and I'll make us a bite to eat." Conner crawled from the bed, and slipped on a pair of basketball shorts.

"It's like," Keisha glanced at the clock, "four thirty in the morning. You want to eat now?" Her pretty face was covered in confusion.

Conner smiled. "I normally get up at four to work out, so this is my normal breakfast time anyway. No worries, I'll keep it light." Conner leaned down and kissed her lips.

Before he knew it, the kiss had turned from a sweet peck to a full on devouring of her lips. Her sweet taste was his favorite flavor in the world, and he was man enough to admit that he couldn't get enough of her.

Conner pulled back regretfully. "If I don't leave now, you'll never get your water."

Keisha's lips formed a cute pout before she leaned back against the headboard. "Okay, but hurry back."

Conner made his way downstairs, and into the kitchen. However, he stopped in his tracks when he felt a cool breeze hit his skin. What the hell?

Conner backtracked and made his way into the living room when he noticed the patio door was slightly ajar. His gun was in the safe upstairs, so he proceeded with caution without a weapon. He didn't see anything, but he didn't want to take any chances.

Conner closed the patio door and locked it. He went back upstairs to get his gun so that he could check the house, and make sure Keisha locked herself in his bedroom.

When he got back upstairs, he rushed into the room. What he saw nearly stopped his heart.

“No!” Conner screamed as he rushed forward.

Conner didn't think. He didn't have time to waste. He just rushed at the attacker before Keisha could be caused any harm. His heart beat out of his chest, and his blood ran cold in his veins. The fury made him see red. He faintly heard Keisha scream, but he couldn't make out what she said.

Dylan raised the knife over his head, and forcefully thrust it down toward Keisha. However, she rolled out of the way in the nick of time. Dylan tried to grab her, but she fell off the bed.

Just when Dylan tried to go after Keisha, Conner slammed into Dylan's smaller body with the force of a Mack truck. “I will end you! Son-of-a-bitch!”

On contact, the knife flew under the bed as they wrestled for the upper hand. Dylan punched Conner, and he could feel the anger behind each blow that Dylan landed. However, Dylan's punches could never compare to Conner's. The absolute rage behind each forceful hit that Conner threw was enough to leave any man wounded.

Conner landed a body shot to Dylan's kidneys and got the upper hand. Dylan tried to cover his head as he gasped for breath, but Conner didn't let up. Conner landed blow after blow to Dylan's face and body until his arms were tired.

When the red haze cleared and Conner finally stopped punching him, he saw that Dylan lay bloodied and groaning on the bedroom floor. Conner felt no sympathy what-so-ever. The deranged lunatic had broken into his home and tried to kill his girlfriend. There was no coming back from that.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:03 am

Conner turned toward where Keisha fell on the other side of the bed, but she was no longer there. “Keisha!” Conner yelled as he got up and moved toward the hall, but the ensuite door opened and Keisha ran out holding a pair of scissors.

“Are you okay?” She dropped the scissors and ran toward him, throwing her arms around his waist. “I was looking for a weapon to help.”

Fat tears rolled down her beautiful face, and he felt a sense of pride. She didn’t run to hide like he wanted her to do. She went to find a weapon.

He shook his head and smiled. “I’m okay, sweetheart. Areyouokay?” Conner asked. His large hands cupped her heart-shaped face, and he looked deep into her brown eyes.

Keisha shook her head. “I just can’t believe he would do this.”

“It will be fine, baby. I’ll take care of everything. You go downstairs, and call the police. I will make sure that this asshole doesn’t go anywhere.” Conner went to his bedside table, and pulled a pair of handcuffs from the drawer.

Keisha arched an eyebrow at him, and Conner winked. “We can use these later.”

Keisha pursed her lips and shook her head. “Nah. We need a new pair first.” She winked back and flounced out of the room.

Conner was happy that Keisha could joke after everything she had been through. It just made Conner fall for her that much harder. She was a strong woman that could

take care of herself, and he admired her for that. However, he still had an incredibly strong urge to protect her.

