



# Beneath The Surface of His Heart 2

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**Category:** Urban

**Description:** I never expect to love a man like Damier. His presence alone commands fear; his name carries power, and his love? It sinks into my bones, impossible to shake, even when I know it could destroy me. He moves like a ruler in a world where loyalty is a lie and betrayal is always waiting in the shadows. And yet, I stay because I like his world.

Walking away from him feels more dangerous than standing by his side. But every time I think I understand him, he shows me another side—one that pulls me deeper into the darkness he swears he'll keep me away from.

But love isn't enough in a life like his. I see the weight of his past pressing down on him, and I wonder—when everything starts to fall apart, will he protect me, or will I be just another casualty in his war? I know how this ends. I feel it deep in my soul. The question is... will I survive it?

**Total Pages (Source):** 28

## Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The streets of South Central had always been my home. To most, it was a battlefield—a place where you either survived or got swallowed whole. But for me, it was the foundation of everything I'd built. I wasn't born into money, privilege, or connections. I was born into chaos. My parents were gone before I was old enough to even understand what I'd lost. The streets raised me, but my grandmother was the one who kept me from completely losing myself.

She used to tell me, "The world don't owe you shit, so take what you can and make it yours." Those words stayed with me. They drove me. I wasn't content with small-time hustling. I wanted more. I wanted an empire.

That's how I met Damier Knight. I was just eighteen when I tried to hustle on Knight family turf. Back then, I thought I was smarter than the game. I wasn't afraid of anyone. But when Damier caught me, he didn't punish me like I thought he would. He saw something in me—potential, ambition, hunger.

He told me, "You're either going to burn out trying to do it on your own, or you can let me show you how to make real money. What's it gonna be?"

I chose wisely.

Over the years, I earned my spot in the Knight family, proving myself time and time again. I wasn't just a loyal soldier—I became a partner. Damier taught me the game, and I brought my own spin to it. Legit businesses, smart investments, and clean fronts. By the time I hit thirty, I wasn't just surviving; I was thriving. A multi-millionaire with real estate, car dealerships, juice bars, and other ventures under my belt. On paper, I looked like just another successful businessman, but behind the

scenes, I was still ride-or-die for the Knight family.

Loyalty was everything to me. And in this life, loyalty wasn't just about words—it was about action. You handled business, no matter how dirty it got.

That's why I was at one of my juice bars on Crenshaw late that night. To most people, it was just a trendy spot with overpriced smoothies and acai bowls. But for me, it was another cog in the Knight family machine—a place to move money and keep things looking clean.

I parked my matte black Range Rover in the reserved spot out front, stepping into the crisp LA night air. The neon glow of the juice bar's sign cast a soft light over the street, but I wasn't there to admire the ambiance.

Inside, the employees straightened up the moment they saw me. I didn't need to say anything—they knew who I was. Marcus, my manager, gave me a quick nod, and I made my way to the back office.

The safe was open, with stacks of cash spread out on the desk. Marcus and another worker were counting, their hands moving quickly as they logged everything. I leaned against the doorframe, watching for a moment before speaking.

“How's it looking?” I asked, my tone calm but sharp.

Marcus nervously adjusted his glasses. “Everything's clean so far, boss. We'll have the drop ready by midnight.”

I nodded, satisfied. “Good. Keep it tight. And tell the crew out front to relax. Don't make it obvious. We don't need anyone asking questions.”

Marcus nodded quickly, and I left them to their work. I trusted Marcus—he'd been

with me for years. But in this game, trust only went so far. I'd learned the hard way that even the most loyal soldier could turn if the stakes were high enough.

After leaving the juice bar, I had another task on my plate. Damier had asked me to keep an eye on Kita. Something about her didn't sit right with him, and when Damier had a hunch, he was usually right.

I parked a few blocks away from her spot, keeping my lights off as I watched her apartment. The streets were quiet, the dim glow of streetlights casting long shadows.

An hour passed, and I was starting to think this was a waste of time. But then, I saw her. Kita stepped out of her building, glancing over her shoulder like she was nervous. She was dressed casual—jeans and a hoodie—but the way she moved told me she was trying to avoid being seen.

I started the engine, keeping a safe distance as I followed her. She wasn't going far—just a couple of blocks to a run-down motel. The kind of place where bad decisions were made and nothing good ever happened.

I parked across the street and waited, watching as she slipped inside. My gut told me to stay put, and a few minutes later, the door opened again.

That's when I saw him.

Damian.

He stepped out of the motel, lighting a cigarette with that same smug look he always had. It didn't sit right with me. Damian was supposed to be laying low, not meeting up with Kita at some shady motel.

I stayed parked, watching him for another twenty minutes. My mind raced with

possibilities. Was Kita playing both sides? Was Damian pulling her into one of his schemes? Whatever it was, it wasn't good.

I couldn't sit on this. Damier needed to know.

As I drove toward the Knight Estate, the city lights blurred past me. My thoughts were a mix of loyalty and frustration. Damian had always been a problem—a loose cannon, a liability. And now, he was making moves that could put everything the Knight family had built at risk.

And Kita... if she was involved, it would be a betrayal that Damier wouldn't take lightly.

The gates to the Knight Estate loomed ahead, opening smoothly as I approached. I parked my Range Rover and sat for a moment, taking a deep breath.

This wasn't just about me. It wasn't even just about the Knight family. This was about preserving the empire, about making sure no one— not even Damian —tore it apart.

I stepped out of the car and headed inside, ready to tell Damier what I'd seen. It was time to handle this once and for all.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The estate's quiet settled around me as I leaned against the bathroom sink, my weight shifting off my bad leg. It had been a month since the ambush, but it felt like I'd taken the bullet yesterday. A fractured bone and a still-sensitive wound—it was hard to admit I'd been down for this long. I'd taken hits before, but none that left me feeling so vulnerable. And I hated it.

My grip tightened as I turned to Dream, who was watching me with that mix of worry and resolve she'd carried since I came back here to heal. She'd been by my side every day, helping me in ways I hadn't expected. Now, she was at my side, ready to help me into the shower. I didn't want her to; hell, I wanted to handle things myself.

"You don't have to do this," I muttered as she placed her hands on my shoulders, steadying me as I took a cautious step.

"Damier, don't start. You know I won't stop," she replied, her voice calm but with a firmness that left no room for argument. I let out a sigh, but I was secretly glad she was here.

I tried to steady myself on the small bench in the shower, and I felt my balance shift for a second. Dream's grip was immediate, her touch grounding me as I steadied myself again. I looked over at her, both frustrated and grateful. She wasn't going anywhere.

When the water finally hit my skin, washing away the aches of sleepless nights, I felt some of the tension melt, if only for a moment. Dream was there, washing me with gentle hands that didn't shy away from the scars or bruises. Her care was as steady as her gaze. We didn't talk much; we just shared a silence that spoke louder than

anything we could say.

After the shower, she helped me put on fresh clothes, guiding me with patience that I never expected. We made our way back to the bedroom, and soon enough, my mother's chef arrived with breakfast. The smell of fresh eggs and seasoned bacon was a comfort, and I felt some of my tension ease. The peace, though, didn't last long.

There was a knock at the door, and then Hocus came in. His face was as serious as I'd ever seen it, and I knew he wasn't just here for a casual visit.

"Morning, bro," I greeted, nodding for him to come in. Dream shot me a look as if checking to see if I was okay with her staying, but I gave her a small nod. I wasn't keeping her out of anything anymore.

Hocus nodded back at me and cast a brief glance at Dream. "Got some information. Damian's been spotted with Kita," he said, his voice low.

The words hit me, my stomach twisting. Damian with Kita? That was a combination I didn't need. The idea of my brother teaming up with someone like her was enough to send my already tense mood spiraling. I didn't want Dream around for the deeper part of this conversation, though. She didn't need to be in the middle of this mess.

Dream, ever perceptive, sensed it immediately. "I'll leave you two to talk," she gently said, touching my shoulder as she left.

When she closed the door behind her, I turned back to Hocus, who didn't waste a second.

"You think Damian had something to do with the hit?" he asked, eyes sharp as he crossed his arms, leaning against the wall.

“Maybe,” I replied, my jaw tight. “But the job was sloppy, my nigga. Damian’s always been impulsive, but even he would’ve put more thought into it if he was trying to get to me.” I paused, weighing the possibility. “Still, he might’ve sent someone, thinking I wouldn’t see it coming.”

Hocus nodded, taking it in. “That sounds about right. Could be he was testing the waters. I’ll keep an ear out and see what comes up in the streets.”

“Good. And if he does start showing up in places he shouldn’t, I want to know.” I didn’t have to say the rest. Hocus understood. We’d been through enough to know what needed to be done if Damian overstepped again.

He reached out, and we did our usual handshake, one that held the weight of loyalty and trust. Then, he left, closing the door behind him. As I leaned back, letting my guard down just for a moment, I heard a soft knock at the door, and Dream stepped in.

She gave me a questioning look, her brow furrowed. “Everything alright?”

“Just business.” I met her gaze, deciding there was no use in keeping secrets. “I haven’t told you, but since we are getting so close, I have to warn you. I have an unhinged identical twin. My brother’s trouble, Dream. If he ever comes around you, I need to know immediately. And don’t entertain anything he has to say if he tries.”

She crossed her arms, her eyes searching mine. “Damier, I’m not going to let him scare me. You don’t have to worry about that. I will let you know if he tries me, of course.”

I almost smiled, seeing the determination in her eyes. She was stronger than she knew, and part of me felt grateful she was here despite the danger around us.



I watched as Dream's eyes softened, her worry fading just enough to let something warmer take its place. Her presence was steady and calming in a way I hadn't felt in a long time. She took a step closer, and I let the tension roll off me as I reached out.

"Come here," I said, my voice low. "Lay with me."

She raised an eyebrow, a small smirk playing at her lips, but she didn't hesitate. She crossed the room and gently settled onto the bed next to me, mindful of my injured leg. I pulled her closer, feeling her warmth against me, and for a moment, it was like the pain in my leg faded into the background.

She moved so she was on top of me, her hands trailing down my shoulders, then pressing into my chest as she met my eyes. I cupped her face, pulling her down for a slow, intense kiss, letting the closeness take over. I felt the soft pressure of her body over mine, her curves fitting perfectly against me as we melted into each other.

We moved with a gentle rhythm, careful not to aggravate my leg. She was mindful, taking her time, and I found myself lost in every touch, every whisper between us. The world outside faded away, replaced by the quiet intimacy of the moment. Dream took my manhood from my sweats and pulled her panties to the side. She was wearing a nightgown, and I was thankful for the easy access. Dream rode me slowly, and she was wet. Her pussy was driving me wild, and I couldn't wait until I healed so I could explore her.

When we finally pulled away, our breaths mingling in the silence, I realized just how much I needed her with me. I'd been carrying the weight of too many things alone, but with her, it was like I could finally breathe. She stayed there, curled up against me, as we drifted into a peaceful sleep.

And for the first time in weeks, I felt something close to whole.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The morning sun was barely up when I left Damier's mother's estate. My first day back at work was finally here. A month away from my office should've left me feeling rejuvenated, but the past few weeks helping Damier recover were anything but a break. I wasn't just a therapist anymore; I was a full-time caretaker and even sometimes an unwilling accomplice in his world of danger when his crew stopped by. Still, I missed the rhythm of my own life, my work, my purpose. I needed this day to remind me of why I got into this field in the first place. Today, I was going to focus on me, my work, and getting back to my groove.

The building was just as I left it—clean and bright, with the faint smell of fresh coffee and vanilla. My receptionist, Janae, greeted me at the door with a welcoming smile, letting me know I had a new client lined up for my first session.

"Jennifer Dolphin," she said, handing me the file. I hadn't thought much of it when I scheduled her. She was one of several new clients who'd requested sessions while I was away, and I barely glanced at her intake form.

"Good morning, Dr. Jaxton," Jennifer said, stepping into my office.

I was immediately struck by her presence. She was stylish but understated, with a kind of quiet elegance that made her seem almost mysterious. Her eyes caught me off guard—one green, one a light, almost golden brown. I felt a shiver as I took in the unusual beauty.

"Good morning, Ms. Dolphin." I reached out my hand and gave a small smile. "Please, have a seat."

She crossed her legs gracefully as she sat, her eyes never leaving me. I adjusted my notes, curious to know what had brought her here.

“So,” I began, settling into my chair with my pen and notepad in hand, “your file says you’d like to discuss the reason for your divorce.”

Jennifer’s face changed, a small smirk playing on her lips. “Yes,” she said with a slight laugh, “I’ve got a lot to say about that. But... maybe let’s start with the man himself.”

“Alright. Tell me about your ex,” I said, my curiosity piqued as I settled into the moment, ready to listen.

She glanced out the window for a moment as if piecing together the words in her mind. “Let’s just say my ex was rich, sexy, and dangerous... just the way I like them.”

An eyebrow slightly rose in surprise, but I kept my expression calm. “Would you like to give a name?” I asked, pen poised.

Her eyes flitted back to me, and she grinned, almost like she was savoring some private joke.

“Let’s just call him Franklin.”

“Alright, ‘Franklin’ it is. You say he was dangerous. Was he abusive toward you?”

Jennifer’s expression hardened. “No. Franklin didn’t hit women. And if he ever needed to, he had someone else do it for him. He was a romantic at heart, always wining and dining the women in his life. But there was something different about him... he was loyal, almost obsessive, and not the type to cheat.” Her eyes fell to my

hands, lingering. “Speaking of loyalty, you’re not wearing a ring. I saw you won that TV show with that handsome billionaire. I guess it was fake if he hasn’t made you his wife. I heard in the blogs that he isn’t hard to please.”

The comment caught me off guard. “It wasn’t fake. We’re just not ready,” I said, clearing my throat and moving the conversation back to her. “So, Ms. Dolphin, why did you end things with him? Franklin sounds like he was a good man.”

She leaned back in her chair, staring up at the ceiling for a second before letting out a low laugh. “Oh, I fumbled him badly. Let’s just say his money blinded me... I got greedy, but I was only trying to find comfort in my marriage. I had a drug problem that he found out about after four years of marriage. But I blame him for my use. I went through a lot mentally.” She glanced at me, her gaze darker now. “But I don’t want to talk about that yet.”

I stayed silent, sensing there was more beneath the surface of her words, layers of something too painful or too revealing to be uncovered so soon.

After a moment, Jennifer continued, her voice softer. “Franklin left scars that I carry even now, scars without ever laying a hand on me.”

Intrigued, I shifted slightly, my pen poised, eyes attentive. “Would you like to tell me more about that?”

A slow smile spread across her face, chilling in its calm. She reached into her purse and pulled out a vape pen, which she held with the elegance of someone handling fine jewelry. She took a slow draw before exhaling. The faint smell of lavender wafted through the room. “Can I tell you a story?”

I nodded. “Tell away.”

Jennifer took a deep breath as if drawing strength from whatever memory she was about to unveil. “One night, I decided to surprise him at his office. I’d made him a home-cooked meal, which was rare for me. I wanted to see him light up, to surprise him in a way that mattered. But when I walked in...” Her voice trailed off, and she paused, swallowing hard. “When I walked in, I was greeted not just by Franklin, but by... something else entirely.”

The silence in the room was thick, pressing down on us as she continued.

“There was a man dead on the floor,” she said, her voice barely above a whisper. “Franklin stood over him with his team all around him, his hand still holding a bloody razor. I froze. He looked at me like he was... someone else. And then, as calm as ever, he said, ‘Babe, you shouldn’t have come here without calling.’”

I felt a chill run down my spine, and I swallowed hard, my throat dry. It was hard to keep my expression neutral, to mask the shock and unease twisting in my stomach. I wasn’t just witnessing her trauma—I felt it as if I were standing in that room with her, confronted by the horror.

Jennifer’s eyes glinted as she looked at me, her voice softening as she said, “And that’s just the beginning. I saw a lot more than that... things that change you, make you tougher, things you can’t unsee.”

I nodded slowly, allowing the silence to settle around us. It wasn’t time to speak, only to let her words hang there in the air between us, a reminder of the darkness she had witnessed.

As the session wore on, Jennifer shared three more stories, each one more twisted and revealing than the last. By the time she was done, I could barely take notes. My head was spinning with the intensity of her experiences, the fear and allure of this shadowy figure she called “Franklin.”

I checked the time. We'd gone over our session limit, and I felt drained as if I'd been dragged through a whirlwind of danger, secrets, and manipulation.

"Thank you for sharing all of that with me," I said, my voice steady, though my mind was anything but. "Would you like to schedule a follow-up appointment?"

She nodded, her lips quirking into a faint smile. "Same time next week."

After she left, I sank back into my chair, the weight of everything she'd shared pressing down on me. I needed a drink and maybe even a session with my own therapist. Or... maybe just a moment with Damier. He'd know exactly what to say to pull me back from whatever strange, dark place I'd been taken to.

I arrived back at Damier's mother's estate, still a little shaken. I barely noticed the security as I passed through, heading out to the deck where Damier was sitting, a cigar in one hand and a glass of whiskey in the other.

He looked up, catching the tense look on my face as I approached. "Long day at work, huh?"

I forced a smile as I sat down beside him, slipping into his lap. "You have no idea."

He wrapped an arm around me, pulling me closer, his warmth seeping into me. "Want to talk about it?"

I bit my lip, hesitating. "I can't really say much—patient confidentiality and all—but let's just say... it was intense."

He nodded, understanding, and pressed a gentle kiss to my temple. "I get it. Just know that you can always leave that shit out there when you come home to me."

His words were simple but comforting, and I let myself relax in his arms. Sitting there with him, the stories of Jennifer's dark past began to fade, replaced by the solid, comforting presence of the man I was starting to see as my own source of peace in the storm. Just as I started to relax, he shifted the topic.

"Mia's been on my case about making a public appearance," he said, sighing. "Says it's time for me to remind people I'm still around after the show. People been saying our relationship is fake."

I raised an eyebrow. "You don't seem thrilled."

"Because I'm not," he admitted, chuckling as he leaned back, stretching his injured leg with a grimace. "I want you to myself. Why does the world have to know what happened after the show? And this fuckin' leg shit... Gotta show up on crutches, and I know everyone's going to be asking what happened."

"You don't owe anyone an explanation, Damier," I said, trying to reassure him.

He nodded, but his eyes held a flicker of uncertainty. "I know I don't, but there's still this ceremony I gotta go to. It's supposed to be a big deal, this two-billion mark I just made it to, and my financial advisor wants to celebrate." He shrugged like it was nothing, but I felt my jaw slightly drop.

"Two billion?" I managed to say, quickly smoothing over my surprise with a calm smile. "You're full of surprises."

A grin played on his lips as he took in my expression. "Oh, you didn't know?"

"I had no idea you were bringing in that much," I admitted, barely able to keep my cool.

He laughed softly, clearly amused. “Guess I’ll keep surprising you, then. But if you’re okay with it, I want you there. On my arm.”

“Really?” I smirked, raising an eyebrow.

He paused, tilting his head and narrowing his gaze at me. “You my lady, right? Me having you on my arm is a problem?” he asked with that same calm confidence that could make anyone feel like they’d never really questioned anything in their life.