Conner looked over at Dylan when his groans got louder. He still couldn't believe that the man would try to stab Keisha. How could anyone be so filled with hate for such a sweet and caring individual? The man had to be crazy. There was no other explanation.

Conner took a deep breath and moved toward the injured man. He took the cuffs and clicked it to one of his wrists, then pulled the chain of the cuff around the leg of the bed and cuffed his other wrist. There was no way Dylan would be able to move the entire California King to get away. The way he was moaning and groaning, it didn't look like he was capable of moving anyway.

"You better be glad I didn't want to kill you in front of my girl, otherwise your ass would be dead." Conner left the room because if he stayed there any longer, he surely would've killed him.

CHAPTER 17

KEISHA

Keisha's smile fell from her face as soon as she left the room. She could joke, and fake nonchalance for a few minutes, but she was quickly falling apart. Her ex-husband tried to kill her, and she had no idea why.

They didn't split on amicable terms, but Dylan's behavior was becoming more and more erratic. Keisha didn't have any idea what had set Dylan off. Her attorney had just filed the paperwork to petition for a restraining order, and the judge hadn't even reviewed her request yet. There wasn't any way that Dylan was aware of the order of protection yet.

Keisha had called 911, and she noticed that the sun was beginning to rise and Conner still hadn't come from upstairs. She worried for him, not that he would be hurt because it was more than obvious that physically, he could take care of himself. However, Keisha was afraid that Conner would kill Dylan. The way he tackled her ex-husband to the ground was something from the WWE. Keisha didn't stick around to see if he had the upper hand, she wanted to make sure that if he didn't, she would be able to have his back.

Keisha could tell from Conner's bruised knuckles and the way Dylan was beat to a bloody pulp on the bedroom floor that she didn't need to get a weapon. Conner's large fists seemed to be their own weapons.

As she sat in the kitchen alone, the tears that she'd been holding back began to run

unchecked down her face. The events of the last twenty-four hours started to weigh down heavily on her conscience. Keisha had unknowingly brought danger to Conner's door. They could've easily been asleep when Dylan broke in, and he could've killed them both.

Keisha cried because if Conner hadn't insisted that she come home with him, that Dylan could've possibly killed her in her own home. It was her fault that she waited for so long to do something about Dylan's threats. Although he was never physically abusive in their relationship, he abused her mentally and emotionally almost every day. She should've known to take his threats of retribution for her leaving him seriously.

Dylan was never the type of man to just let things go, and now he was the ex that tried to kill her in her sleep. Keisha shook her head at the ridiculousness of it all. When she noticed more than fifteen minutes had passed since she came downstairs, she decided to go back and check on Conner.

As soon as she slid off the barstool, she heard his footsteps coming down the stairs. His hair was disheveled, and his body had light scratching and bruises from the fight. But he didn't look any worse for wear. Then, she noticed his hands; Conner's fists were still clenched tight, but she could see they were bruised and swollen. He got those wounds from protecting her, and she would be forever grateful.

When Conner stood in front of her, he reached down and pulled her against his chest. Keisha, like she always did, melted into him, eating up the warmth of his body and his affection. The guilt she felt was overwhelming, but she refused to pull away from this man that she was falling for.

"I'm so sorry." Keisha looked into his eyes and moved his hair out of his handsome face. She tried to put on a brave face, but the tears still flowed.

“Don’t be sorry, beautiful. None of this is your fault.” Conner leaned down and kissed her lips. Keisha wanted to believe him, but she knew the truth. Dylan was there because of her, and she hated that.

“Look at me, beautiful.” Conner pulled her face toward his. “I can tell by the look on your face that you don’t believe me, but I would never lie to you, okay?” He gave her one of his special smiles that he only gave to her. “This is on him. Not you!”

Conner’s words held such conviction that Keisha was inclined to believe him. Although she knew that it would take some time for her to come to terms with what he was saying, she also knew that deep down, he was right.

Once the police had taken both her and Conner’s statements, they carted Dylan off to jail. Keisha was comforted by the fact that Dylan was now off the streets, and he was unable to cause her any more problems. She wanted to know the reason why he snapped, but for now, the important thing was he didn’t hurt anyone.

She sat on Conner’s large sofa snuggled with her sister. Conner wouldn’t let her out of his sight, even though Dylan was in jail, but she felt comfortable in his home. When Carson showed up to return Conner’s truck, Bell was with him.

Conner and Carson were in the kitchen, so she and Bell were alone. They sat huddled together under a large blanket like when they were kids.

“You’re going to have to call mama and tell her what happened.” Bell finally broke the silence that surrounded them.

“I know. I just don’t want to see the look of hurt on her face.” Keisha sighed. Keisha was close to her mom, and when she told her that she was getting divorced, she saw

the disappointment in her mom's eyes.

Of course, if Keisha would have told her mom, Lynn, all of the details surrounding her breakup, then she would have been singing a totally different tune. However, at the time, Keisha had been embarrassed about the circumstances, and she didn't want her mother to judge her.

Bell sighed, grabbing Keisha's attention. "What?" Keisha asked her sister.

"You need to let her know everything," Bell responded with an arched brow. "She's not going to judge you, Keish. I didn't judge you. Dylan was verbally abusive, and he cheated on you. He broke the vows to you, not the other way around. It is not your fault, and you have nothing to be ashamed of. Mama was unhappy that you were unhappy."

Keisha hugged her sister tight. She had no idea that she'd needed to hear those words. Keisha always felt like a failure for getting a divorce, but now she understood that staying in an unhappy marriage would have been the real failure.

"Thank you for always having my back." Keisha smiled at Bell.

"You know I will always be here for my little sis." Bell kissed her cheek, and they fell into a comfortable silence.

"So are you and Conner serious?" Bell asked after a few silent minutes.

"He just saved my life from my psycho stalker ex-husband, so I'm going to go with yes." Keisha smirked.

"Yeah, I guess that would qualify as a yes." Bell clasped her hands together, and Keisha could see the mischievous glint. "Is it 'first full name' serious?" Bell smirked.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:03 am

Keisha narrowed her eyes at her older sister. Only she would bring up her biggest secret at a time like this. Keisha hated her name so much that she almost legally changed it, but her mom would've been hurt, so Keisha kept the God awful name, and swore her sister to secrecy. Nobody called her by her birth name, not even her mother.

“Kaybella, now why would you bring up something like that?” Keisha admonished.

“Come on, Keish, if anybody wanted to know, all they would have to do is look up any public record. It's the worst kept secret you have.” Bell laughed.

Her sister was right, but Keisha would never admit it. Anybody could look up the bakery information and find out her name, but why would anybody do that? Most people just accepted her name was Keisha and left it alone.

“It's not a secret,” Keisha tried to deny.

Bell twisted her face into a frown. “You made me make a blood pact with you.”

“I was eight,” Keisha argued. “I'm a grown woman now. It's not a secret. I would just rather be called Keisha.”

“So, with all this protesting, I'm guessing Conner doesn't know.” Bell laughed.

“Conner doesn't know what?” Conner sauntered into the living room, his long legs striding toward the couch.

Keisha was awestruck every time the man entered a room. His brown hair was pulled into a messy bun, and he had a five o'clock shadow that was doing wonders for her libido. His intense blue gaze landed on her, and she could feel her body heat.

"Nothing." Keisha quickly found her voice before her big mouth sister said something.

They may have been in their early thirties, but Bell still teased her like they were children.

"Keisha, you know at the very least you owe the man your first name." Bell smiled devilishly.

Keisha rolled her eyes, but again, her sister was right. If Conner wanted to know her full name, she would tell him... if he asked.

"Since I deserve to know... are you going to tell me?" Conner asked.

Well, shit.

"Keisharella," she mumbled under her breath.

"Say what now?" Conner laughed.

"You heard me. Now, we are never to speak of this matter again." Keisha put on her most uppity voice with her nose in the air.

"Yeah. No." Conner laughed louder. "Your mom named you Kaybella, and you Keisharella?" He pointed to each of them.