I tried to hide my laugh, but it slipped out. “So demanding.” I leaned forward, pressing a kiss on his lips. “But, no, I don’t have a problem with it.”

“Good,” he murmured, pulling me closer and settling me back against his chest.

We sat there for a while, the silence between us easy and full. He didn’t say it, but I knew how much the next few weeks would mean to him, how much it would mean for us to show up together as something more than just a reality TV storyline.

As he held me close, I felt like we’d crossed a line, moving into something deeper than we’d anticipated. And I was ready—surprisingly ready—to see what being “his” would mean, even if it came with the shadows he’d worked so hard to shield me from.



## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

I strolled into Damier's high-rise downtown office, calm as anything, watching him buried under a mountain of paperwork. He looked up from his desk with that ever-present smugness, and I held back a grin. There's nothing like catching him off guard.

"My crybaby ass twin, looking all important," I said, letting my voice cut through the silence of his overly pristine office. It was hard not to smirk at the way his jaw tightened when he realized it was me.

"The fuck you want, my nigga?" His tone was calm, trying too hard, but I could see the tension in his eyes. That's what I had done to him since we were kids—no amount of billion-dollar success could wipe that away.

I sank down in the chair across from him, stretching out like I belonged there. "Thought I'd check in on my dear brother. How's that leg treating you? You finally know what pain feels like." I threw out a chuckle, one that let him know I had the upper hand.

"Leg is good enough to stomp you the fuck out," he fired back, hand clenched under his glass desk, eyes narrowing. "That is, if you're behind that hit."

I laughed louder this time. "You actually think I'd waste a hit on you? I know I did some fucked up shit, but family doesn't do that to family." I leaned back, unbothered. "But then again, you're a nigga who's gathered his fair share of enemies. Must be rough at the top."

He huffed, visibly irritated. "Enough with the bullshit. What do you want? I got work

to do.”

His tone almost had me feeling bad—almost. “I figured it was time for me to make a grand appearance,” I replied, not breaking his gaze. “After all, you hit that two-billion-dollar mark. I saw you last night getting all the praise. Mom said you’d be generous, throw your ‘struggling’ brother a bone.” I let that last part simmer, the sarcasm all too obvious.

“It sounds like you need an allowance.” He scoffed, leaning back, feigning amusement. “What are you, a kid again?”

I clenched my jaw, but I kept it cool. “Just fifty bands a month. No drama, no hassle. I’ll put all the exposing the family behind me and move on. You got more than enough now, don’t you?”

That really got him laughing. “Fifty K a month? You think I’m a fuckin’ bank?” He shook his head, the amusement in his eyes gone. “Or maybe you finally realize you can’t stand on your own.”

I leaned forward, looking him dead in the eye. “Careful, my guy, the only person that can’t stand right now is you. You’re only untouchable as long as you keep me out of the gutter. Give me what I want, or things might get uncomfortable around here.” I let my words hang in the air, and I watched as that amusement drained from his face. “You know what I’m capable of.”

“Uncomfortable?” He leaned in, voice low, steady. “You keep threatening me like you want me to do what ya momma told me to do. My nigga, if it’s beef you want, it’s beef you’ll get. But I’m not giving you any money.”

I sat back, letting the twisted smirk curl back onto my face. “A’ight,” I said. “Just remember, you’re the one choosing to make this shit difficult. I’ll be around, one way

or another.”

With that, I stood, taking my time, letting him feel the weight of my words before I turned for the door.

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Leaving Damier’s office was nothing short of disappointing. My attempt to extend an olive branch had been met with laughter and arrogance. My “brother” had always been smug, but now, with two billion to his name, he was untouchable—or so he thought.

I slid into my black AMG coupe and made my way back to my condo. I had given Damier the option to do this the easy way, but clearly, he preferred to complicate shit. A smirk tugged at my lips as I imagined how this would play out.

The moment I stepped into my condo, I was greeted by Kita, lounging on my suede sectional couch in a sheer, lacey black set, exactly how I wanted her. We had been kicking it for a month, and I couldn’t front; I liked having her around. She looked up at me, her eyes filled with adoration and just the right amount of submission, and I could tell she was ready to make this evening about us.

“Right where I left you,” I said with a grin, shedding my jacket and dropping it onto the arm of the couch. She had been staying at my spot for days, being my little slut, as long as I took care of her simple needs. Food and dick, and a little pocket change.

“Been waiting for you. The food came forty minutes ago,” she purred, running a finger along her collarbone.

Tonight, I had work to do before play. She’d have to wait.

“I know you have, baby. We’ll get to that,” I assured her, placing a hand on her ass as I headed toward my office space. “But first, I have calls to make. Let me handle some shit.”

She nodded obediently, giving me a smile that said she’d wait however long I needed. She was hooked on me, and that loyalty was going to serve me well.

I went into my study, closing the door behind me. The condo was a luxury spot I’d been keeping for a while, paid for in part by the money my mother had been secretly funneling me. She didn’t know about my plans, of course. She believed I’d stay in line and keep my distance from Damier since she told him he could kill me if I got too close, but that was a fantasy. Nothing would satisfy me until I was on top, not him.

I dialed Troy’s number. He picked up on the first ring.

“You still down for tonight? Or is you still laid up?” I asked, my voice low.

“Nah, I’m good to go. You got the details?” His voice was a mix of eagerness and anticipation.

“Warehouse off Broadway downtown. It’s one of his smaller operations, but it’ll send a message and put some money in our pocket.” I gave him the exact time and location, down to the minute that the place would be empty. “I’ll meet you there at midnight with the key. Make it clean and quick. My cousins only take a thirty-minute break.”

He chuckled. “Consider it done.”

The thought of one of Damier’s prized warehouses going down filled me with a sense of satisfaction. Start small, work up. That was my plan.

I hung up the phone and joined Kita back in the living room, grabbing a box of hot wings and fries from the coffee table. The scent filled the room, and I sank into the couch, easing back for the first time all day.

Kita curled up beside me, watching me eat with those devoted eyes of hers. She picked up a fry, playfully feeding it to me before stealing one for herself.

“So, are you going to tell me what had you so worked up today?” she asked, resting her head on my shoulder.

I smirked. “You know what I was doing. Handling family business, if you can call it that. You know I told you to step back and let me take control. I’m going to get that nigga.”

“Good,” she whispered, running her fingers along my chest, “because I know you will.”

Once the food was gone, she slipped into my lap, her eyes tracing my face with that look that said she’d do anything for me. Kita had become a reliable asset, someone who’d follow my orders without question, but tonight, something was different. She didn’t just look like an ally; she felt like mine. And I knew exactly what she wanted from me.

I leaned back, letting her take the lead, and before long, our mouths met in a slow, deliberate kiss. She slid down to her knees, moving with confidence but never losing that touch of submission I liked. For someone who was typically all business, I let go with her in a way I rarely did with anyone else.

“Damn,” I muttered, looking down at her going to work on my stick with her wet ass mouth. “You keep this up, and I might just get used to having you around.”

Her smile widened as she stroked me slowly with her hand, and I realized that with Kita on my side and a plan in motion, I was closer to my goal than ever.

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My head was pounding, but not from the liquor I had before blowing out Kita's back and falling asleep.

The room was quiet, save for the soft hum of the fan overhead and Kita's even breathing beside me. She lay sprawled out, her dark curls spilling over the pillow, blissfully asleep. I knew I should be, too, but my mind was running erratically, looping through old memories like a tape that kept skipping.

It was the dream again. The same one that hit me every night, gnawing at me more with each passing day I'd been off my meds.

I was back in my grandfather's backyard, the sun hanging low in the sky, painting everything a sickly orange hue. I was a kid, just a boy of eight, sprinting around with Damier, weaving through the trees. We laughed?the high-pitched giggles of boys who didn't know real pain yet.

But then, as I ran past, the scene shifted and darkened. I could still feel the crunch of dried leaves under my shoes and hear the soft whoosh of the wind rustling through the trees. And then... the dull thud of an ax.

"Stay back!" I heard someone yell, but the voice was muffled.

Our grandfather, nearly blind, was splitting logs as if we were nowhere nearby. He always swore his eyesight was still as sharp as ever, said he'd been splitting wood for years and wasn't about to stop just because "a doctor told him to be careful."

I darted around the backyard, glancing back over my shoulder to see Damier trailing me, grinning, unknowing. And then... that sound. The heavy, hollow sound of metal on bone.

My body froze in place.

All I felt was a sharp, splitting pain in my head and then blood. Blood down my face, warm and thick, streaming into my eyes. I staggered, blinking, as the world started spinning. The pain was all-consuming, a red haze swallowing my vision.

Through the haze, I could see Damier's face, wide-eyed, frozen in horror. I wanted to scream, to tell him I was fine, but the words were strangled, stuck.

He dropped to his knees beside me, his voice breaking as he screamed for help. "Somebody help! Damian! Hold on!" His hands pressed to my head, trying to stop the blood, but it kept flowing, and I was slipping further into darkness, pain carving its way through me.

Then the laughter started. Not Damier's, not my mother's frantic sobs or my father's shouts—but our grandfather's laughter. Lost to his dementia, he didn't even realize what he'd done. Didn't see the way I crumbled beneath the ax. In his twisted mind, it was all a joke.

That fuckin' laugh still echoed, stretching into a high-pitched ringing.

My eyes shot open, jolting me out of the dream, out of the past. My body was slick with sweat, my heart slamming against my ribs like a fist trying to escape. I tried to steady my breathing, but it came in shallow bursts, ragged and uneven.

Kita stirred next to me, but I kept silent. She didn't know about the dreams, and this was why I preferred to sleep alone, but I liked Kita next to me. She didn't know about

the meds I'd ditched, the ones that kept me sane but numbed me to everything else. The meds had smoothed out the edges, dulled the colors, and made me feel like a shell of myself.

But now, everything was sharper. Vivid. Dangerous, just the way I liked it.

I slid out of bed, grabbed my phone, and crept to the bathroom, flicking on the cold water and splashing it over my face. I stared at my reflection in the mirror—tired eyes, a face too much like Damier's staring back at me. Everyone always called me the reckless twin, the unpredictable one, but that's only because they didn't know what I'd been through. They hadn't felt what I felt.

The clock on my phone blinked 11:30 p.m. I'd woken up just in time.

The nightmare had left me feeling restless, but I shook it off, ignoring the heaviness as I walked out of the bathroom. Kita was still asleep, her silhouette barely visible in the dim light, and I moved quietly, not wanting to wake her. She didn't need to be with me, even though I knew she wanted to be involved.

The night was quiet as I got into my whip and drove through the empty streets of L.A. toward the industrial food district. Every darkened building and streetlight reflected in the windows, each glint and shadow dragging me back to my past with Damier. Once upon a time, he was my partner in crime—my only friend, really. As kids, we were inseparable. Even after the accident with our grandfather, he'd been there. I remembered how he and our mother visited me every weekend when I was stuck in that sterile hospital, healing after my grandfather nearly killed me.

Every damn weekend, just to keep me company. He'd bring comic books, music, anything he thought would take my mind off the headaches and the endless doctor appointments and surgeries. He did the same when I was locked in the hospital as an adult, battling my mental health. He came to visit me every weekend. He was a breath



of fresh air until our pops died, and I was let free.

He started seeing me differently like I was something fragile, a project he had to keep safe and out of the limelight. And after that, his life skyrocketed. Damier's business, his wealth, his influence—every single thing he had seemed like a reminder that he was leaving me behind. His success was a taunt, a glint in his eye that said he was better than me, stronger than me, and everyone knew it. But that was his mistake—thinking I'd stay on the sidelines.

I pulled up to the warehouse and parked at the edge of the lot, scanning the shadows. Midnight was the perfect time for this; the place was deserted, and I still had access to the camera feeds. I cut the feeds with a few taps on my phone and saw Troy's black van already parked by the entrance, his guys waiting in dark clothes and ski masks. Troy looked up as I approached, his mouth curving into a tight grin.

“You ready?” he asked, his voice muffled through the mask.

I nodded, tossing him the key. “Let's get to it. Cameras are off, so we're clear.”

The warehouse door swung open with a creak, and we stepped inside, greeted by rows of shelves stocked with designer clothes, counterfeit cash, and stacks of neatly packed drug bricks. Damier was as meticulous with his illegal operations as he was with his legitimate empire. The thought made me smirk as Troy's guys got to work, efficiently clearing the shelves.

Watching them tear through his stash, packing up everything worth a damn, I felt a rush of satisfaction. Here was my brother's empire, picked apart piece by piece. A million dollars worth of drugs, cash, and high-end goods—all slipping through his fingers without him even knowing it.

“Make it quick,” I said, watching as Troy's team loaded the last bags into the van.

“My uncles will be back soon.”

Troy clapped me on the shoulder as he walked past. “Don’t trip, my nigga. We’ll get this moved, and your cut will be ready by the end of the week.”

I reached into one of the bags, pulled out a couple bricks of coke and a handful of Ecstasy pills, and shoved them into my hoodie.

The job was done, so I stepped back out into the cold night, watching as the van’s taillights disappeared down the street, fading into the distance. Everything had gone smoothly, and I couldn’t shake the twisted satisfaction settling in my chest.

By the time I got back to my condo, Kita was up waiting for me, dressed in one of my shirts, her eyes lighting up as I walked through the door.

“Well?” she asked, a sly grin playing at her lips. “Did you handle it?”

I held up the brick of cocaine and the pills, smirking. “More than handled it. And now you’re gonna sell these at yo’ new job at Club Gemini.”

Her eyes widened, the smile flickering. “What am I now, some kind of drug dealer?”

I stepped closer, locking my gaze with hers, my voice low. “If you want to stay around me, yeah. I need someone I can trust. Someone who knows how to keep her mouth shut.”

The joke faded from her face as she stared at me, realizing I was dead serious.

Kita’s playful smile turned intrigued as she held my gaze, fully locked into the energy of my plan.

“A’ight,” she said, a slight grin tugging at the corner of her lips. “You want me to move it? I’ll move it. Just didn’t think I’d be needing a side job.”

I stepped closer, watching her reaction carefully. “This is more than just a side job, Kita. I need people around me who are all in, ready for whatever. You say you’re my bitch, then prove it.”

She raised an eyebrow, crossing her arms. “You really think I’d back down now?” She held the brick up with a smirk. “You should know me better than that. Besides, it’s your brother who’ll be caught off guard. He’s about to learn that ain’t nobody sitting around waiting to get money from him.”

I chuckled, satisfied. “Good. First, you keep it under wraps—nobody’s to know you’re working with me. Move it slowly to your friends. Get a feel for what the city wants.”

She nodded, that familiar fire sparking in her eyes. “And here I thought you’d keep me in the dark. Nice to know you’re finally letting me in.”

I pulled her in close, our faces just inches apart. “Trust goes both ways, Kita. You show me you’re serious, and we’ll get this city in our hands. One move at a time.”

She pressed her lips against mine with a sly smile, her confidence solidifying. I kissed her, both of us feeding off the energy in the air, the plan set in motion. Damier thought he’d locked me out of his life for good, but I’d spent enough time on the sidelines—and now, it was our turn.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

I helped Damier down his mother's front steps, careful not to let him slip. I could tell he was mad as hell, and he was already irritated by the walk from his room upstairs to the back of a Rolls-Royce truck for our night out. He wanted his life back, a piece at a time, starting here, even if it meant doing things his way. The usual energy he carried—the pride and confidence—had been dimming lately. His mother's estate was a comfortable place, no doubt, but for someone as independent as Damier, it was nothing short of confinement.

“Can't wait to be back in my own fuckin' crib,” he muttered, his voice rough and annoyed, more at the situation than at me, I knew. “This leg shit is taking its time. I'm tired of this bullshit—it just feels like I'm a baby with you helping me all the time.”

I reached over, squeezing his hand as he settled back into the plush seat. “You'll get there,” I said, keeping my tone soft. “And you're doing better than you think. But you're allowed to be frustrated.”

He gave a quick glance, a faint smirk on his lips before the weight settled back onto his face. “You're always sayin' that.”

I offered a small laugh, but he only pressed his lips together as if he wasn't ready to give any ground to his own struggles. This wasn't the strong, unstoppable man the world saw. Right now, he was vulnerable, held down by an injury that stripped away his usual fire.

Despite his bad mood, he leaned forward and brushed a kiss on my forehead, his fingers trailing along my jaw. “Having you around,” he murmured. “That's the only

thing keeping me sane.”

We hadn’t done much more than that lately. His leg wound sapped most of his energy for sex. I understood he needed the closeness, though, more than he could express. And I wanted to give him that, be that for him. We took a smooth ride through the city and ended up at his nightclub thirty minutes later.

Tonight, he was supposed to be at his club, making a much-anticipated public appearance for the first time since the ambush. Mia had arranged everything down to the last detail, and the media would be there to witness his resilience?his undeniable success. The billionaire at his own club, above it all. But here he was, stuck in his office, watching the scene below us through the lightly tinted glass wall, a quiet observer of a life that felt out of reach.

I’d dressed up for him, just as he’d asked. Hair done, flawless makeup, a white silk dress that fit every curve and shone like money. The kind of look he wanted for the woman on his arm—a billionaire’s girlfriend, maybe even more. But he’d lost interest in being out there tonight.

He kept his gaze on the club below while leaning on his crutches, lost in his thoughts. I could see him slipping, the way he’d withdrawn lately, letting bitterness creep in and take hold. I had been in my profession long enough to know when a man is slipping into depression.

I rested a hand on his back. “Damier, if you want to talk about things... You know you can with me.”

He glanced at me with a trace of defiance in his eyes, but I didn’t pull back.

“Or one of my colleagues. A professional to get through this difficult time.”

The slight snap in his voice took me by surprise. “I don’t need a fucking shrink, Dream. Everything’s good. I’ll get used to the way things are. I’m not going crazy like my fucking brother,” he muttered.

He looked away as he finished, but I didn’t take offense. I could feel his frustration, his constant push to be better, to be back to his full power. It was something I admired about him, but sometimes, his pride got the better of him.

Mia walked in at that moment, her upbeat energy like a shot of caffeine, carrying a champagne glass with a bemused look. She was always composed, always ready to tackle the social side of things.

“Damier, there’s a packed house downstairs. Interviewers waiting in your section,” she scolded, only half-jokingly. “They all want a word with their favorite billionaire and his girl. They want to know if it’s going to be a spin-off show with y’all as a couple.”

“Favorite?” he scoffed, settling back into his chair. “Stop playin’ on my top, Mia.”

Mia rolled her eyes. “Then they’ll want to know about Dream, at least. Are you going to sit in your office the whole time, being a damn grouch?”

He looked at me and shrugged, his indifference mixed with a hint of irritation. “Nah, send her out,” he said to Mia. “Let her handle it. And if they ask, tell them no about a fuckin’ show. We’re not doing some couple bullshit for cameras again. My image is clean enough.”

Mia raised an eyebrow at me, and I smiled.

“Guess I’m the spokesperson,” I said, not minding it at all. I’d be able to keep the spotlight off him tonight, just like he wanted.

The club buzzed with a hundred sounds, bodies pressed close, and laughter echoing. I navigated through it all, putting on a bright, confident smile for the interviewers. When I got to the section, everything was lavishly live. People were calling my name like I was famous, and they opened a bottle of Moët for me. I felt rich, classy, and on top of the world. I never expected to be popular after the show, but I couldn't lie; I was embracing it.