"Yes." Keisha sulked, but her eyes were alight with amusement. She could see the

foolishness of their names, which was why she never told anybody what it was.

“What was your mother thinking?” Carson asked, finally joining the conversation.

“She was thinking she was living in a damn Disney movie.” Keisha chuckled.

“It must’ve been hell for you two growing up,” Conner stated as he pulled Keisha into his lap and nuzzled her neck.

“Nah, that’s why we have nicknames,” Bell said, laughing.

The four of them sat comfortably talking about growing up, and their crazy families. And for the first time in a long time, Keisha felt at ease.

CHAPTER 18

CONNER

After the night that Dylan broke into his home, Conner and Keisha had been inseparable. They spent almost every night together, and they still texted throughout the day. Conner was still trying to convince Keisha that they should just move in together, but she wasn't having that.

She would always tell him that what they had was real, so taking their time to get to know one another before they made any life changing decisions was fine. He accepted her answer, so instead of asking her everyday if she changed her mind, he'd only ask once a week; it was a compromise for him.

With everything that had gone on with Dylan and the investigation, he and Keisha didn't get to go to her friend's annual Valentine's Day party. They were both busy with work, and just didn't have the energy to go. He could tell that she was disappointed, and he wanted to make it up to her, so he planned one of his dates that she told him she loved so much.

He cooked for her, and this time he followed the directions to the letter, and nothing caught on fire. He spread a blanket in the living room, and lit a fire. He covered the blanket in a heart made out of rose petals, put candles around the room for a nice romantic glow, and to top it all off, he had a dozen vases of tulips spread throughout the house.

Conner had taken off of work early to make sure everything was perfect. He tried to

convince Keisha that they could make it to the party, but she told him that she'd be too tired to socialize after putting in double time at the bakery.

Since Keisha's kitchen was still accessible, she took specialty orders to keep her business going until the shop was back open. Keisha's insurance company paid for all of the repairs, but it took a while to get a reputable company in to fix everything. Because of that, she was behind on some of the orders. Business was doing so well that she stayed busy.

Conner was proud that she picked up the pieces, and kept moving along. She didn't let her ex discourage her from moving on in her personal life, or with her business.

Once Dylan was arrested, it had come to light why he was stalking Keisha in the first place. Dylan was under investigation for securities fraud and had been suspended from his job. His parents, who babied him even as a grown man, had cut him off. He began to obsess over the fact that he had to pay Keisha money in the divorce settlement. Dylan felt like she didn't deserve his money, and he needed it.

Dylan had also taken out a life insurance policy on Keisha before they were divorced. The policy was worth two million dollars, and he had planned to cash it in. Of course, Keisha had to die first, so he thought of the idea of staging a break-in at her shop to make it look like a robbery gone bad. Only problem was, Keisha wasn't there, so he ended up going crazy and destroying her bakery instead.

The investigators also discovered that Dylan was the one who broke into Conner's gym. He was truly stalking Keisha, and him "bumping" into them on their first date was not a coincidence. Dylan was following her every move, and when he saw that Keisha was happy with someone else, it put a wrench in his plans. So, Dylan had to find out everything he could about Conner, but without his connections and money, he took to breaking and entering. He found Conner's address, and that was vital information in his new plan.

When Keisha didn't go home that night, Dylan went to Conner's house and waited for the right time to kill her. In his warped brain, he would kill Keisha, and frame Conner for her murder.

Conner couldn't believe just how crazy Dylan turned out to be. He had only confessed all of his plans because of all of the overwhelming evidence against him. He was looking at life without the possibility of parole for premeditated attempted murder, so he cut a deal for ten years in prison instead.

Now that both of their crazy ex's were out of their lives, Conner and Keisha could continue to focus on building a stronger relationship. Conner knew that Keisha felt some type of way about Brooke, so to reassure her, he set up a meeting with Keisha and his assistant, Gloria. After the two of them had lunch, he would never have to worry about Keisha doubting his feelings, or lack thereof, for Brooke ever again.