I was just answering a question about our time in Paris, my response poised and diplomatic, when my gaze shifted briefly up to the tinted windows of Damier's office. He was in there, watching, but nowhere in sight for everyone else. It felt symbolic somehow that he could observe from afar but no longer be part of his own empire the way he used to.

After the interview, I clinked glasses with Mia and indulged in lighthearted conversation, just enough to get through the socializing. When I finished, I returned to the office but stood quietly at the cracked door.

But before I could enter fully, I heard voices inside. Damier was talking to Hocus, his right-hand man, and their conversation was serious.

I didn't want to intrude, but I couldn't stop myself from listening.

Damier sat on the edge of his desk, not even using his crutches, his knuckles tight around the edges as he stared Hocus down. The air was thick with rage, something I'd rarely seen in him, even on his worst days. Grouchy, yes, but rage... never.

"I want the head of any pussy nigga who thinks they can play me like this," he growled, his voice low but vibrating with an anger that was all too real. "Every last one of them."

Hocus, steady as ever, nodded, his eyes dark with understanding. "So you're saying

it's war with whoever?"

"Hell yeah," Damier replied, his expression hardened. "My spot got hit for everything, Hocus. One million in product. Whoever planned this thought they could wipe me out in one night. That's one bold ass nigga."

Hocus narrowed his eyes, glancing at Damier with a mix of curiosity and caution. "You think Damian's the blueprint?"

Damier didn't hesitate. "This here, I know he is. Nobody else would've known when the place was least protected, and it's got his name all over it. It's sloppy enough to reek of his jealousy."

Hocus took a deep breath, his voice low but sharp. "What's the plan then, boss?"

Damier's jaw tightened, the words spilling out with a calmness that betrayed the fury beneath them. "I want a word with him before I get violent with his weird ass, not in my office, not in public. Just me and him, face to face, like it used to be. I want to know where his head is—whether this is just another petty power grab or if he's truly crossing a line we both know we can't come back from."

"And if it does cross that line?" Hocus asked, his tone deadly serious.

Damier paused, his gaze flickering with something darker and more reluctant. "Then we'll handle it however we have to. But I'm hoping it doesn't go there. I don't want to kill my own brother, my nigga. I do know one thing, though. Whoever it was, they turned off the cameras. But what niggas don't know... my cameras don't turn off. I'ma analyze the footage when I leave here. Somebody gotta die, even if it's not Damian." The raw edge to his voice told me he meant it.

At that moment, I cleared my throat, stepping inside just enough to make my



presence known. They both turned, their eyes instantly softening as they noticed me.

Hocus stood up straight, giving Damier a quick nod. “Once you wrap up your engagement, meet me at the warehouse so we can look at that together,” he said, his voice all business now. He threw me a quick glance, his expression neutral, and then left the room without another word.

I closed the door gently, taking a step closer. Damier leaned back, crossing his arms, a shadow of frustration in his gaze. I knew what I’d walked in on, but I didn’t press. I was here for him, no matter what, and I knew he’d tell me what he wanted me to know when he was ready.

“You okay? You don’t look happy,” I softly asked, running a hand along his back, my fingers tracing a light circle on his tense muscles.

He gave me a tight smile, clearly trying to act as if I hadn’t just overheard him talking about revenge.

“Yeah, I’m good. Just business,” he said, his voice warmer now as he turned his attention to me, ignoring the last few minutes as if nothing had happened. “How was it down there with those vultures?”

I played along, letting him hold onto that mask a little longer. “Well, the interviewers were predictable as always. They kept prodding for details about us, trying to see if we were really together and if we’d do a reality show as a couple. I shut that down quickly, don’t worry.”

He chuckled, though his shoulders were still tense. “Good. The last thing I want is us being poked and prodded for nigga’s entertainment.” He brushed a hand along my arm, letting out a sigh. “But you handled it just like I knew you would.”

Standing there, close enough to feel the anger still radiating off him, I couldn't deny how attractive I found him in that moment. His world was complicated, dark, even daring—yet, something about it, something about him in this raw state, drew me in even more... Damn, I had fallen for a man in the mafia.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The clock blinked 2:04 a.m. in bold red, lighting up the car's dark interior as Dream and I pulled up to the empty warehouse. As I looked over, watching her eyelids droop in exhaustion, my anger simmered down for a moment. She was like a calm wave washing over me, softening the edge of the night. Her presence reminded me there was still peace somewhere in my life, even in a world that felt ready to turn on me at any second.

But I wasn't here for peace.

"Stay in the car, baby. I'm going to holler at my fam for a second. I won't be long," I murmured, leaning over and kissing her lips. She looked like she wanted to say something, but her expression shifted, and she nodded, trusting me.

I stepped closer to the warehouse. It stood like a silent witness, emptied of everything I kept there—everything we kept there. This spot was supposed to be off-limits? untouchable. Yet someone had found a way to clear it out without leaving a trace, except for the insult I felt at being played.

My mother stood by the warehouse entrance, calm and collected, the way she always was. Next to her were Uncle King, Hocus, and a few others from our tight-knit crew. Hocus had his head turned, watching the streets for any eyes on us, while King tapped his fingers against the barrel of his gun, his frustration almost a mirror of my own.

"Where we at wit' it, my nigga?" I asked as I approached, my voice low but pointed.

"The cameras were tampered with, boss, but..." Hocus exchanged a glance with me.

“Seems they didn’t know about that second layer your boy Lil Ken set up for you.”

Of course, they didn’t know. That system was invisible unless you knew exactly what to look for. A little security gift from the homie from college, Lil Ken Demon himself. Every piece of footage fed into his server, and it would only go dark if I was the one to shut it off.

I turned to King. “Any word on who these niggas think they are?”

“Shit,” he started shaking his head. “These were pros, nephew, or at least, they thought they were. But Lil Ken said he’s got a trick to reveal their faces. Give him seventy-two hours, and we’ll have everything.”

A calm settled over me, but it was the quiet before the storm. “Good. Once he sends those faces, I want their heads on my desk. I want to take them out personally. One by one. Nobody touches my business and walks away.”

This hit didn’t just hurt us—it put my reputation with the Mexican mafia at risk, too. Half of what was stolen belonged to them, and I already knew they’d want more than just the money. They’d want every last brick back. Luckily, this wasn’t my only stash. I had bricks and pills to replace what was missing, but I was going to take a loss.

I nodded to the group. “That’s all for now. I’ll take it from here.”

Once everyone had cleared out, my mother and I slipped into the back seat of her Maybach before I headed back to Dream, the steady hum of the engine filling the silence. She stayed quiet, studying me like she’d done since I was a kid. I knew she wanted to say something about what happened. About Damian and all the mess he was dragging into our lives, but I broke the silence first.

“Dream... she brought up something tonight,” I started, staring out the window. “Tried to say I might be depressed. That I’m not myself. She is trying to use her education on me.” I chuckled.

My mother raised an eyebrow, staying quiet, but I could see her thinking hard.

“She’s right,” she finally said, her voice soft yet firm. “I’ve seen the same thing since you have been at my house. This thing with Damian and your injury... it’s weighing on you, Damier. And you used to be able to talk about things, but now...”

I shook my head, rubbing a hand over my face. “It’s just that he acts like I never gave a fuck about him. He’s out here trying to ruin my life, acting like we weren’t close. Like I wasn’t there when Grandpa hit him with that fuckin’ ax... like I didn’t nearly lose it, thinking he was dead at such a young age. We were eight, and I just recently stopped having nightmares about that day. He thinks that shit doesn’t haunt me like I was the one hit?”

My mother took my hand, squeezing it. “That incident scarred him, you know that. But he was on his meds, seeing progress while he was locked up... until he stopped. He’s not the brother you remember anymore. Sometimes, I feel like I should drive him back to the mental institution and tell them not to let him out.”

I started grinding my teeth like I always did when I was enraged, feeling the sting of regret under all the anger.

“But I didn’t cut him off until he crossed every line he could when it came to Arika. I tried to help that nigga, and he threw it all back in my face. And the way he’s acting now... I know it’s only going to get worse.”

She sighed, resting her head back. “I’ll talk to him. I’ll set up a meeting, see if he’ll give any hint of involvement in this shit. But I doubt he’ll admit anything, and he

better not be one of them faces on that video.”

“I know he won’t,” I muttered. “But maybe he’ll slip up and give us a clue before this all goes too far. Because I don’t want to kill my own blood, but if he keeps up like this...” My voice trailed off, and for once, I didn’t finish the thought.

I climbed out of my mother’s Maybach, taking a moment to exhale and re-center before heading back to my own ride. I opened the door of the Rolls, and there she was—Dream, curled up in the back seat, her head leaning against the window, wrapped in my jacket. She looked like she’d drifted off as soon as I’d left her, peaceful in a way that calmed something in me, too.

I slid in beside her, reaching under the jacket and pressing my hand against her thigh, running my fingers over the softness of her skin. She stirred slightly, a small smile pulling at the corners of her mouth, and I couldn’t help but grin.

“Missed rubbing on you, woman. Sorry I’ve been so distant,” I murmured, letting my thumb trace slow circles over her thigh, making my way up to her lace thong.

She opened her eyes halfway, catching me with that playful look of hers.

“Is that right?” she asked, voice still heavy with sleep.

“Yeah. And when we get home, I want you in my bed. Not that hospital bed over at my mother’s crib. I’m tired of that place. I lived there most of my life.” I paused, then leaned down close to her ear. “We’re heading to my penthouse tonight. Need some privacy. Just us. We’ll go back tomorrow.”

She laughed softly, clearly waking up now. “I don’t mind that at all.”

With that, I gave the driver his instructions, and the Rolls pulled off, leaving the

warehouse behind. As we moved through the dim streets, I kept my hand on Dream's pussy, feeling her warmth, every mile bringing us closer to a night I'd been wanting since I got hit.

By the time we reached the penthouse, she was wide awake. We stepped out, only grabbing one of my crutches. I could already feel the anticipation between us. The elevator ride up was silent, but the energy spoke louder than any words.

When the doors opened to the penthouse, I led her to the bar in the corner. I poured two glasses of cognac and then handed her one.

"To privacy," I said, raising my glass.

"To us," she replied, her eyes gleaming.

We drank, the warmth of the liquor setting a slow burn that matched the one building between us. She looked so fucking good tonight, and I was done waiting. I set my glass down, took hers from her hand, and led her straight to the bathroom. The glass shower was large, taking up half the space, and I turned it on, letting the steam rise as she undressed, the cool air making her nipples hard.

I joined her, pulling her close under the hot water, and took a moment to admire Dream. Her straight ginger hair was now wet and curling at the ends. There was something about her standing there, vulnerable yet so powerful, that made me want her even more.

"Damn, you look sexy all wet," I said, letting my hands trail over her curves, the heat between us building as the water poured down.

She ran her hands over my chest, and for a second, I felt a twinge in my leg—a reminder that I was still healing—but I ignored it, brushing it aside like I was going

to start doing. Nothing was going to stop me tonight. My hands slipped down, gripping her ass, pulling her closer, and the world around us faded. It was just her and me, every touch deepening the connection I felt to her.

The pain in my leg was still there, sharp and constant, but my focus was all on her. I couldn't stop myself, and I didn't want to. This was more than just a release; it was grounding, a way to escape everything else in my life. As she sexily turned around and arched her back under the water, I knew this wasn't just about lust. This was where I wanted to be, and nothing else mattered.

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Two days after that night with Dream, I was back at my mother's, feeling the weight of everything, including the damn Percocets, dragging me down. I was slouched in the conference room, hardly touching the plate of hot wings in front of me. My leg throbbed, and every time I tried to ignore it, the haze of sleep pulled me deeper. I knew I needed the meds, but I couldn't stand the way they slowed me down.

Just as I was about to doze off completely, the door swung open, and my mother walked in with King right behind her. I sat up, half-alert, watching as she tossed a folder onto the table, snapping me out of my fog.

"Here's what you need," she said, her tone no-nonsense as always.

I straightened, wiped the sleep from my eyes, and opened the folder. The pictures spilled out in black-and-white clarity of each face under the mask. I scanned through them, but there was something familiar about the eyes of one of them—the same cold stare I'd locked onto when I got hit. I'd never forget that face, even half-hidden behind a mask.

But then there was another image that caught my attention: a man standing by a van,



positioned in a way that made it difficult to see him fully. Even with Lil Ken's best efforts, it was just a shadowed figure. But the stance, the way he stood... it struck something in me.

"Who does that look like to you?" my mother asked, reading the expression on my face.

I squinted, a sick feeling settling in my gut. "It could be your fuckin' son. That's his posture, his damn stance... I know it. We stand the same."

King let out a low grunt, nodding. "Looks like it to me, too, and if it's him, he's only confirming what we already know about where he stands with us."

I ran a hand over my jaw, trying to shake off the irritation that flared hotter with every second. "So, what do we do? Let him explain himself? I think we are past that shit."

"We'll give him a chance," my mother said, cool and collected, but the steel in her voice was undeniable. "We show him the photos, let him come clean if it was him. And if it wasn't... he'd better make that clear to us."

But when the time for our meeting came, Damian never showed. I waited, sitting through one more wave of rage and then another. The empty seat, his empty promises, his constant ghosting—it was all stacking up, and I was done.

"I'm done being the nice brother," I said, glancing at King. "If he's going to play this game, I'm going to find every one of these men myself and send a message Damian won't forget. He's about to learn what happens when you mess with me."

My mother's eyes glinted with pride as she nodded in approval. Nothing—and no one—was going to stop me from handling this, leg injury or not. I wasn't about to sit

around, waiting for some cowardly apology that would never come. The meds were wearing off mentally, but they still helped me block out the pain.

I grabbed my keys and headed to my new blacked-out Bentley GT, the anger keeping me focused. I drove through the city, pushing the car's speed limit until I reached Dream's office. I strode inside, knowing exactly what I needed. Her receptionist raised an eyebrow but quickly pointed to her office door.

"She's available," she said, and I could tell she was a little taken aback by my unannounced visit.

I walked into Dream's office, pausing as I took in the sight of her in her element. Her clear Prada glasses rested on her nose, and her hair was pulled back, giving her this sharp, no-nonsense vibe. She was completely focused on her work, and the way she handled herself made me proud. I cleared my throat to make my presence known, and she looked up, her face lighting up just a bit.

"Didn't mean to drop in unannounced," I said, letting my eyes linger on her for a moment.

She smiled, folding her hands. "It's fine. What brings you here?"

I hesitated, the words feeling heavy even before they came out. "You were right, Dream. I'm feeling... off. Depressed, maybe. And I can't afford to keep ignoring it." I let out a breath, feeling the weight of the confession settle between us. "So, I thought... four paid sessions, and I'll tell you everything about me. Starting with my last marriage... and my brother."

Her expression softened, and she took off her glasses, giving me her full attention. No judgment, just an open ear. She leaned forward slightly and nodded. "I'm listening."

And for the first time in a while, I felt like I might actually want to talk.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

I sat back in my mancave, swirling the last of my whiskey in the glass, watching the ice melt into it. My mind was all over the place, bouncing between satisfaction and frustration. Damier really thought he could call some family meeting and get me to spill everything just by showing me a few pictures? Please .

When Mom called, I could tell she was tired. She only called to let me know Damier wasn't buying my story—or my absence from his little interrogation.

I smirked, playing with the Cuban link chain around my neck. “So, he thinks I was there?”

Her sigh came through the phone, sounding like static. “Don't play dumb, Damian. You know exactly what he thinks. You weren't subtle, and he's going to figure it out if you keep this up. He's already reviewed the footage, and the faces were revealed.”

“Footage, huh? Interesting.” I tried to keep my voice calm, but inside, paranoia flickered.

I remembered the five men Troy and I hired to hit Damier's warehouse. I'd been careful not to show my face, and I never set foot inside. I turned off the cameras, so there was no way he had footage. But maybe it hadn't been as seamless as I thought. The psychosis started creeping in, whispering doubts, telling me I'd messed up, that everyone was watching, waiting.

“Stop with the games, Damian,” she said. “Damier has ways to find out the truth, and if you're really mixed up in this?—”

I cut her off. “Mixed up? I didn’t walk into that warehouse with my hands out, did I? Is my face exposed on camera?” My words hung there, half-confession, half-denial. Part of me didn’t even know if I was telling the truth anymore.

She paused, her tone shifting to something softer. “Damian, you need to be careful. He’s my son, too, and I hate seeing you tear each other apart like this over money.”

But the damage was done. I couldn’t stand hearing her defend him. My brother. Golden Bitch Boy. The son who got every break, every ounce of love I wanted. And now, his world was about to come crashing down, thanks to me. Not that I’d admit to anything. Let him suspect; let him dig. He’d find nothing. But the whispers in my mind told me to go further, to make sure he couldn’t come for me even if he wanted to.

“Yeah, I know. Maybe I’ll lay low for a while.” I chuckled, more to myself than her. “Take a little vacation.”

She sounded relieved. “Maybe that’s best, Damian. And don’t leave me in the dark. Tell me where you go.”

“Maybe,” I replied, knowing I’d never tell her where I was going or what I was planning next. The voices told me to keep it quiet, to stay a step ahead. My brother wasn’t going to get the satisfaction of pinning this on me, not in this lifetime.

After I hung up, I paced the length of my mancave, my mind racing faster than my footsteps. Damier was on to me. He had surveillance, proof, maybe even a face or two that he’d be ready to track down. This was more complicated than I’d expected. I realized then that my plan would have to be bigger than a few warehouses. I’d have to stay out of his line of fire altogether. The voices murmured their approval, filling my head with images of distant cities and open borders.

In the meantime, Troy was waiting for me at his spot with some of my money, and I knew it was time to make the call. I couldn't stay around with him breathing down my neck, and that meant relocating outside of the country. It was a drastic move, one that'd be difficult to explain to Kita—but I didn't have time to babysit. My brother was more clever than I gave him credit for, and if he sniffed me out, my window to move would be gone.

When I walked downstairs, Kita was sitting at my dining room table, an empty glass of wine in her hand and a few stacks of money next to her.

“Finally, you brought your ass downstairs.” Her voice was soft, laced with something like relief. I'd never understood her attachment to me, but she was useful when I needed her.

“Yeah, I am.” I sat next to her, watching her watch me, already imagining the questions she'd ask.

She had no idea what I was planning, and part of me didn't want her to know.

I sat down, exhaling. “Listen, I gotta leave out of Cali to make my next move, but I can't bring you along this time.” I watched her face fall, but I couldn't care. Attachments only got in the way. If she was smart, she'd get that.

She frowned, trying to keep her voice steady. “But why? I thought we were in this together.”

I sighed, leaning back. “Yeah, we were. But some things are bigger than that. It's safer if you stay put.”

I could tell she didn't believe me, and maybe that was fine. It was better she learned now what loyalty really meant to me.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The morning light seeped softly through the clinic windows, casting a calming warmth over my office. Yet, I found myself restless. My thoughts drifted back to my last three sessions with Damier. He'd spoken with rare vulnerability about Damian, recounting the traumatic accident with their grandfather—a terrible incident where their grandfather, partially blind and already showing signs of dementia, had struck Damian in the head with an axe. The memory had stayed with Damier, haunting him with the weight of what might've happened had the blow been fatal. He shared how he had felt frozen with terror, unsure if his twin would survive.