Conner had heard through the grapevine that Brooke, being the gold digger that she was, had finally found her a sugar daddy. The man was old enough to be her actual daddy, and she was living her gold digging dream. During their lunch, Conner not only threatened to file a restraining order, but to tell her "friends" that she was broke and was cut off by daddy dearest if she kept bothering him, so he was certain that she wouldn't come back around anyway.

However, he did acknowledge that if it wasn't for Brooke being a horrible girlfriend, and just a downright awful human being, he would've never recognized the wonderful person that Keisha was.

Conner now only had to put the finishing touches on their mid-week Valentine's Day date so that he could be one step closer to convincing Keisha to move in with him.

When Keisha arrived and knocked on his door, Conner could barely contain his excitement. He opened the door to a wide-eyed Keisha. She looked him up and down and smiled brightly.

“Wow, you look handsome!” Keisha stepped in and kissed his lips. “What’s up with the suit?” She was still smiling, and Conner loved the look on her face.

“It’s Valentine’s Day,” he replied simply. “I have a surprise, so go directly upstairs. There’s a bath waiting for you.” He led her upstairs, and left her in his bedroom.

Conner knew that if he followed her into the bathroom, they would never make it back down stairs, and he wanted this night to be more than just sex. He wanted her to feel like she was cherished.

Twenty minutes later, a much more relaxed looking Keisha came down the stairs. Conner knew that she would be breathtaking in the satin red dress he’d picked out for her. Keisha’s brown skin looked smooth and soft, and Conner couldn’t wait to feel it. Her hair was in soft waves around her shoulders. She was simply perfect.

Keisha ran her hands down her dress, and smiled brightly. “Thanks for the dress, baby. I love it.”

Conner pulled her into a warm embrace, and they swayed to the music that he had softly playing. “You’re more than welcome, beautiful.” He kissed the top of her head as they continued to sway to the music.

“I thought you would be too tired to do anything.” Keisha’s brown eyes searched his face. “I thought we would just watch Netflix and chill tonight.” She smirked.

“As much as I love Netflix and chilling with you, I think you deserve more than that tonight. Besides, I slaved away to make a meal for you.” Conner winked.

“Wait!” Keisha stepped out of his embrace and headed to the kitchen.

“What are you looking for?” Conner followed behind her, confusion written across his face.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:03 am

“Smoke.” Keisha laughed.

“I resent that. It only happened once, by the way.” Conner’s face was serious, but the laughter in his voice was undeniable. He stood with his arms crossed over his massive chest.

“No smoke and wow, you actually cooked for me.” Her beaming smile and sparkling eyes were so sweet that he couldn’t resist kissing her again.

Conner led her to the table that was beautifully set and pulled out her chair.

“Madame.” Conner pushed in her chair once she was seated, and then he went back to the kitchen to take the plates from the warmer.

“Wow, this looks delicious, Conner.”

They ate and talked as usual, but Conner was nervous. Besides the strawberries, champagne, and whipped cream that he had set up in the living room, Conner had something extra special planned for dessert.

The time had come for him to serve dessert. Here goes nothing.

“Oh, Conner! It’s gorgeous in here!” Keisha exclaimed happily as she looked around the romantically decorated room.

Keisha made her way over to the blanket that was laid out in the middle of the room by the fireplace, but before she could sit down, Conner was down on one knee. He

knew that she would think it was too soon, but it was never too soon for love.

Keisha gasped. “It’s only been a few weeks, Conner!”

“It’s not what you think. Just hear me out.” Conner tried to soothe her concerns. He pulled out a heart-shaped box, and when he opened it, the confusion on her face was adorable.

“This is a key to my house. You said you weren’t ready to move in, yet,” he smirked, “but I wanted you to know you’re welcome here at all times. I want you here, and I don’t want my woman waiting on the porch for me to open the door. I have a garage door opener too, but it wouldn’t fit in the box.” Conner smiled, and Keisha laughed.

“Thank you, Conner. I love it!”

“And I love you,” Conner said seriously.

“And I love you too,” Keisha responded with tears in her eyes.