I could almost feel his pain as he spoke, his voice tinged with a bitterness that didn't suit him. There was a fierce loyalty beneath his resentment, a brotherly bond that had somehow unraveled into rivalry and hurt. Watching him wrestle with that guilt only deepened my own affection for him. I could still see him sitting across from me, his usual confidence softened by something deeper—a rare, unguarded glimpse at the weight he carried.

"It's strange," he'd said, leaning back with a sigh, eyes focused somewhere beyond the room. "You'd think a hit to the head would've been something we'd laugh about one day, just one of those wild childhood stories." He gave a bitter chuckle, but there was no real humor in it. "But I don't think anyone else really gets it. I felt it—every bit of what he was going through. That accident, it was like... it changed him in a way I couldn't reach anymore."

He looked at me then, the hardness in his gaze melting into something like regret. "For a long time, I didn't want to admit how much I blamed myself. Like, maybe if I'd held him back or stopped him from running past Grandpa that day, things would be different." He took a deep breath, jaw clenched.

“And now?” I’d asked gently.

“Now, I wonder if we’re even brothers anymore or if he’s just someone I used to know.”

The door to my office opened, jolting me out of my reflections. My receptionist’s voice crackled through the intercom.

“Dr. Jaxton, Jennifer Dolphin is here for her session.”

Jennifer’s name still had an odd ring to it. She was mysterious, and those mismatched eyes of hers—one green, the other light brown—left an impression that lingered. I couldn’t quite shake the sense of familiarity that clung to her presence, though I hadn’t yet pieced together why.

Jennifer entered, her usual composed demeanor tinged with a hint of nervous energy today. She took her seat with a sigh, tucking a stray curl behind her ear.

“It’s been close to a month already, and I know I missed a couple of sessions, but I couldn’t wait to come back,” she began, her voice soft yet resolute. “There’s just... so much to unpack.”

“Whenever you’re ready,” I replied, offering a reassuring smile as I prepared to take notes.

Jennifer took a steadying breath, gazing at the floor as though the words were hiding somewhere beneath the carpet. “I keep thinking about my ex... Franklin. There’s no one in my life I can tell the truth to. No one who would understand. And some days, it’s like he’s still with me, casting this dark shadow I can’t shake.”

“What was he like again?” I asked, keeping my tone gentle, though a familiar sense



of dread curled in my stomach. The stories she shared always seemed to brush up against an unnamed darkness.

Jennifer's lips curled into a wry smile. "He was everything, honestly. Showed me a lot of shit no man has ever. As I stated, I loved his fast-lane lifestyle. Franklin would take me to dangerous places and leave me in the car, saying he had business to handle. I'd wait, and when he came back, he'd be the same man he was before. But... he'd have a little blood on his shirt or his hands. It was like he'd leave a part of himself behind in those places, and I was expected to sit there and act like nothing was happening."

Her eyes seemed to cloud over as she spoke as if the memories themselves had wrapped her in their grip.

"It sounds like he was someone who took pride in compartmentalizing his life," I said, watching her carefully.

"Very," she said quickly as if even the suggestion was absurd. "He was so gentle with me, never raised his voice until he found out about me using his supply of drugs and how much money I spent. I took millions, girl. I should probably be dead like those men in those buildings." She hesitated, her gaze drifting back to her hands. "It was more the way he could kill without blinking. Just calmly moving from one person to the next as if he were invincible. You can't imagine what it's like to love someone like that."

I tried to steady my breathing as the edges of my mind began to blur, connecting pieces I hadn't allowed myself to think about until now. "Did that lifestyle affect you?"

She let out a small, hollow laugh. "You could say that. He always wanted me around, so I saw a lot that affected me mentally. I stayed loyal and went wherever he dragged

me. Right up until I didn't, though."

Her gaze shifted as though she'd just revealed something she hadn't meant to.

"What do you mean?" I asked, keeping my expression neutral.

Jennifer chewed on her lip, clearly reluctant but unable to stop herself now that the words were spilling out. "I mean, I'm ready to talk about all the money I spent and how I used it to manipulate him," she said, her voice barely above a whisper. "I fell for his money and all the access I had to it. I know it was wrong, but I couldn't help it. I started getting cosmetic surgeries, partying seven days a week, and starting businesses I couldn't conduct. When he found out I stole a million in drugs from him, used most of it, and gave some to my family to sell, he divorced me. I had so much access to him, and I got caught up in my world."

The room seemed to shrink as I processed her words. Everything about her story was starting to feel too familiar, too close to the stories Damier had shared in our sessions. I couldn't shake the feeling that "Franklin" might be more than just a coincidence. But I kept my thoughts guarded, my face unreadable.

"Do you regret it?" I softly asked.

She nodded slowly. "More than anything. What started as something passionate and exciting turned into a nightmare. I realized too late that messing with Franklin's money wasn't just another bad decision. Big mistake for me, even though Franklin still takes care of me from a distance. That's why I am able to sit here with you. I'm thankful to be sitting here. As I stated, I should be dead, but Franklin blamed my behavior on the drugs and mental illness. My mental illness came from the demons he exposed me to."

We spent the next few minutes in silence, her words hanging heavy between us. I

took notes, recording her every word, though my mind was spinning, trying to piece together the fragments of truth hidden within her cryptic confessions.

Jennifer looked at her watch and sighed. “There’s more, but I’ll save it for next time. I’m not sure you’re ready to hear all of it.” She gave me a teasing smile, though her eyes held a glint of something darker.

“Whenever you’re ready, Jennifer. We’ll be here,” I replied, keeping my tone even as I showed her out.

As the door clicked shut, I felt a strange shiver run through me. It was as if a storm had swept through my office, leaving behind an eerie silence. There was no denying it now—Jennifer’s story felt like a twisted reflection of the life Damier had begun to share with me. Could he be Franklin? The question burned in my mind, but I couldn’t allow myself to believe it, not without proof.

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I hadn’t seen my best friend Zaraa in months, so picking her up tonight after work felt like a breath of fresh air. She’d just finished filming *Divas*, a reality show I’d been dying to ask her about. With my own schedule filled with clients and the chaos of my relationship with Damier, our catch-ups had been painfully sparse.

When she climbed into my Bentley, her familiar laugh instantly put me at ease. The air between us was alive with stories we were itching to share. We decided on Roscoe’s, ordering a nostalgic and necessary spread. As we ate, Zaraa filled me in on all the behind-the-scenes drama of her show. Between bites of waffles and laughing over the absurdities of reality TV, we streamed the first couple of episodes on my phone, reliving her wildest moments on screen. It felt like old times, the noise, the energy—all of it.

As we headed out, I reached for my keys, but my steps froze as I noticed a figure standing in front of my Bentley, illuminated by the streetlights and a faint haze of smoke. The man's stance was too familiar—the slouch, the cockiness—and when he looked up, I recognized the dark glint in his eyes that I'd only seen in old photos that Damier had shown me in our sessions. Damian.

He looked almost identical to Damier but with an edge that screamed trouble. The sight of him sent a shiver through me, though I kept my face neutral as I met his gaze. Zaraa, oblivious to who he was, rolled her eyes, muttering under her breath, “Here we go. Another guy trying to act tough.”

“Dream, is that you?” he called, his voice smooth but laced with malice, the smirk on his face deepening as he sized me up.

I didn't need to answer. He knew who I was. “What do you want?” I asked, trying to keep my tone steady, ignoring the way my heart raced.

He took a lazy drag from his blunt, exhaling the smoke with a smirk before he stepped closer, invading my space. “Just wanted to meet my brother's girl. See what all the fuss is about. You definitely are sexy as fuck. Unique, just the way my brother likes them.” He leaned in, his eyes flickering with a dangerous amusement. “I'll cut to it—tell your nigga he's got one last chance to cut me in, or I'll make my own moves. And when I do, sweetheart, you'll be the first on my list.”

A cold wave of fear washed over me, but I steadied myself, maintaining a calm expression. I'd heard about his schizophrenia and knew he had a reputation for lashing out unpredictably. Any sudden reaction from me could set him off. I kept my voice firm. “You really think I'm the one you should be threatening?”

Zaraa, still unaware of the tension, scoffed and put a hand on her hip. “Who do you think you are, coming up here and talking to her like that? You better back off, my

nigga.”

Damian’s head snapped toward her, his expression darkening in a way that made even her bold attitude falter. He didn’t say a word, but his eyes alone were enough to make her step back. He turned his gaze back to me, a twisted smile returning to his face. “Deliver the message. And don’t take too long,” he said, flicking his blunt to the side before giving me one last look over. “Wouldn’t want things to get... messy.”

With that, he turned and sauntered off to a sleek Porsche parked nearby. He slid in, the engine roaring to life as he drove off, leaving a thick tension in his wake.

As his car disappeared down the street, Zaraa finally let out a nervous laugh, though her voice held a trace of awe. “Okay, he was too fine to be acting like that. Are you sure he’s not into you?”

I shook my head, my heart still pounding. “Trust me, Z. Looks don’t make up for what he’s capable of. That was Damian, Damier’s twin brother.”

Zaraa’s eyes widened, her shock turning to mild horror as she put the pieces together. “Twin? And he’s got a crazy side? You’re living in a crime novel, girl.”

I gave a shaky laugh, masking my unease as we drove back. I dropped her off at her place, and the second I was alone in the car, the adrenaline hit me all at once. I barely noticed the city lights streaming by as I navigated to Damier’s office, my thoughts a tangled mess of fear, anger, and urgency.

When I finally reached his building, I bolted out of the car, practically sprinting to his office. I needed to see him, to tell him everything that had happened, to feel safe again in his presence.

The receptionist gave me a sympathetic look as I hurried past her desk, barely

acknowledging her greeting. Damier's office door was open, and he was seated at his desk. His posture was relaxed, but the look on his face darkened the second he saw my expression. "What's wrong, Dream?"

I took a deep breath, trying to keep my composure. But the second I opened my mouth, everything spilled out—Damian's threat, the twisted way he'd looked at me, the malice in his voice.

He clenched his jaw, fists curling as he listened, the intensity in his eyes growing with every word. "So, he threatened you?" His voice was low, barely controlled.

I nodded, fear resurfacing now that I was reliving it. "He wants money, Damier. He's giving you one last chance, or... or he'll come after me."

His expression hardened, a dangerous calm settling over him as he stood and walked over to me, pulling me into his arms. "This nigga tripping thinking he can fuck with you."

His words, fierce and protective, gave me a sense of relief I hadn't realized I needed. But beneath his comforting embrace, I could feel the rage simmering—a storm waiting to break.

The weight of his arms around me and his promise of protection made my fears fade, if only temporarily. I knew this would only deepen the rift between him and Damian, but there was no turning back now.

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*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The thought of Damian stepping to Dream, of him getting close enough to threaten her, had me seeing red. The images flashed in my mind—Dream’s soft, caring eyes, her gentle presence, her unwavering support—and it only made the rage in my chest burn hotter. She was innocent in all this, untouched by the poison of my family’s legacy, and Damian had the nerve to bring her into it? No, he was going to pay for crossing that line.

I’d been searching for Damian all night, tracking down every lead I had on where he might be hiding, but he was slippery, had turned off his phone, and vanished from every spot he thought I wouldn’t know about. It was like he’d planned for this moment. Like he’d known I’d come after him if he went too far.

The last place I could think to check was the condo he thought he’d kept hidden from me. I arrived, the anger pulsing through my veins as I pushed my way into his apartment. The first thing I saw wasn’t Damian—I was surprised to see it was Kita, sitting on the couch with an expression somewhere between scared and defiant. My blood boiled as I crossed the room and yanked her up by the neck, watching her flinch.

“Where the fuck is he, Kita?” I growled, watching her face for any sign of a lie. “You better start talking.”

“He’s gone, Damier. He just... left. He didn’t tell me anything about where he went. He told me I could stay here until the lease is up.” Her voice was trembling, but I wasn’t buying it.

“Right,” I sneered, tightening my grip just enough for her to get the message. “You

know something. You've been fucking him. So, tell me, what's he got planned? And what the fuck is your involvement?"

Her eyes darted to the side, and she swallowed hard. "All I know is... he's out to get you, Damier. That's all he ever talked about—taking everything from you. He is sending people to you, starting with my brother."

"And you didn't tell me?" I shot her a death stare.

"I was scared! And you weren't fucking with me. I didn't feel like I needed to."

I watched her carefully, considering her words. Maybe she was telling the truth, maybe not. But the fact that Damian had bailed told me all I needed to know. He was running, and he wasn't about to stop.

I let go of Kita, shoving her back onto the couch, and she fell with a cry. "I should kill you, but I'm not because shit is hot right now. Stay out my way, Kita, and stay away from Damian. If you are with him when I catch him, I'll kill you too," I said, my voice a low, dangerous promise.

She looked up at me, her eyes wide, and for a moment, I saw a flicker of fear before she turned away, hugging herself.

Leaving Kita in tears, I stepped out of the condo and drove into the night, the city lights flashing by in a blur. I could feel the adrenaline surging in my veins, the taste of vengeance thick on my tongue. If Damian wanted to play dirty, I'd give him what he wanted, one way or another.

Lil Ken had done his part, running through the list of names and addresses of everyone who'd been there for the robbery. Tonight, I wasn't going to Troy—no, I'd save him for later. But there was another one on that list, and I had plans for him. He



would be the one to send the message to Troy while I was on vacation.

I pulled up to the address, quiet and dark. Hocus and Uncle King were already waiting for me, their eyes as sharp and focused as mine. We didn't waste time with words; we knew what needed to be done.

The three of us crept through the house, moving silently until we heard the muffled sounds of the shower running. The kid was in there, clueless as to what was coming for him. Hocus gave me a nod, his grip steady on his weapon as we edged closer to the bathroom.

I raised my revolver, finger steady on the trigger as Hocus yanked the shower curtain back. The boy's face went pale the second he saw me standing there, his eyes wide with terror. He didn't have to ask who I was; he already knew.

"Damier," he whispered, voice shaking as though saying my name might save him.

"Yeah, you know who the fuck I am," I snarled, my gaze dark and unyielding.

Then, with a single movement, I turned the gun to the girl beside him, who was frozen in shock. I didn't hesitate as I pulled the trigger, her blood splattering against the tile as she slumped down.

The boy screamed, his voice strangled as he tried to scramble back, his body shaking so hard he lost control of himself, the smell of his own fear filling the air.

"Now," I said, my voice cold and unforgiving. "Where the fuck is my shit?"

The kid stammered, barely able to get the words out. "T-Troy," he choked. "T-Troy has it... please..."

Before he could finish his plea, I pulled the trigger again, the gunshot echoing in the small space. His body slumped to the floor, and I watched, my heartbeat steady, my rage finally starting to fade.

Leaving the house, I let out a long breath, knowing that tonight was only the beginning. I still had business with Troy, and he'd get his soon enough. But for now, my night wasn't about the bloodshed. I had something, or rather someone else, waiting for me. I also had an early flight that I wouldn't miss for the world.

The thought of Dream grounded me and pulled me back to a reality that didn't involve revenge or violence. I needed her tonight; I needed to feel her softness, her peace. She was my calm after the storm, the only thing that kept me from getting completely lost in this life.

I drove through the streets, pushing down the surge of adrenaline that had fueled me all night. When I finally pulled up to her townhouse in the Hollywood Hills, I found her waiting in her doorway, wrapped in the dim light spilling out from inside. The second I stepped out, she looked up at me, her face softening in a way that made everything from tonight fade into the background.

"You went all out with these roses, Damier. My kitchen and living room look like a flower shop." She snickered as I walked up the stairs. I sent her twenty dozen roses from Million Roses because she was worth every one of them. After my brother approached her, I felt bad about his actions, so it was my way of making it up to her. She was strong, though, and went on with her everyday life like it never happened.

"It's just how I feel about you, baby."

As soon as we were inside, I didn't waste time with words. I pulled her close, pressing my lips to hers in a kiss that held everything I'd been holding back all night. She melted into me, her touch soft and warm against my skin, and for a moment, all

the anger, all the bloodshed faded into something gentler, something that only she could bring out in me.

We moved to the bedroom, our bodies intertwined, my hands gripping her, grounding me. I needed her more than I needed revenge, more than I needed anything.

Two days later...

After an incredible day of relaxing on pristine beaches and indulging in local foods in The Bahamas, we were on a luxurious yacht with Damier's business friends from the area and Hocus and his wife, Jada. The group felt so at ease, so laid-back, and as I looked at Damier, I realized this was exactly the side of him I loved—away from the grit, away from the grind, away from the chaos he couldn't escape back home. Here, he was free, fun, and that smooth charm of his was in full effect.

As the yacht glided through the warm Caribbean waters, the world seemed to narrow down to just Damier's crew. The warm, humid breeze felt like silk against my skin, and the scent of salt and tropical blooms lingered in the air. I couldn't believe we were actually here, far from everything back in LA, letting ourselves just be. It was close to midnight, and the yacht was alive with laughter, the sound of waves lapping against the hull, and soft reggae music carrying us into the night.

He was leaning on Hocus, laughing, a glass of dark, rich Jamaican rum in one hand as they both tried to keep their balance while the DJ spun the "Mississippi Cha-Cha Slide." I was sitting with Jada, and she was cool. Very mature, and we were the same age. She and Hocus had two kids together, and they were glad to be away just as much as Damier and me. They didn't hang with us unless they were meeting us for lunch and now for the boat ride.

Jada rolled her eyes, giving me an amused look. "These two always request the cha-cha slide whenever they're together and drunk—no matter what country, no matter what time."

I watched Damier, his deep laugh carrying over the music as he and Hocus moved side by side, occasionally nudging each other. Despite his slight lean on Hocus's shoulder, Damier's movements were smooth, his natural rhythm and confidence shining through. Even with that slight limp, he made the dance look good. Damier's other guests on the yacht joined in, adding to the energy. I couldn't help but smile, loving this carefree side of him.

To anyone watching, he was the perfect mix of alpha and fun, a man with presence but an openness that invited you in. And he was all mine.

The song shifted to something slower, more soulful. Marvin Gaye's "Distant Lover" floated through the speakers, casting a familiar, intimate warmth over the deck. Damier locked eyes with me, his lips curving into a slight smirk as he extended his hand.

"Dance with me, beautiful," he said, his voice low, "before this leg gives out on me."

I laughed, taking his hand, and he pulled me in close. His hand rested on the small of my back as we swayed together, his movements effortlessly smooth. I could feel the strength in his arms, the rhythm in his step, even as he moved carefully to avoid too much pressure on his injured leg.

"You got moves, Mr. Knight," I murmured, grinning up at him.

He chuckled, his voice a rumble against my ear. "When I got a woman like you in my arms, moves just come naturally." He spun me gently, then pulled me back into him, his hand sliding down my waist. I rested my head against his chest, closing my eyes for a moment, letting the music and his warmth carry me.

As we moved to the music, a thought slipped into my mind, and I decided to finally voice it. "So... I've been seeing this new client," I said softly, keeping my tone

casual. “She tells me a lot of stories about her ex-husband.”

Damier raised an eyebrow, looking down at me. “Oh yeah?” he asked, his voice nonchalant, but I caught a flicker of curiosity in his eyes.

“Yeah,” I continued, “and it’s strange. Some of her stories, her descriptions of him... they feel familiar. Like, eerily familiar.”

He tilted his head, his gaze sharpening just a bit. “How so?”

“Well,” I hesitated, choosing my words carefully. “For one, she describes him as a man with a dangerous edge but loyal to the core. First, she went on, telling stories about how he did crimes and then went back to her like nothing happened. Next, she goes on to say he wasn’t the type to cheat and loved a good woman by his side, you know? Like a real hopeless romantic.”

Damier nodded slowly, a subtle tension growing in his shoulders. “And?”

“And,” I went on, “there’s something else that’s... unique about her. It’s her eyes.” I met his gaze, watching for a reaction. “She has one green eye and one light brown eye. Striking, really.”

He stopped moving, his expression shifting as he took that in. “Her name?” he asked, his voice just above a whisper, but I could sense the edge in it.

“Jennifer,” I replied, keeping my gaze steady.

He stilled for a second, then chuckled lightly, his expression unreadable. “Oh, okay. Thought you were going to say, Carmen.”

I nodded, making a mental note to dig a little deeper with “Jennifer” the next time we

spoke. But I didn't push the subject with Damier. We were here to enjoy each other, to savor this escape.

He must have sensed the shift in my thoughts because he pulled me close again, his hand slipping under my chin to tilt my face up to his. "Don't overthink tonight, Dream," he murmured, his lips brushing against mine. "We'll handle everything waiting for us back home soon enough. But right now, I want you to myself."

I couldn't argue with that, not with the way his eyes held mine, steady and filled with something deeper than just affection. It was that loyalty, that fire, that connection I hadn't found in anyone else. I melted against him, letting him sway me through the rest of the song, my heart beating to the rhythm of his steps.

The night wound down, but we stayed in our little world, relishing every moment. By the time the yacht docked, my cheeks hurt from smiling, and I couldn't recall the last time I'd laughed so much. Being with him felt freeing in a way I'd never expected as if his world had somehow become mine, and I was content to let it.

When we got back to the resort, the night sky stretched wide and dark above us, the stars bright and the air warm. The door closed behind us, and without a word, we found each other's hands and guided one another toward the bedroom.

We didn't rush. Every touch, every whisper felt deliberate, each kiss a promise that, at least for tonight, we'd let everything else fade. His hands moved over my body, his touch grounding and igniting me all at once. He took his time, our bodies moving in sync, each moment deepening our connection until there was nothing but us.

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The gentle warmth of the Bahamas sun woke me, its early rays slipping through the balcony door. I blinked awake, reaching across the bed, only to find Damier's side

empty. Sitting up, I spotted him outside, his leg propped up and wrapped, a blunt between his fingers, and a glass of ice water on the table beside him. He looked deep in thought, his gaze fixed somewhere far beyond the calm, blue horizon.

Wrapping a robe around myself, I quietly padded over and slipped my arms around him from behind. He looked up, a small, sleepy smile crossing his face as he reached out to pull me onto his lap.

“Didn’t mean to wake you,” he murmured, setting his blunt aside and reaching for his glass of water.

“You didn’t,” I replied, pressing a soft kiss to his shoulder as I studied his profile. There was a heaviness in his expression that felt familiar but somehow different. “It seems like you’ve been out here for a while. What’s on your mind?”

He hesitated, exhaling slowly. “I guess I’ve just been thinking about us. What it means to bring you into my life. I know I’ve mentioned it before, but...” He paused, his gaze drifting back out to the sea, his expression turning serious. “I want you to understand that my life isn’t a fairytale. And if we’re going to keep going, I need to know you’re prepared.”

“I am,” I said, holding his gaze. “I’m not going anywhere, Damier.”

A faint smile tugged at his mouth, though the intensity in his eyes didn’t waver. “Then, you need to know that if you’re with me, there are things you might see. You’ll hear things that might make you question what kind of life this is. But I don’t ever want you to be afraid. If you see things that aren’t exactly... on the right side of the law, you need to know that it’s just how I have to handle things sometimes. It’s part of my world.”

He looked at me, waiting for my reaction. I took his hand, holding it tightly as I



nodded. “I trust you, Damier. I don’t need the details to know I’m not going to run the moment things get complicated. I stayed calm when your brother approached me. It scared me, but I didn’t show it.”

He squeezed my hand in return, a flicker of relief passing over his face. But as we sat there, I found myself thinking again about Jennifer and her strange sessions. Her stories had been haunting me since we last talked about them, and now, knowing what I knew, it was hard to keep them from bubbling up in my mind.

“You know... I keep thinking about that client I told you about,” I said slowly, breaking the silence. “The one who tells me stories about her ex that she calls ‘Franklin.’ She came back for another session, and I couldn’t help noticing that her stories feel closer to home than I’d like. She has this rare look with her eyes. I know I said this before, but it feels too similar to ignore.”

I looked over, gauging his reaction, and saw a knowing look cross his face. “Those eyes. They sound like my first ex-wife’s,” he said quietly. “She’s got the same eyes and a real specific way of making herself stand out with fashion.”

My heart raced at the confirmation, even though part of me had suspected as much. The thought that I’d been sitting across from his ex-wife, listening to stories about a man I now knew so intimately, sent a strange chill through me.

“So, if it is her,” I continued, “she’s been... careful about what she says. She never uses your name. She sticks to these vague details about ‘Franklin’ and says she’s running from her past of greed. It’s... unsettling, to say the least, especially when she said she stole from him.”

He nodded slowly, his gaze turning hard. “She isn’t supposed to be anywhere near anything that has to do with me. That was part of our arrangement. She’s had enough chances to move on and live her own life. I want you to find out if it’s her, and if it is,

shut her down. I don't want her planting things in your head. She claimed she loved my lifestyle but at the same time says it ruined her. She has bipolar depression, and she might be on drugs again. She is only still around because she isn't as bad as my second wife."

"Well, I got the impression that she is bipolar. She didn't add it to her paperwork," I replied, squeezing his hand reassuringly. "If she comes back to my office, I'll let you know, even though I'm not supposed to. It's clear she still has things she needs to work through."

He looked at me then, his eyes warm with a mixture of gratitude and something else—something softer, almost vulnerable. "Thank you, Dream, for sticking by me through all of this. It means more than you know."

We sat there for a while longer, the conversation lingering between us. The breeze was cool against my skin as I snuggled closer, content to be right where I was.

The rest of the week was just as perfect. We spent our days lounging on the beach, exploring hidden trails, and savoring the luxury and beauty of the Bahamas. It felt like a stolen chapter from someone else's story, a peaceful interlude before reality set in.

But, as all good things do, our time in paradise had to end. The moment we stepped off the plane back in LA, the weight of everything we'd left behind began to press down on us.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The Mexico heat had a way of creeping into your bones, making the hours stretch long and slow, like some sick countdown that I was the only one watching. I looked around the small beach house I'd rented for the night, its walls thin, the air thick with the smell of salt and tequila. It was a decent hideaway, but I wasn't here to relax. I was here to plot—had all the time in the world for that now.

I leaned back, lighting my blunt as I stared out over the empty coast. The beach stretched out in front of me, quiet and still, no one around for miles. That's how I needed it. Two days, then I was off to Canada where nobody, not even my shadow, would find me.

I pulled out my phone, checking for messages from the man I came to see in Mexico, then thought back to when I'd cornered Dream a few days ago. I chuckled to myself, remembering her nervous stare, that attempt to keep it cool. The things I could've said to her... The woman didn't strike me as much—ginger hair and all that softness didn't do it for me. Still, I'd fuck her just to get under Damier's skin. Wouldn't mind seeing him seethe again over a bitch. Hell, I'd do more than that if it meant watching his world crumble. My laugh was low and humorless. Dream would do whatever it took to protect him, and she'd learn that her loyalty to Damier would cost her in the end.

"Thinkin' about fuckin' little miss perfect, huh?" the voice said, that same familiar one, mocking me in my own damn head.

"That bitch ain't perfect," I muttered under my breath, running a hand over my head. "She's just in the right place, wrong time. But a little collateral damage never hurt anyone."

The voice laughed back, satisfied for now.

I turned my attention to the call I had to make. Kita's name popped up on my screen, and I pressed the button, glancing over my shoulder at the empty beach. I'd told her to wait for my instructions, and now, it was time.

She picked up on the first ring. "I was starting to think you forgot about me," she teased.

"Kita," I said, voice flat. "Listen. I need you to do something at that bitch nigga's club. Can you get in?"

There was a pause, her voice slightly hesitant. "I don't have access to it anymore since I left. But... I can call one of the girls. She'll do it for a few bills."

"Good," I replied, the wheels turning in my head. "I need some product planted behind the bar. Just enough to stir up some shit."

Another pause. She knew what this meant, but she played along. "Alright," she finally said, her tone shifting. "I'll handle it. But when can I see you?"

That question again. She wanted a little piece of me, wanted what I looked like more than who I was. I could sense it. "Soon," I muttered, cutting the conversation short. "Get it done, Kita. We'll talk later."

She sighed, sounding almost disappointed. "Fine. But when I call back, I need answers about us." She sounded like she had a point to prove, but I wasn't in the mood. I ended the call, chuckling to myself. She was useful, but I wasn't fool enough to get tangled up in whatever obsession she had with me just because I looked like Damier.

As I walked into the dimly lit back room of the bar, the familiar smell of smoke and whiskey hit me. I spotted Felix lounging against the bar, his expression a mix of surprise and curiosity as he caught sight of me.

“Damian? Is that really you?” Felix said, pushing himself off the bar with a grin. “Haven’t seen you in years. Thought you were the twin who stayed in the shadows?”

“Yeah, well, I took a little detour,” I replied, trying to keep it casual as I leaned against the bar beside him. “But I’m here now because there’s something you need to know.”

Felix raised an eyebrow, clearly intrigued. “Oh?”

I leaned in closer, lowering my voice as I spoke. “It’s about Damier. He’s got heat on him. That’s why I am out here.”

Felix straightened, the playful vibe shifting to one of caution. “Heat? What do you mean?”

“The pigs are watching him, Felix. He’s going to be on the run soon,” I said, letting my words hang in the air like smoke. “Thought you should know before you get dragged into whatever shit he’s in.”

His expression darkened as he processed this. “You think they’re tailing him?”

“Fuck think... I know,” I confirmed, letting a smirk play on my lips. “He’s been keeping it quiet, but the word is out. And about that warehouse...”

Felix leaned forward, his interest piqued. “What about the warehouse?”

“Got flocked,” I stated bluntly. “Somebody cleared that shit out. And if I remember

right, that was your product, too.”

The silence that followed was thick and heavy. I could see the gears turning in Felix’s mind, the realization settling in. “What the fuck? How did this happen? And why hasn’t he called me about it?”

“Don’t ask me how or why. Just know that it did, and you might want to reconsider your loyalty to him,” I suggested smoothly. “He’s slipping, and it’s only a matter of time before it all comes crashing down. He is nothing like the boss my father was. Damier is a coward.”

Felix crossed his arms, his demeanor shifting to one of suspicion. “Why are you telling me this, Damian? What’s your angle?”

“Simple,” I replied, holding his gaze. “Loyalty only goes so far when it’s not returned, and I figured you’d want to be on the right side of this when it blows up.”

Felix sighed, the tension in his shoulders easing slightly as he processed my words. “Good to know. What do you want in return for this?”

I shrugged nonchalantly. “I ain’t hurtin’ or nothin’, but just a little something for the info. Maybe a few stacks?”

He chuckled, shaking his head, then nudged his bodyguard, who was holding a duffle bag. He pulled out fresh stacks of American money and handed them to me. “Alright, alright. Here. Take a few grand for the trouble.”

I pocketed it with a satisfied grin. “Appreciate it, my guy. You know I’m always looking out for family.”

“Just remember who your real family is,” he warned, his tone turning serious. “Don’t

get lost in your own shit. You're a Knight, and you should know how your family is when you play with fire."

With a nod, I left the bar, the thrill of the game igniting my senses. I had what I needed to set my plan in motion.

As I drove back to the beach house, my phone buzzed. It was Kita, her message brief and to the point:

It's done. Now call me, nigga. I don't like how you play with my emotions.

A part of me wanted to celebrate, to drink to my success, but there was more to come, more pieces to move before my brother felt the full weight of my revenge.

I hit her number, and the sound of her voice was smooth and eager as she answered. "Hey, it's all taken care of. So... now, can you tell me when I can be with you? I'll go wherever you go and won't say a word."

She was persistent. I felt a mix of irritation, and I had to tell her something that left me on edge. "I told yo' ass soon, Kita. Don't get on a nigga's bad side. But let's keep it a stack. You're not interested in me—you're interested in the fact that I look like that bitch ass nigga. You was all on TV with him just a few months ago, in love and fighting over him. You are obsessed with my twin."

Her tone shifted, defensive. "That's not true, Damian. I like you for you, and the show was to just win money. Damier's got nothing to do with this."

I scoffed, shaking my head. "Yeah, a'ight. Keep telling yourself that." I ended the call. No need to linger. She'd done what I needed. That was all that mattered.

Finally, with everything in place, I made the call I'd been waiting to make—a direct

line to a detective who had been dying to catch my family slipping. I disguised my voice, the words slipping out in a calculated whisper, planting the idea like poison.

“They’re hiding dope at his club. The Knight Family pays your crooked officers and city managers to stay quiet, right? But how long can you keep looking the other way?”

The line went silent before the detective spoke up. “Consider it handled.”

With that, I hung up, my work for the night complete. Tomorrow, the storm I’d set in motion would reach Damier, and he’d know exactly who was behind it. My private flight to Canada was waiting, and as I boarded, I felt a dark satisfaction settle over me. Soon enough, Damier would pay—he’d pay for everything.



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*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The night was thick and quiet, the kind that hung like a wet sheet over the city. It was pitch black behind Troy's grandmother's house, and the three idiots from the robbery were lined up and blindfolded, shivering in their last moments.

"Y'all are an example the city will never forget," I muttered to them as I paced slowly.

Hocus and King stood watch, shadows against the trees, while I savored this moment of silence before the storm I was about to unleash.

The boys were too scared to speak, especially with ropes around their necks. I wasn't in the habit of making excuses for what I had to do. This was about sending a message to Troy: his life was over, too—he just didn't know when or how it would end. That was the joy of how I moved. You never knew how or when I was coming.

One by one, Hocus, King, and I hung them.

I left them there, hanging from the makeshift gallows I'd set up in the backyard. When we got to the front of the house, with a cold spray can, I marked the family's Knight symbol on the grandmother's house. Nobody outside the family really knew what the mark was, and I intended to keep it that way. This was just between us, between my family and Troy's. A reminder that I was coming for him next, and he better be ready.

As I climbed back into the black, unmarked Cadillac truck with King behind the wheel and Hocus riding shotgun, a nagging thought hit me. I glanced down at my hands, faintly stained with blood and dirt, and something shifted in my gut. I'd

always loved getting my hands dirty and always felt more supported when I did things myself, but a part of me was starting to wonder if this was worth it. I didn't need to be out here, taking risks like this. I had a crew for that. I could've sent any of my men, but I'd shown up tonight because I trusted myself not to mess it up. No loose ends, no one to turn around and snitch.

As I leaned back, my phone rang, snapping me out of my thoughts. It was Mia.

"Damier," she said, her voice tight. "You need to get to the club. Now."

"What happened?"

"They're raiding it. Detective Ellis' bitch ass is here with a search warrant. They're saying they got a tip-off about drugs in the club."

I could feel my blood pressure spike. "Drugs?" I ground out. "Since when do I keep drugs in the club? They know that's not my style."

Mia's voice wavered. "I told them that. They're not listening. They're waiting on you to get here, but they're all over the place, tearing it apart."

"I'll be there in ten," I replied, ending the call.

As we pulled up, the blue and red lights from cop cars lit up the block. They were everywhere, swarming my club. Ellis stood out in the middle of the chaos, his smug face watching as I got out of the truck. I told King and Hocus to drive off, not wanting them in the mess. I held back the rage simmering inside and made my way through the crowd, walking up to him with the confidence I was known for.

"Detective Ellis," I said, keeping my voice cold and steady. "You better have a fuckin' good reason for this raid."

Ellis folded his arms, his face smug. “We got a tip-off, Mr. Knight. Word is, there are drugs in your establishment.”

“You know I keep my business clean. No drugs in the club,” I replied, my voice laced with disdain.

“We’ll see about that.” Ellis smirked. “Now, get in there and open your office.”

I frowned and headed inside the club.

When we got into my office, he already knew where my safe was, hidden behind a family portrait on the wall.

“Unlock the safe,” he demanded.

I unlocked it, keeping my expression cool as I swung it open. Inside, almost two million in old cash, registered guns, and piles of cold diamonds lay in pristine order. Everything was legit, and they knew it. We had been here before, and nothing had changed.

“Satisfied?” I spat, daring them to find something incriminating.

Ellis was about to say something when another officer walked in, holding up two kilos of pure cocaine.

“Well, well, well, looks like your clean image just took a hit,” Ellis drawled, eyes glinting with triumph.

My fists clenched. I knew the game they were playing. “That’s not mine, and you know it. You planted that shit,” I hissed, my voice laced with venom.

He shrugged, a smile playing on his lips. “That’s for the courts to decide. But I think you know what this means.” He looked around my club. “We’re shutting you down. Be glad we ain’t locking your ass up for this.”

“Yeah, because you know the deal. You are on my payroll.”

I wanted to lunge at him, to rip that smug look off his face, but I held back, knowing that was exactly what he wanted. Instead, I frowned, watching as he and his men paraded around, making sure everyone saw the spectacle. I couldn’t stand it anymore, so I got in my Ferrari and left. Mia and my crew would lock up for me.

The drive away from my club felt endless, and my mind raced as I tried to piece together who could’ve set this up. Damian’s face flashed in my mind, and a fresh wave of rage swept over me.

I pulled up to Dream’s place at around four in the morning, barely aware of the time.

I rang her bell a few times before she came to the door. When she opened it, sleep still lingering in her eyes, I forced myself to calm down, to keep the rage buried under a smooth exterior. “I’m sorry to wake you,” I muttered as I stepped inside. “I just didn’t want to go to my crib.”

She wrapped her arms around me, her warmth grounding me for a moment. “It’s okay. What happened?”

“They raided my club,” I said, my voice tight. “Shut me down because of some drugs they planted. I never keep anything in there. Never.”

She led me to the couch, her gentle touch soothing the edges of my anger. I didn’t mention what I’d done in Troy’s grandmother’s backyard. Some things, she didn’t need to know.

She listened to me until her eyes got tired, and then we went to her room. I took a long, hot shower and then got in bed with her. She was already asleep by the time I got out. I held her close until the sun came up, finally feeling at ease for a second.

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I watched Dream get ready for work, admiring the way she moved, so graceful and composed. She was a reminder of what peace felt like, of what I wanted beyond the blood and chaos.

“You okay?” she asked, catching me watching her in the mirror as she put on her diamond necklace.