They never had dessert.

They made love right there on the living room floor, all night long.

EPILOGUE

KEISHA

Two years later.

“Do you, Conner O’Bryan take Keisha Love, to be your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold. In sickness and in health, until death do you part?”

“Mrs. O’Bryan, I’m home.” Keisha smiled as her husband came bounding in the door.

“Mr. O’Bryan, you’re home early.” Keisha smiled through her sniffles.

“Beautiful, why are you watching this, again? You know it only makes you more emotional.” Conner smiled sweetly as he came over and tugged her into his lap, and kissed her lips softly.

“Stop it, Conner, I’m too fat to be on your lap.” Keisha pouted, but she snuggled into her husband’s large chest. There was no place she would rather be.

Conner chuckled. “You’re not fat, beautiful. You’re pregnant, big difference. Plus, you have always been tiny.” He kissed her on top of her head.

“Tiny, pfft.” She scoffed. “I’m as big as a house. I can’t even see my feet, and I’m only six months along.” She sighed dramatically. “This is all your fault.”

“I take full responsibility.” Conner gave her the most beautiful smile, and she melted, just like she did each and every time he smiled at her in that way.

“See, that right there!” She pointed at her husband accusingly. “That smile is the reason I’m like this now.” Keisha threw her hands up in exasperation.

Conner busted out in a full on belly laugh. “I can’t help that I’m irresistible, sweetheart.” He winked at her. “But I’ll try to tone down the smiles from now on.” Conner wiped the smile from his handsome face, but the laughter still danced in his blue eyes.

Keisha leaned up and kissed him. At first, it was a sweet, teasing kiss. Then her ever raging hormones got the best of her, and she deepened the kiss. Keisha was lying sideways across his lap because she could no longer straddle his waist without her belly getting in the way. She did her best to pull him down on top of her, but Conner wasn’t having it.

Keisha tugged at his neck, and he broke the kiss.

She pouted. “Please, Conner.” Keisha batted her lashes because that usually worked. Her husband was a large muscle bound man on the outside, but on the inside, he was a big softy.

“I’m not going to crush you, or my baby.” He kept kissing Keisha, but her frustration started to take over.

“I miss you being on top,” she whined.

“Yeah, well me being on top got you into this mess.” Conner smirked.

Keisha couldn’t help but laugh as she moved to get up. Conner helped her to her feet,

and she waddled to the stairs.

“Where are you going?” Conner asked.

“To the bedroom. I want my husband to make love to me, and we both know my flexibility on the couch is limited.” It was Keisha’s turn to smirk as her husband hopped off the couch so fast she thought she married Usain Bolt.

CONNER

Two months later

“This is your fault!” Keisha screamed as she squeezed his hand tightly.

Conner would never admit it, but the strength of a woman giving birth was like nothing he had ever felt before. He was pretty sure that his wife just broke at least two of his fingers.

“I know baby. I take full responsibility,” he ground out through gritted teeth.

Keisha yelled out again, and the agony in her voice hurt Conner to his core. He hated to hear her in pain, and he wished that he could take it from her.

“Just push, sweetheart. You’re doing great,” Conner encouraged as he wiped the sweat from her brow.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 10:03 am

“Okay, Mrs. O’Bryan, one last push,” the doctor instructed.

Keisha pushed through a yell, and Conner just barely held in his own scream. She definitely just broke a bone. Conner clenched his teeth harder.

“It’s a boy!” The doctor exclaimed.

Both Keisha and Conner had tears running down their faces. Their son was a big boy; he weighed in at nine pounds and had a head full of curly brown hair, and bright blue eyes.

“You did so good, baby! He’s beautiful. I love you so much.”

“I love you too.” Keisha smiled tiredly at him.

Conner didn’t try to contain his emotions as his tears flowed from his eyes. He kissed Keisha, and their love for one another was palpable.

After the baby was cleaned and swaddled, he was put against Keisha’s chest. Conner’s heart was full. He never imagined anything greater than this moment. The woman he loved and cherished and his healthy baby boy were all he needed in the world.