“Yeah, especially after that good pussy you just gave me,” I replied, trying to push down the storm brewing inside. “But it’s been a week since we’ve been back, though. Just feels like everything’s spiraling already.”

She walked over to me, placing a hand on my cheek. “I’m here for you. Whatever you need.”

I pulled her close, inhaling the familiar scent of her Chanel perfume, grounding myself in her presence. “I’ll be alright,” I assured her, giving her a soft kiss on the forehead. “Let’s get you some breakfast before work. I’ll drive you around since I’ll be out of the office today.”

We headed to a cozy breakfast spot near her job, the morning air crisp and cool at nine in the morning. I did my best to keep my mind on Dream, on the lightness she brought to my life, but the call I received shortly after rattled me.

It was my lawyer, Melissa. “Damier, I just got word that the city is after your liquor license. They’re planning to shut you down permanently.”

My jaw tightened. “What about the deal I have with the city manager?”

“They’re saying you violated it with the drugs they found, and the raid made the news.”

“Tell him to remember the favors I’ve done for him. Remind him what happens when loyalty runs thin. I’ll expose him,” I snapped before ending the call.

“Everything alright?” Dream asked, picking up on my frustration.

I forced a smile. “Just business. Nothing for you to worry about.”

When I dropped her off at work, I lingered, watching her disappear into the building. I’d gotten used to waking up beside her, used to her calm grounding me in ways I hadn’t expected. But I knew I couldn’t keep dragging her into this storm. Not unless she was ready for it.

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My mother called me, so I pulled up to her estate, the massive gates opening as I drove up the winding path. Inside, she was waiting for me, and I wasted no time laying everything out for her.

“They raided my club, tried to shut me down, and now they’re going after my liquor license. Someone’s feeding them lies, and I have a good guess who,” I said, my voice laced with anger.

She listened, her face impassive as always, but I could see the fire in her eyes. “Damian, huh?” she asked, her voice calm but knowing.

I nodded. “I need your help to shut him down. He’s getting too close, and he’s

starting to mess with everything I've built."

She placed a hand on my shoulder. "We'll handle this. He's playing with fire, and it's time he learned that this family doesn't tolerate betrayal, but I have to talk to you about Felix."

"What about him?" I started pacing, something I did when my mind moved too fast.

"He called me," she began, her tone even but firm. She kept her gaze steady, piercing through me. "He told me Damian paid him a visit in Mexico, then fled. Told him about the robbery and said the police were following you. He said he'd rather speak to me first because he trusts me, but he wants to have a meeting with you. Decades of loyalty to our family are hard to shake." She paused, and I could feel the weight of that loyalty. It was like a thread running through generations. And now Damian had stretched it to its breaking point.

My hands clenched as I looked at her.

"I was handling it, Ma," I replied, my voice tense. "I was going to replace everything that was stolen, and the police are not after me. I didn't see a need to pull Felix into the bullshit your son made. I know he had everything to do with it. Bet he ain't tell Felix that."

She didn't respond right away, her fingers tapping on the polished wood of her desk. "Of course, he didn't tell him that. But, replacing it without telling him, son?" she asked, her voice a mix of frustration and disappointment. "It's one thing to replace product, but Felix needs to know that his trust in us hasn't been betrayed. We can't afford that type of doubt creeping in. On top of Felix, now I have to go talk to the cops and the city manager to get your club back open. Did you check the tapes?"

I ran a hand over my face, exhaling slowly, feeling the weight of her words. "You're

right, Ma, and no, I haven't. I've been detached from what happened," I conceded, trying to temper my own anger. "But with Damian out of sight, I couldn't waste time explaining to Felix. I thought I'd handle it fast enough. Damian's been a thorn in my side for too long."

She nodded, her gaze softening a bit, but her voice was as sharp as ever. "You have always protected him. Shielded him, covered for him?"

"You have too, even after you gave me the okay to take him out," I interrupted, my voice rougher than intended. "But that loyalty's dead. I should have dealt with him the moment he became a threat to everything I've built."

"And now?" Her voice was softer, almost understanding.

I straightened, a fire igniting inside me. "Now, I'm done sparing him. He's hidden before, always under a fake name, thinking I'd never go after him. But I'll find him this time, Ma. Even if it means tracking down every alias, every last corner of the earth he hides in, I'll do it."

She looked at me, the hint of a smile on her lips, like she was proud of me but saddened by what it had come to. "Good," she said simply. "Then, let's finish this. But I have to warn you, he's hiding out of the country. All his lines are disconnected, and some girl was staying at his condo when I went by."

"Yeah, same when I looked for him. I shook that bitch up, but she claims she knows nothing. I'm going to get back with Lil Ken to see how we can track him."

"Well, Felix is about to call you. We can't afford to beef with him right now, so I texted him to call you now."

I was sitting at the edge of my mother's desk, the tension in the air so thick I could



practically taste it. My mind was already racing, trying to sort through the mess Damian had just made. I could feel my jaw tightening with each passing second.

My phone buzzed, interrupting the silence. It was Felix. I stared at the name for a moment before answering, trying to steady my breathing.

“Felix,” I greeted, keeping my voice calm, even though I could already feel my blood simmering. “What’s going on?”

Felix’s smooth voice came through the line, tinged with his signature Spanish accent that always made him sound like he was speaking from a higher ground. “Ah, Damier,” he said, his tone like syrup, smooth but cutting. “I hear there’s been some trouble with the law. A little robbery at the warehouse, maybe? But it’s funny—no one mentioned anything about it to me. Your family’s been handling it, sí? And now I hear from your twin that things aren’t as clear as you’d like them to be.”

My teeth ground together. “Felix, what the hell are you talking about? Damian is sick,” I snapped, but my voice was tight with the effort to hold back my rage. I didn’t like being checked, and Felix knew it. The bastard was testing me, and I could feel my patience wearing thin. “I don’t have time for this. You are sitting with the enemy, letting him feed you lies. Damian’s been spewing lies about my business, trying to set me up. I didn’t want to involve you in this shit, but I get it now. You want answers, right?”

His chuckle on the other end of the phone was maddening, like he enjoyed pushing my buttons. “Ah, yes, Damier. You always do things your way. But this is big, my friend. The policia, product missing... and now I know your brother is in the middle of it.” He paused for a beat, and I could hear the amusement in his voice. “But you, Damier, you have to be careful. You think you can handle it alone?”

I clenched my fists, grinding my teeth so hard it hurt. “Listen to me, Felix,” I warned,

my voice dropping low, the anger bubbling under the surface. “I’m handling this. I know what I’m doing. What happened wasn’t intended to hurt the empire. It’s bigger than that.” I tried to keep my voice steady, though the frustration was seeping through. “But I didn’t think it was necessary to bring you into this right now. My focus has been on fixing the damage.”

Felix’s voice was a mixture of casual amusement and something colder now. “Ah, I see. You think you can handle it all by yourself?” he asked. “But you forget, Damier, loyalty is a two-way street. We built this together, and I don’t like being left in the dark. Your problems are mine, no? I’ve stuck by you and your family for decades. And now you think you can brush me off?” He sighed?a mockingly thoughtful pause. “You have to see, amigo, that’s not how this works. You and me—we need to talk. So how about this: you make a little time, and you come see me in Mexico. This thing doesn’t go away without us handling it together. And, Damier,” he added with a quiet, almost playful menace, “the sooner, the better.”

I stared at the phone, my hands tightening into fists as my blood boiled. This was a damn test. He knew damn well I didn’t like being challenged. But I had to swallow it down. I respected Felix; he had earned his position. That loyalty was too important to ignore, no matter how much I hated feeling like I was being cornered.

“You’re right, Felix,” I finally said, my voice barely concealing the edge in it. “I’ll get on a plane. I’ll be there within the week. Let’s talk more when I get there.”

Felix’s laughter came through the line, smooth and knowing. “Not a week, Damier. Sooner than that. I don’t want to wait around while your empire crumbles. Make it two days , sí?”

Before I could respond, he hung up, the call ending with a finality that left me standing there, seething. My fingers tightened around the phone, the anger in my chest threatening to spill over. But I knew I had to play this right. Felix was right

about one thing—loyalty mattered. I had to deal with this, even if it meant swallowing my pride.

I took a deep breath, turning back to my mother, who had been watching me carefully.

“You’ll meet him, right?” she asked, her voice quieter now but her gaze sharp.

I nodded, grinding my teeth. “Yeah. I’ll meet him. But when I get back, this shit with Damian... it’s over. One way or another.”

My mother didn’t say anything more. She didn’t need to. The weight of what was coming hung heavy in the room.

Leaving her estate, a new sense of resolve hit me, hot and in control. I wasn’t going to keep playing this cat-and-mouse game with Damian. He’d crossed too many lines, and now he was going to learn that nobody escaped the consequences of betraying the family. But first, I had to go meet Felix. Mexico wasn’t in my plans, and I hated traveling there, but the streets were calling yet again.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The sight in my grandmother's backyard was something out of a nightmare, and as I sat next to her on the couch, I could tell by the trembling in her hands as she clutched her rosary beads that she was feeling the same horror. Her vacation from Hawaii had ended in a way none of us had prepared for, and I couldn't bring myself to meet her eyes. The scene I'd witnessed was too gruesome, too unimaginable.

Three of Troy's closest friends were strung up, blindfolded, their bodies still. The grass beneath them was stained red. But that wasn't what held my gaze. It was the symbol spray-painted on the wall of her house. Bold, dark, and unmistakable.

I'd seen it before, etched permanently into both Damier and Damian's skin. I felt a cold wave of realization, the memory flooding back. It was their family's mark. A signature they left when they wanted to make it clear that crossing them had consequences. And Damier hadn't left it just anywhere—he'd marked my grandmother's house, our family's sanctuary.

I left my grandmother inside and went to find Troy. He was pacing the backyard, and the police hadn't even come yet. His face twisted in rage, fear simmering underneath. It had been an hour, and we couldn't believe nobody had seen or heard anything while my grandmother had been gone for two days.

He turned to me, and I pulled him aside, my voice barely a whisper. "Troy... that symbol," I said, pointing at the wall. "It's the Knight family's mark. Damier and Damian both have it tattooed on their face. This... this is a message."

He scowled, looking from me to the symbol. "What are you talking about?"

“Damier did this, and you know it,” I whispered, feeling a chill run down my spine. “This is what he does. That mark—it’s his way of telling you that you’re next, and if he finds out I was involved, I am too. You and Damian were supposed to handle him. What happened?”

Troy’s face contorted with anger and a hint of fear, but he tried to mask it. “Nothing happened, and I am going to handle him. I don’t need Damian’s bitch ass. He is running anyway.”

“Troy, listen to me,” I pleaded, grabbing his arm. “This isn’t just some empty threat. Damier doesn’t play. He’ll come for you for real. This was only the beginning.”

For a moment, he seemed to take in my words, but then his face hardened again. “No. He doesn’t get to do this to us, to G-ma. I’m not going to just sit back and do nothing.”

Fear tightened in my chest. I could feel the danger surrounding us closing in, and Troy’s stubbornness was going to make things worse. “You can’t go up against him now that he knows it’s you behind some of this. You don’t know him like I do, Troy. He’ll destroy everything, and he won’t think twice about it.”

Troy didn’t answer me. Instead, he stared at the bodies of his friends that he had to cut down with his friend North, rage smoldering in his eyes. “He’s going to regret this.”

That was the last thing I wanted to hear. Damier wasn’t just anyone. He was a man who lived for power, a man who didn’t leave loose ends. And if Troy tried to retaliate, he’d only end up making things worse.

The fear I’d been trying to keep buried began to bubble up. I couldn’t shake the memory of Damier finding me at Damian’s apartment after he fled, the cold look in

his eyes as he demanded to know where Damian had gone. He'd grabbed me, rough and unyielding, and for the first time, I realized just how ruthless he could be. I'd been scared then, and now, seeing what he'd done here, I was terrified. I was angry at first, and I wanted my revenge, but we were exposed, so things had to change.

As I left Troy at Grandma's house, I felt panic beginning to claw at my insides. He was going to get himself killed if he didn't stop. And Damier... he'd find out soon enough that Troy was my brother. He already knew I'd been involved with Damian, but if he pieced everything together. If he knew just how deep I was in this, I didn't know what he'd do to me.

I got into my car, my hands shaking as I gripped the steering wheel.

The sickening feeling in my stomach wouldn't go away as I drove away from my grandmother's house. My body was tense as I fought to hold it together. I tried to shove the images out of my head, but they kept coming back. The horror, the cold realization that I was wrapped up in this. My fingers trembled as I sat at a red light. I held my phone, my mind still reeling from the scene and the fact that Troy had pushed us this far. We were already too deep. I couldn't escape it now.

The vibrating of my phone broke me from my spiral, and I almost jumped out of my skin. I glanced at the screen—an unknown number. My heart skipped a beat. I didn't need to check the number to know who it was. It was Damian. Thank God.

I swallowed hard, anxiety swirling in my chest. My breath quickened as I pressed the phone to my ear, trying to steady myself.

“Hello?” I said, my voice shaky despite my best effort to sound calm.

Damian's voice came through the phone, calm and collected like nothing had happened. “Kita.”

I could barely breathe. “Damian...” I started, but my voice cracked. “I-I’m scared. You need to know what happened, and you need to come get me. What Damier did... it was worse than we thought. Your brother killed all my brother’s friends—he left your family’s mark on my grandmother’s wall.... It’s a message, Damian. He knows I have been with you... I think he knows that I’m involved with you and Troy. He is going to kill Troy and probably me too.”

There was silence on the other end, too long, too heavy. The air felt thick, and my chest tightened. I waited, but nothing came. No words, no threats. Just silence.

“Hello?” I screamed into the phone, panic setting in.

Finally, he spoke, his voice still calm, as though everything was under control. “Don’t trip, Kita. I got you. I got you a first-class ticket to Toronto. It leaves in a few hours.”

I blinked in shock, my mind not registering the words at first.

“What? Canada? That’s where you at?”

“You’re going. Pack for a few months. And when you get on that plane, you won’t have to worry about shit,” Damian said, his voice unwavering.

The panic inside me froze for a second. “But... what about Damier? What about the bullshit he’s caused?”

Damian’s tone remained unchanged as if he didn’t care for the details. “You won’t have to deal with that nigga. Just pack. You’re leaving, and he can’t find you.”

I felt a wave of relief wash over me. As much as I didn’t want to leave everything behind— everyone —Damian’s words were a lifeline. I didn’t have a choice. I

realized that leaving would give me some time to figure things out. To breathe.

“Okay,” I whispered, barely able to believe what was happening.

“Good,” Damian responded. “Pack your shit, and don’t look back.”

I rushed home as quickly as I could, my hands shaking as I packed what I could. I threw a few clothes into a suitcase, moving in a daze. Part of me wanted to leave it all behind—the drama, the people, the broken promises—but the other part was terrified of what would happen if I just left. Damian was dangerous, and I knew if I stayed, I’d end up getting pulled deeper into it. This was my only escape.

I threw a few toiletries into my bag, zipped it up quickly, and looked around. This was it. I wasn’t coming back.



*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

I sat in the back of the blacked-out Maybach, the leather seats cold beneath me as I waited. My wrist was heavy with the weight of my Rolex, its smooth face gleaming under the dim lighting in the car. I glanced at it again, just to check the time. She was late, as usual. But I wasn't in a rush. I liked this. The anticipation.

The low hum of the engine filled the silence, but it wasn't enough to drown out the noise in my head. The constant, gnawing chatter that never stopped. I hated it. I hated how it made me feel like I was losing control and slipping into something darker. But I had been dealing with it. I hadn't made any moves on my brother, even though every part of me wanted to.

I had only been taking one of my medications lately. The doctors had prescribed them to me, but they didn't really work like they said they would. The noise in my head stopped for a little while when I took them, but they made me feel... numb. Idling. Stagnant. Like I wasn't really me. Still, it was better than the constant whispers, the urges, the rage bubbling under the surface. Sometimes, I needed the quiet.

I hated the meds, but sometimes, I needed them.

I snapped out of my thoughts when I saw her. Kita. She was walking across the tarmac, her heels clicking with each step, heading toward the black SUV I had sent for her.

Damn. I didn't realize how much I missed the way she moved—how much I liked her. She was a little bit of everything, sharp yet soft, fiery but smooth. I liked that about her. That's why I finally sent for her.

Not just because I wanted to fuck her. No, it was more than that. She had something. I had been keeping my distance, playing it cool, but the need for her was becoming undeniable.

I looked out the window and watched her approach. Damn, she was looking good, though. She had put on a little weight, but she was still thick, still damn fine. As she neared the car, I leaned back in my seat, trying to push the unwanted thoughts from my mind.

She finally reached the door, and when I opened it for her, Kita jumped into my arms, her perfume hitting me before her body did.

“Damn, girl, you’re gaining weight,” I said, my tone playful but real.

She smirked, her eyes lighting up. “Yeah, I am,” she said, grinning at me. “I’m pregnant... and it’s yours.”

I froze. The words hit me like a bucket of ice water, the words slicing through my thoughts as my brain scrambled to process them.

“What?” I asked, my voice low, tight.

She smiled, but it wasn’t just any smile. It was that smile. The one she always wore when she knew she had me. It didn’t help that she had this glow about her now, something I didn’t expect but something that made me feel... unsettled.

“I’m pregnant, Damian. It’s yours,” she repeated, a little quieter this time, her smile lingering but uncertain.

I didn’t say anything for a few seconds. I just stared at her, taking in the curve of her belly that I hadn’t noticed until she’d mentioned it. Something inside me

shifted—something jagged. But I didn't know how to handle it.

I finally shook my head. "Let's go," I said to the driver, my tone flat because, honestly, I didn't know what else to say. My thoughts were all over the place.

We arrived at my high rise in downtown Toronto. The city stretched out beneath us, its skyline like a jagged silhouette against the night sky. We stepped into my condo, and as soon as the door clicked shut behind us, I felt it. That pressure. The suffocating need to act .

I turned to Kita, my fingers started twitching, and I suddenly slapped her. I hit her so hard her back cracked against the wall.

"Why the fuck didn't you get an abortion?" I snapped, the words ripping out of me before I could stop them.

Her eyes widened as she held her face, her voice trembling. "I didn't know what to do! You hadn't called me, and I was scared to get an abortion. I thought... I thought you'd be happy and mad at me if I aborted it."

I could hear the hurt in her voice, but all I could feel was the chaos inside me. I had been careful with my words until now, but the truth was, I didn't know what to think. I didn't know how to handle this— her —and certainly not a baby.

"I don't have a choice now," I said, my voice cold.

She looked at me, her expression pleading. "I'm sorry, Damian. I should've known, but I really thought you would be happy. I thought this would bring us closer."

Her words hit me, but they didn't sink in the way I thought they would. Maybe because I wasn't happy. Maybe because I wasn't sure I could be happy with a baby.

Or with her.

I ran a hand over my head, frustration mounting. But then something changed inside me. My mood shifted from anger to something lighter.

I stepped toward her, my attitude changing as quickly as it had flared up. “I’m sorry,” I muttered, pulling her to me. “I didn’t mean that. It’s just... a lot hearing that you are pregnant. I don’t even know if it’s mine for real.”

She looked up at me, her eyes searching mine. “It is yours, Damian,” she whispered again, and I could hear the confusion in her voice. “I haven’t been fucking anyone since you left me. Something told me you would want this.”

I didn’t know what I wanted. But I did know one thing—I wanted her close. I wanted to forget about everything that just happened. I shouldn’t have hit her, and she was pregnant with my baby.

We stood there for a while, her warmth against me as the tension between us slowly faded.

“I’m sorry,” I said again, my voice quieter now. “We’ll figure this shit out. But tonight, I just want to be under you.”

She nodded, her body relaxing into mine. I couldn’t believe I was having a kid. That made me lowkey want to clean up my mental health and get back good with my family, but I didn’t know how.

When we got to the living room, I was all over her. Kissing her neck and trying to slide down her leggings. She giggled as she wrapped her arms around my neck.

“Take all this shit off. You know what I need,” I uttered in her ear, and she got in the

position I liked. She slid out of all her clothes and stood in front of me. I rubbed her belly as I kissed her.

“If this baby is mine, it won’t want for shit, I promise you that.”

“It’s yours, and I believe you,” she cooed softly.

She arched over the couch, and I let my jeans and boxers fall to the floor. I played with her middle and ate her pretty ass good from the back. She was moaning, and she nutted like she hadn’t been fucked, making me believe she really had been celibate. I finally stood up and slid inside her. She moaned at the initial slide-in, and then I started stroking her slowly. As I fucked Kita, a nigga felt something. Was it love, or was it hate? I didn’t know, but either way, it felt good. It felt right...

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The walls of my apartment seemed to close in around me as I paced, my fists clenching and unclenching with each step. My mind was spinning with thoughts of revenge. Damier had crossed the line this time, and I couldn't let it slide. My friends—my own damn crew—had been strung up in my grandmother's backyard like animals, their bodies lifeless, their blood staining the rose bushes she loved. I couldn't stop seeing their faces, their bodies, the horror etched in every detail of that moment.

That was Damier's doing. He'd taken them out, made them an example, just to send me a message. A message I wasn't ready to receive.

Damian, the bitch ass nigga, had left me to rot after he took everything. The money, the plan, everything. I did all the work, and that mark ass nigga took the reward and fled, leaving me and my boys with the bill. Not a fucking dime. I should've known better than to trust him, but I did. Now, I was on my own. And it was personal.

The plan had already started to form in my mind. I wasn't going to sit back and wait. Damier was going to pay for what he did to me, to my crew, and to my family. I didn't care what it cost. This was no longer just about money; this was about respect. And Damier had taken that from me in front of my own family.

As I was lost in my thoughts, planning the next move, there was a knock at the door. It was hesitant, almost as if whoever was outside knew they were walking into something dangerous. I swung the door open, and there she was—my girlfriend Marlow. Her face was a mix of concern and exhaustion, and I could tell she had been pacing just like me.

She stepped inside without waiting for me to invite her. “Troy,” she said, her voice soft but urgent. “You need to let this shit go. Damian’s gone, and Damier is going to kill you if you keep pushing him.”

I slammed the door behind her, not even bothering to hide my frustration. “Let it go? After what he did to my crew? After he humiliated us in front of my own family?” I turned away from her, shaking my head. “I can’t back down, Marlow. I won’t.”

“Troy, you’re risking everything,” she pleaded, taking a step closer to me. “Think about your grandma. Think about me! Damier already gave you a warning. He’s not playing around.”

I clenched my fists tighter, my anger rising. “You don’t get it, Marlow. You weren’t there. You didn’t see what I saw. I can’t just walk away. I won’t let Damier think he can do this to me, to us.”

I grabbed my jacket off the back of the chair and made my way to the door, hoping that if I just left, I could shake the thoughts out of my head. But she wasn’t having it. Her voice followed me, pleading, desperate. “Damian already left you hanging. Can’t you see he doesn’t care about what happens to you? You’re on your own, Troy. Don’t do this. Please.”

I stopped in my tracks, her words hitting harder than I wanted them to. But my pride wouldn’t let me show it. “Shut the fuck up, Marlow,” I snapped, spinning around and shoving her out of my way. “I don’t need Damian. I don’t need nobody. I’m handling this. Alone if I have to.”

Marlow flinched, her eyes filled with hurt, but I couldn’t back down now. I had already made up my mind. This wasn’t about her or anyone else. This was about me, my respect, and how far I’d let this shit go before I took it all back. I needed to make Damier feel the heat. I needed him to know what it felt like to lose control.

Marlow stepped back, tears brimming in her eyes. I didn't care. She was just another distraction, another piece of the puzzle I couldn't afford to lose myself in. "You're wrong, Troy," she whispered before turning to leave. "But I'm scared for you."

I didn't respond. I couldn't. I had already made my decision. Nothing would stop me now.

I didn't waste any time. As soon as Marlow was gone, I met up with Danni, one of my last loyal soldiers. His face was flushed red, a mix of fear and determination in his eyes. He glanced around nervously as if expecting Damier's men to jump out of the shadows at any moment.

"You sure about this, my nigga?" Danni asked, his voice low, cautious. "Shit's getting too hot. I ain't heard from North since this morning, either, and he was supposed to be here."

I looked at him, annoyance flashing in my eyes. "North is probably hiding, too scared to show his face. We're not gonna be like him, a'ight?" I spat, my anger bubbling up. "If we want Damier to feel the heat, we have to hit him where it hurts. We're going after his family and his club. You with me or not? You sounding like all these other niggas that left me hanging."

Danni nodded, determination hardening his jaw. "I'm with you, my nigga. Whatever it takes. But I feel like we need to lay low and watch this nigga. We can't afford to make emotional moves."

I glared at Danni and chuckled. I pulled the blunt I had out my ear and lit it. The weight people were putting on me to stand down was killing me.

"A'ight... We don't move tonight, and only because of the women. But this ain't over. Even if I gotta do the shit by myself."



I drove through the city of LA, mad, grieving, and ready for war. But since the closest people wanted me to lay low, I would. For now...

## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

I was in the bathroom at six in the morning, head over the toilet, my stomach churning while the pregnancy test lay on the counter next to me. Two days of constant nausea and zero appetite had me in a spiral. I had been on birth control for as long as I could remember and hadn't had a period in ages, and yet... here I was. Either I was sick, or my heavy wine intake was finally catching up with me.

"Mani, you good in there?" I heard Damier's voice outside the door, low and concerned.

"Yes, just give me a minute," I called back, my voice weaker than I intended.

I needed to get myself together before he realized something was up. But just as I reached for the box on the counter, the door opened, and he stepped in.

His gaze dropped to the box before I could grab it. "What's this?"

I froze, unable to meet his eyes. "It's a test... a pregnancy test," I managed to whisper, feeling my face heat up. "I... I didn't want you to find out. I was hoping it was just a stomach virus, or maybe I need to cut back on the wine." The words tumbled out in a rush as I tried to keep myself from unraveling.

Damier looked at me, his expression unreadable, and I couldn't hold back anymore. "I didn't want this to mess up what we're building, and I definitely didn't want you to think I was trying to trap you," I said, my voice breaking. "If it's positive, I'll get an abortion, and we can move forward without any of this?—"

He put his hand up, stopping me. "Dream," he said firmly, "you don't need to explain

yourself like that. I know you're not trapping me, and a pregnancy wouldn't mess us up." He sighed, his fingers brushing my cheek. "We agreed that we didn't want kids, yeah, but let's just see what it says before we jump to any conclusions."

I nodded, feeling a wave of relief that he understood. I picked up the test, hands trembling, and took a deep breath before going through with it. Meanwhile, Damier stepped into the shower, giving me a moment to breathe.

When the results came up, my heart hammered as I read the test. Negative . I exhaled, almost collapsing from relief. It was just a scare.

After he got out, I showed him the result, and he looked as relieved as I felt. "Guess we're safe for now," he murmured with a smirk, pulling me into his arms. I made a mental note to follow up with my doctor to be sure, but for now, the tension had lifted.

With that behind us, we moved into our morning. Damier offered to drive me to work, and I gratefully accepted. On our way, he seemed unusually relaxed. "You know," he said, glancing at me, "I kind of like this routine—taking you to work. Keeps me grounded in the real world."

I smiled, taking his hand. "It feels normal, doesn't it?"

We pulled up to my office, and he kissed me goodbye. "I'll pick you up for dinner," he said with a wink, making me feel like I was floating as I walked inside.

Later, as I settled into my office, my third client of the day appeared on my schedule: Jennifer. I knew who she really was—Carmen, Damier's ex-wife—and the thought of our session had me on edge. I immediately texted Damier about her, and I could tell he wasn't pleased from his response.

Let me know if it is really her. She is going to wish she stayed in New York like our agreement stated.

As Carmen walked into my office under the alias Jennifer Dolphin, the strange satisfaction I once felt in being her therapist began to dissolve. I'd pieced together the threads of her stories long before she'd likely realized. Today, I had a feeling our session would be different.

"Good morning, Jennifer." I greeted her with a steady voice, gesturing for her to take a seat.

"Good morning, Dr. Jaxton," she replied, her smile faintly amused, as if she was in on a private joke. She looked immaculate, every bit as poised as she had in previous sessions. But her unique features—the striking combination of one green eye and one light brown eye—felt like a taunt.

She sat across from me, crossing her legs elegantly, but something about her demeanor was different today, less guarded, more... calculated.

"You know, Dr. Jaxton, I thought it was finally time for me to let go and move on." She offered me a small smile, tilting her head. "Especially since my ex is moving on yet again."

I held her gaze, feeling my own confidence rising. This game of hers had gone on long enough.

"Carmen," I said, letting her real name hang between us. Her smile faltered for a split second, but she quickly regained her composure.

"Oh, my. You called me Carmen," she coolly replied.

“You can drop the act,” I said, leaning forward. “I know that Franklin—the rich, dangerous ex-husband you’ve been talking about—is actually Damier. And I know that Jennifer Dolphin doesn’t exist.”

A slight tension tightened her face, but she didn’t react the way I thought she might. Instead, she simply let out a soft laugh. “Well, I didn’t think you’d figure it out quite so quickly. But I suppose I underestimated you.”

“So, you came to me under false pretenses,” I continued, keeping my tone firm. “Pretending to be a patient, just so you could... what, Carmen? Keep tabs on Damier? See what he’s doing in his life?”

She crossed her arms, her face now void of any pretense of friendliness. “I was curious, yes,” she admitted. “Is that such a crime? To want to know what the man you were once married to is up to?”

“It is when you lie about who you are and manipulate your way into my office. You and Damier have a strict relationship right now. You’re not supposed to be here.” I kept my tone calm, refusing to give her any reaction that might satisfy her.

She let out a sigh, almost as if she were disappointed. “You’re making this more dramatic than it needs to be, Dr. Jaxton. I only wanted to get a sense of who my replacement was before I moved on with my life. Satisfy my curiosity, if you will.”

“Well, consider your curiosity satisfied,” I replied, my voice sharper than I intended. “But the truth is, this isn’t just curiosity. You’ve crossed a line.”

Carmen rolled her eyes, unfazed. “Oh, relax. I just wanted to see if you’re worthy of him since he picked you on a fake show.” She looked me up and down, her gaze lingering with something between disdain and indifference. “And, I must say, you seem... promising.”

The audacity in her voice made my patience snap. “I don’t need your approval, Carmen. And, for the record, you had no right to intrude into my professional life. This is my work, not some personal playground where you can check up on your ex-husband. I can sue you.”

She raised an eyebrow, feigning innocence. “Really? Because from where I stand, it seems you’re more invested in him than you’d like to admit. So, my little visit here shouldn’t ruffle your feathers, should it?”

I drew in a breath, keeping myself steady. “If you’ve moved on like you claim, then it’s time for you to actually move on. Stop inserting yourself into his life—or mine. It’s been years, he told me.”

She tilted her head, a glint of something dark flashing in her eyes. “Fine. But here’s some advice for what it’s worth. Don’t fumble him like I did. Damier is loyal to a fault. He’s the kind of man who doesn’t give himself to just anyone. You should be grateful to have him.”

“Advice from you?” I replied with a calm I didn’t entirely feel. “No, thank you.”

She rose from her chair, adjusting her coat with a satisfied smile that made my skin crawl. “Suit yourself. But if he ever proposes, my advice still stands, say yes. You’d be lucky to have him.”

Without another word, I nodded toward the door, signaling her exit. As she turned and left, I pulled out my phone and typed a quick message to Damier.

She’s gone. It was exactly who we thought.

I barely had time to put my phone down before it buzzed with his response.

I'm outside waiting on her. Trust me, I won't make a scene.

I let out a sigh, watching the door close behind her. Whatever reckoning she thought she'd evade was about to catch up with her, and somehow, I felt a quiet satisfaction in knowing that.

## Page 17

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

Seven years earlier...

I was halfway to my penthouse when my phone buzzed. It was Hocus. He didn't waste time with pleasantries.

"Yo, we got a problem," he said, his voice sharp. "Somebody tried to hit the warehouse."

My grip on the steering wheel tightened. "Who?"

"It's your wife's people," Hocus said. "Her brother and those three bitch ass cousins of hers. They tried to clean out the back inventory so we wouldn't notice, but we caught 'em red-handed. They here tied up and cryin'." He chuckled.

A cold wave ran through me. Carmen had no business knowing about my warehouses. I'd been careful—at least, I thought I had. But the pieces were clicking together, and the rage was already bubbling in my chest.

"I'm on my way."

By the time I got to the warehouse, it was already done. Hocus and the crew had rounded up her brother and the three cousins. They were all on their knees, bound and gagged, their eyes wide with terror.

I didn't say much. I didn't need to.

"You don't steal from me," I said, my voice low and cold as I stood over them. "You



don't fuck with what's mine.”

The room was silent, save for the muffled pleas of Carmen's brother. I ignored them. The gun in my hand felt steady, almost weightless, as I took each one out, one by one. By the time I was done, the floor was slick with blood, and the air was thick with the metallic stench.

Hocus lit a cigarette, shaking his head. “That's some cold shit, D.”

I holstered my gun and walked out, my jaw clenched tight. The real work wasn't done yet. I still had to deal with Carmen.

When I got home, the penthouse was quiet. Too quiet. I pushed open the door to the master bedroom and stopped short. The faint smell of something chemical lingered in the air.

The bathroom light was on, spilling a soft glow into the bedroom. I moved silently, stepping into the doorway.

Carmen was standing at the sink, a small gold tray in front of her. A fine line of white powder was on the tray alongside a rolled-up bill. Her back was to me, but I could see her reflection in the mirror—her thin frame, the dark circles under her mismatched eyes, the jittery movement of her hands.

“Enjoying yourself?” I said, my voice calm but cold.

She gasped, jerking around to face me. The gold tray slipped from her hands, hitting the floor with a clatter. The cocaine scattered across the tiles like dust.

“D-Damier,” she stammered, her eyes wide.

I leaned against the doorframe, my arms crossed. “Go ahead. Explain this shit to me.”

Her mouth opened and closed, but no words came out.

“Coke, Carmen?” I said, stepping closer. “You really turned into a cokehead while I’m working?”

She looked away, her hands trembling. “It’s not like that ? —”

I cut her off. “Not like what? You’re standing here doped up in our bathroom, looking like you just crawled out of a party in hell.”

Her face twisted in anger. “It’s your fault,” she snapped. “You sell this shit. You put it out there. You got me hooked on it! It’s your product!”

I let out a bitter laugh, shaking my head. “I don’t put that shit up your nose, Carmen. You do that because you want to. Don’t try to blame me for your weak-ass decisions.”

She glared at me, but her defiance only fueled my anger.

“You thought I wouldn’t notice?” I said, stepping closer. “The weight loss. The late nights out. You really thought you could hide this from me?”

She looked down, her silence confirming everything I already knew.

“And while we’re at it,” I said, my voice dropping lower, “let’s talk about how your brother and your little rat cousins thought they could steal from me. They hit my spot, Carmen. My fucking spot.”

Her head snapped up, her mismatched eyes wide with fear. “I-I didn’t ? —”

“Don’t lie to me!” I roared, pulling my gun from my waistband.

She froze, her hands trembling.

“Get on your knees,” I said, my voice cold and deadly.

“Damier, please ? —”

“Get. On. Your. Knees.”

Her legs buckled as she dropped to the floor, her wide eyes locked on the barrel of my gun.

“Tell me the truth,” I said, my voice like ice. “You gave them the information, didn’t you? You told them about my warehouse.”

Tears streamed down her face as she nodded, her voice barely a whisper. “I didn’t mean for it to go this far. They begged me for help. I-I didn’t think you’d find out.”

I crouched down, grabbing her chin and forcing her to look at me. “You didn’t think I’d find out?” I said, my voice low and menacing. “Do you know what I did to them? Huh? I killed them, Carmen. Your brother and your cousins. They’re gone because of you.”

Her sobs grew louder, her body shaking.

“I want you out of my life,” I said, releasing her chin and standing up. “We’re done. I don’t want to see your face again. Not now, not ever.”

She looked up at me, her tear-streaked face full of terror.

“You’ll get what I want to give you in the divorce,” I coldly said. “And after that, you stay the fuck away from me. You understand?”

She nodded quickly, her sobs choking her words.

I only saw her once after that, at the divorce hearing. I made sure she got what I wanted her to have, nothing more, nothing less. Now, when she needed something, she went through my accountant. I pumped enough fear into her heart that night to keep her quiet for seven years.

So why the fuck was she testing me now?

Carmen had gone way too far. Posing under a fake name, worming her way into Dream’s life like a damn snake. She must’ve lost her mind if she thought I’d let that slide. Something told me she had seen the show, and it made her jealous. There was nothing else that would bring her back into my life this way. She lied to me, stole from me, and tried to drain me just as much as Arika.

Now, I was standing in the middle of the parking lot outside Dream’s building. I frowned, feeling my patience fray by the second. Finally, the building doors opened, and there she was. Carmen stepped out, adjusting her coat with that haughty air she always carried. When her eyes landed on me, I saw a flash of fear, but she quickly masked it, squaring her shoulders like she was ready to take me on. Good luck with that.

I closed the distance between us, my steps hard and deliberate. She took a step back, gripping her Chanel purse like it was some kind of shield. I knew Carmen didn’t have a gun. She was scared of them but called herself loving men like me.

“Damier,” she started, her voice unsteady, “I didn’t?—”

“You didn’t what, Carmen?” I cut her off, my voice low and cold. “Think I’d find out? Thought I’d just let it slide while you moved your way into Dream’s life?”

She swallowed, feigning composure. “I just wanted to know who she was, who you’d replaced me with this time since I see Arika isn’t in the picture anymore.”

“It’s not your business who I am moving on with. Consider yourself lucky I’m letting you walk out of here again. The whole world would know it was me if I killed you right now just for invading my space,” I told her, voice thick with warning. “But that little deal we made years ago where you stay in New York, and I pay your bills instead of alimony? The money? The support? That’s done, Carmen. You crossed a line, and now you’re on your own.”

She blinked, stunned before fury seeped back into her expression. “You think you can just cut me off like that? I have rights, Damier! You can’t do this. You don’t scare me.”

“Oh, I don’t?” I raised an eyebrow, smirking. “Think real hard about what you’ve done because next time, you won’t get off so easy. You can forget about any financial support. You’re on your own with whatever you got going on.”

She laughed—a hollow, desperate sound. But I could see her weighing her options, finally realizing how deep she was in. Her deal with me had been her safety net, and now I’d yanked it away.

“So that’s it?” she asked, bitterness dripping from her voice. “You’re just going to throw me away because of her?”

“No, Carmen,” I said, tone sharp as steel. “You threw yourself away when you stole from me. You had an agreement with me—stay out of my life, stay out of my business. And now, you’re done. Go find someone else to bankroll your life.”

Her face twisted with anger, her jaw clenching. “I’ll find a way, Damier. You’ll see. I’m not done yet. And I’ll get every penny I’m owed—even if it means taking you to court.”

“Go ahead, Carmen. Take me to court. Waste your time, waste your money,” I replied coolly. “But don’t think for a second you’ll win. You’ve got nothing left on me, and you know it.”

She glared, and I could see her realizing she’d backed herself into a corner. But Carmen had never been one to back down easily.

“And my brother?” I added, voice dropping to a threatening calm. “You better stay far away from him, too, or you’ll find yourself caught in the middle. I wanted to see your motive, so I checked your iCloud. You have tried to contact my brother numerous times over the last couple of months. He’s a dead man walking, Carmen. If he drags you down with him, I won’t blink twice. You’ll both be gone before you even see it coming. Don’t ever try to use anyone near me against me. You’ve seen what I am capable of. Didn’t you tell Dream I am dangerous? You better realize you are not off limits.”

A flicker of real fear crossed her face, just for a second. “I never contacted your brother,” she insisted, almost defiantly. “Unlike you, I don’t need to throw around threats to get what I want. You may have won this round, but I’m not going anywhere.”

I smirked. “Oh, you’re staying put, alright. I’ll make sure of it. You’ll be watched closer than ever. One wrong move, Carmen, and you’ll regret it. Don’t try to contact my brother.”

She took a step back, her face flushed despite her forced confidence. After one last, desperate glare, she turned and walked off, her Chanel heels clicking against the

pavement. She'd try to keep her pride, but she knew exactly what she'd lost.

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Later, I texted Hocus to tell him about Carmen and then drove over to his downtown office, needing someone with a clear head in my corner. When I pulled up, his security team scanned me, like always. Even I had to go through security for wires. We didn't take chances, even with each other.

Once inside, I walked into his high-rise office. Hocus sat behind his desk, feet up, phone in one hand, blunt in the other. He gave me a nod as I came in, motioning for me to sit.

"So," he started, his gaze sharp as he put the phone down, "you finally cut Carmen off?"

I nodded, still feeling the residue of anger from our encounter. "She crossed the line bringing her ass around. Came sneaking into Dream's life, using a fake name, trying to pull some twisted jealousy game."

He chuckled, shaking his head. "Bold, I'll give her that. But you did right. Women like her—give 'em an inch, they'll take a mile."

"Yeah, she pushed her luck too far," I replied. "Figured it was time to make it clear there's no place for her in my life. Or my pocket. The bitch tried to contact Damian, but all the contacts she had were off."

"Good. I always told you that you were too nice, though," he nodded approvingly. "But listen, that's small potatoes. We got some real business today. Troy's right-hand man is coming here on some supposed 'peaceful' tip. Says he's got info on Troy."

My eyes narrowed. “Who the fuck is his right-hand man? And he thinks he’s walking out of here untouched?”

Hocus smirked, leaning forward. “North is Troy’s right-hand man, and it depends on what he says. The nigga claims he’s willing to rat out Troy’s plans. Says he’s got something we’ll want to hear.”

A few minutes later, North walked in, looking wary but smug, like he thought he was doing us a favor. He barely got past the doorway before I shoved him against the wall, my forearm pressing into his throat.

“What the fuck made you think you could walk in here on some peace shit, snitching on your own man?” I hissed, my voice low but deadly.

North choked, his hands shot up defensively. “I—I got information you’re gonna want to hear, Damier. Just... listen, alright?”

“Let him talk,” Hocus said, his tone calm but authoritative. He was the one who kept me grounded when my temper was running high. I released North, but not before giving him one last hard shove.

North took a deep breath, rubbing his neck. “Look, that nigga is planning something big. He’s got his sights set on taking out your family, starting with your sisters. He’s even talking about burning down your club tonight. His sister Kita is a part of this, too. She is the one who told him to go after you. Them lil niggas that hit yo’ house, one of them was his godson. That’s why he wanted beef with you before Kita even came to him. Kita just fueled his fire, and she brought Damian along with her.”

I narrowed my eyes. “And why should I believe a single word out of your mouth?”

North gulped, reaching into his pocket. I tensed, ready to draw, but he just pulled out



his phone. Everyone was checked coming into Hocus's building, but I was still on point.

"I got proof. Listen."

He played a recording. Troy's voice came through loud and clear, detailing every piece of his plan, from the kidnapping to the arson. The rage in me grew with each word. This wasn't just business; this was personal.

When the recording ended, I glared at North.

"And what do you want out of this?"

"A spot," North said, swallowing hard. "Anywhere on the Knight team. I'm done with Troy. Just give me a place, and I'll be loyal."

I exchanged a look with Hocus, and we both knew what came next. North thought he was walking out with a deal, that he'd bought his safety. But loyalty didn't mean ratting out your right-hand man. Hocus and I would never do each other like that.

As North turned to leave, I pulled out my gun and shot him down, his body hitting the floor with a dull thud. "You really thought we'd put a snake on our team?" I muttered, disgusted.

Hocus just chuckled, shaking his head. "Guess you're paying for the cleanup," he said, unbothered.

I nodded, unapologetic. "Consider it done. Now, let's handle Troy and that bitch Kita. It's time they learned what loyalty really means."

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That evening, I picked Dream up from work for dinner, determined to push everything else aside until later in the night when she was asleep. She looked stunning, all dolled up, and I took her to one of the nicest spots in town. For once, I wanted to feel like just a man, not a boss weighed down by family business.

Over drinks, she asked, “What happened with Carmen?”

I leaned back, giving her a reassuring smile. “I cut her off for good. But that was bound to happen anyway. She’s not worth a single penny. I only take care of one woman now,” I said, locking eyes with her. “You’re the only one who matters to me.”

Dream smiled, her trust and relief clear in her eyes. We enjoyed the rest of our night, eating and laughing, but in the back of my mind, I knew the streets were calling. There was work to be done.

After dinner, I drove Dream back to her place. The night was chilly, and I glanced at her as she rested her head against the window, her eyes half-closed from the wine. She’d had a bit too much, but I couldn’t help but smile. She was always so full of life, and seeing her like this made me feel lighter, even if just for a moment.

When we pulled up to her place, I parked the car, taking my time as I stepped out and walked around to open her door. I helped her out, noticing the slight sway in her step. She was tipsy but still just as beautiful as ever. “Let me walk you inside,” I said, slipping my arm around her waist to steady her.

She leaned into me, her lips brushing against my neck as we walked toward her door. “You know, I think I’m just gonna skip straight to bed,” she mumbled, pressing a soft kiss to my jaw. “I want you with me, Damier. Please don’t go yet.”

Her words made me smile, but I knew I couldn’t stay. Not tonight. There were too

many loose ends that needed to be tied up. “I can’t stay tonight.” I chuckled softly, brushing her hair from her face. “I have to leave. I’ll see you in a few hours or tomorrow, okay?”

She pouted, a playful grin crossing her face as she kissed me again, this time more urgently. “You can’t leave,” she whispered against my lips. “I want you here with me.”

I kissed her back, feeling her warmth against me, but I pulled away, my hand gently resting on her shoulders. “I know you do, but you’ll be fine. I’ll be back soon, I promise.” I leaned in, kissing her forehead before stepping back. “Get some rest, baby.”

Smiling softly, I watched her go to her door. “I’ll be waiting,” she called out.

As I made my way down the stairs when she walked inside and closed the door, I couldn't help but wish I could stay with her. But the club and everything else had to come first.

I drove to the club, the streets eerily quiet for midnight. It didn’t sit right with me how still everything was. I pulled up to the front entrance, staring at the heavy chains locked around the door. Someone had tried to shut me down, and I could feel the frustration building again. I unlocked the chains, pushing the door open with a harsh tug. The place was dead silent, the usual music and chatter replaced by an unnerving emptiness.

I made my way up the stairs to my office, heart pounding in my chest. The last time I’d been here, it was under attack. It felt different now, colder. I exhaled, trying to steady myself.

Thankfully, the cops hadn’t taken the surveillance footage. They knew better than to

push the case further. They were on my family's payroll, after all. They were loyal enough to keep their distance but not loyal enough to help clean up this mess. I'd have to handle it myself.

I sat in the chair behind my desk. Before I got to work, I booked my private flight to Mexico because I had to get Felix out of the way before I did anything else. I was going to surprise Dream by telling her that she was going with me. I needed her nearby. The woman was my peace.

I finally started staring at the monitors as I scrolled through footage from every angle. It was painstaking, tedious work, but I had to see everything. Every detail could tell me something. Four hours passed as I watched the footage in complete silence, my eyes growing heavy as I dozed off for brief moments. I hadn't had good sleep since my last vacation with Dream, and it was starting to catch up with me. But I forced myself to stay alert. I couldn't afford to be careless.

Then, something caught my eye. One of my bartenders, Tay, walked into the back with a duffle bag, heading straight for the bar. I leaned in, squinting at the screen. She slipped the bag under the counter, right where the cops found the drugs. My stomach turned. I had trusted Tay. She'd been working for me for years, and I'd never had a reason to doubt her loyalty. But now, seeing this—her betrayal was crystal clear.

I rubbed my temples in frustration. I hated when I had to handle women like this, but I knew what had to be done. Tay would be able to tell me who set this up and who was behind it if she wanted to live. There was no way she'd get away with this.

I stood up, pacing back and forth in my office. My anger bubbled, but I kept it contained. This was just the beginning. I had to make sure no one got away with trying to tear down everything I'd built. And when I was done with Tay, I would get the answers I needed from everyone involved—no exceptions.

I sat quietly, my thoughts already moving forward. It wasn't just about handling betrayal. It was about protecting the empire, and no one would take that from me. When I came back from Mexico, Tay was as good as gone.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The waves crashed softly against the shore, the rhythmic sound almost lulling me into a sense of calm as I sat in the suite, the luxury of the beach resort surrounding me. But peace eluded me. Out of the blue, Damier invited me on a trip to Mexico, and I agreed. However, he had been distant since we arrived earlier in the day, and it was more so than usual.

I watched him from the corner of my eye, pacing back and forth across the room. His phone buzzed in his hand every few minutes, but he barely glanced at it. His expression was tight, his posture stiff, and something about the way he held himself made it clear he wasn't fully present.

Something seemed to be pressing down on him, and I, the therapist, could see it. But the man I was with wasn't the kind of person to easily admit when he was struggling. I'd been with him for weeks now, and while he'd shared moments of vulnerability, this was different. This felt like a tipping point.

I knew why he was here—he was here for a meeting, but he hadn't told me what it was about. I wasn't going to press him for details. That's not how this worked. But I could tell something was weighing on him, and it wasn't just business.

I took a deep breath, trying to shake the feeling of helplessness.

"Damier," I called softly from where I was sitting. He paused mid-step, glancing over his shoulder at me. "We never got to our last session. What do you say we talk now?"

His eyes darkened, and he hesitated, the weight of his thoughts still clearly heavy on him. "Dream, I don't know if now's the best time." His voice was strained, as though

he was holding back from saying too much.

“Please,” I gently said, standing and crossing the room toward him. “I know you’re carrying something. I can see it. Whatever it is, you don’t have to carry it alone.”

He exhaled sharply, dropping his phone onto the bed before walking over to the window, staring out at the ocean as though the answer to his problems might be out there. After a few moments of silence, he turned to face me, his expression unreadable.

“You’re right,” he said, his voice low and filled with resignation. “Let’s do it.”

I walked over to the couch and sat down, my iPad and Apple Pencil in hand. He settled into the chair opposite me, leaning back and crossing his arms. I could see the tension in his posture, the stiffness in his shoulders, but there was also a hint of relief in his eyes as if he knew this was something he needed to do but hadn’t been ready until now.

“I’ve been thinking a lot,” Damier started, his gaze fixed on the floor. “About everything... what I’ve done, who I’ve become. And I don’t know if I can keep this up.”

I nodded, encouraging him to continue. I’d heard bits and pieces of his struggles before, but I could tell this was different. There was something raw in his words, something he hadn’t fully allowed himself to express.

“I’ve done some things... things that haunt me,” he said, his voice cracking slightly. “I’ve taken lives, I’ve hurt people, and every fuckin’ day, it eats away at me. But it’s like I can’t escape it. I can’t stop. I’m afraid of losing myself, Dream. I’m afraid I’m going down the same path as Damian.”

I felt a pang in my chest at the mention of his brother. I knew about the accident, the traumatic event that had left Damian scarred and mentally unstable, but I hadn't fully understood the depth of how it had affected Damier. I could see the fear in his eyes as he spoke of losing control.

"I've had nightmares," he continued, his voice softer now, almost a whisper. "Waking up in cold sweats, seeing their faces. People I've killed. People I've betrayed. I even have nightmares about my brother's accident. It's like they're still with me, chasing me. I can't sleep, and when I do, it's the same thing. I see them. I hear them."

I didn't speak; I just let him continue. My heart ached for him as I scribbled notes, trying to process everything he was saying. This wasn't just a man who was hardened by his experiences—this was someone deeply wounded, someone trapped in the very darkness he had created.

"I'm scared, Dream," he confessed, his eyes meeting mine for the first time. "I'm scared I'm losing my mind. What if I end up like Damian? What if I'm too far gone to turn back? I'm so far removed from God that I don't even pray. He probably can't even help me."

His words hit me like a punch to the gut. I could see it—the fear, the vulnerability he rarely allowed anyone to witness. This wasn't the man who commanded a criminal empire; this was a broken black man struggling to make sense of everything he had done.

"You're not losing your mind, Damier," I softly said, trying to reassure him. "You're carrying a heavy burden, but that doesn't mean you're losing control. You can still fix all of this and build a good rapport with God. You are not counted out."

He shook his head, his expression darkening. "I can't keep doing this. I can't keep



pretending I'm good. I know I'm not. And I don't know how much longer I can keep pretending. I'm tired, Dream. So fuckin' tired, mentally and physically. But I was taught to keep going, even if it hurts."

I looked down at my notes, then up at him. "I'm here for you, Damier. And I think it's time you stop pretending. You've been carrying this weight for so long, and it's okay to let someone in. It's okay to admit that you need help."

He let out a long breath, his shoulders slumping as the tension seemed to ease just a little .

"I don't know how to do that. I don't know how to ask for help. I am the help."

"You don't have to do it all at once," I replied. "Start small. You're already doing it by talking to me."

He nodded, though I could still see the wariness in his eyes. But something in him had shifted. He was finally allowing himself to admit the depth of his pain, and that was a significant step.

"I'm afraid I'm not the person you think I am," he quietly said, his gaze dropping once more. "I've done terrible shit, Dream. And I'm scared that, deep down, I'm just like Damian—lost, broken, and beyond saving. My mother or father never showed weakness. Never seen a therapist. If she knew I was doing this, she would probably disown me."

I took a deep breath as I leaned forward. "You're not like Damian, Damier, and we can keep these sessions away from your mother. You're dealing with your shit, but that doesn't make you a lost cause. It makes you human."

He looked up at me, his expression uncertain but hopeful like he was trying to believe

my words.

“I don’t know how to get past it,” he admitted. “I’ve tried, but it keeps coming back. I can’t sleep. I can’t breathe. And the guilt—it’s always there.”

For a moment, we just sat in silence, the weight of his confession hanging between us. I could see the relief in his eyes but also the uncertainty. It was like he was afraid of what would happen next, afraid of what it meant to finally face the truth of who he was and what he had done.

A knock at the door broke the silence, and Damier stiffened, the moment of vulnerability quickly vanishing.

His mother’s voice called out from the hallway, “Damier, it’s time. We need to go.”

He looked at me, his face hardening again, the mask slipping back into place. “We’ll finish this later,” he said, his voice a little more composed. He stood up, brushing himself off as he walked toward the door.

I watched him go, the emotions swirling inside me. He had shared so much, more than I ever expected. But as he closed the door behind him, I was left alone with my thoughts, my notes, and the weight of everything he had just exposed.

As I sat back down, I reviewed what I had written. His depression was undeniable. The guilt, the nightmares, the lack of sleep—all of it pointed to a man carrying the world on his shoulders, and it was weighing him down. But something else lingered in my mind. The way he talked about losing control, about becoming like Damian—it made me wonder if there was more to his struggles. Maybe Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) was also in play. He had moments when he exuded complexity, a sense of entitlement, and a need for validation. But that, too, seemed to be tied to his underlying fear of being unworthy, of being lost.

I couldn't diagnose him fully at that moment, but the signs were clear—he was a man in pain, a man who needed help more than he realized.

I looked out at the ocean, the sunset casting a soft glow over the water, and I couldn't shake the feeling that I had fallen for someone far more complicated than I ever imagined. A drug lord, a murderer, yes—but also a man haunted by his past, afraid of his own mind. He could have PTSD, too.

I wasn't sure what would happen next, but I was sure of one thing: I couldn't walk away now, not after what he had revealed.

Not after everything he had shown me.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The air was thick with tension the moment I walked into the room. Felix, my old family friend—my ally—sat there with a cocky grin plastered across his face, like he was enjoying the chaos he'd set in motion. My mother was in the corner, arms crossed, her gaze steady, unwavering as usual.

Uncle King stood by the door, his presence silent but commanding. They didn't trust me to handle this alone. No matter how much they respected Felix or how long he'd been in the family, they didn't trust me to make the right decisions if things got out of hand.

And I wasn't about to back down.

Felix leaned back in his chair, swirling a glass of tequila, his eyes never leaving me.

"Damier," he said with a slow smile. "You are days late. I almost cut ties with the Knight Family over this, you know. The law—I don't deal with the law. And that warehouse raid? You know who's behind it, don't you? You don't strike me as the kind of guy who knows how to handle business when shit gets messy. So, I know why you didn't contact me about all of this."

The words hit me like a slap to the face. I started grinding my teeth, my fists itching to reach out and do something. But I kept my calm. I had to. Felix's comment about my abilities? It was too much. I felt my temper flare.

"Don't talk to me like that, my nigga" I said, my voice steady but carrying a dangerous undertone. "I built this empire, Felix. When my family was crumbling, I stepped in. I brought in billions. I cleaned up the mess my father left when he was

dying from cancer to handle his business. You think I don't know how to handle shit? You think I'm not fit for this position?"

Felix's smile didn't falter, but there was an edge to his eyes now. "You're not fit for this, Damier. I'm starting to think you're more like a puppet than a king. You've got the money, but you don't have the instincts, the power. You're trying to play with the big dogs, but you're not in the same league. You're still a pup."

The insult hit me harder than it should have. My eyes narrowed, and for the first time, I felt a real wave of rage building inside me. He had the nerve to question my capabilities? He who had been sitting back, waiting for me to make the moves, waiting for me to put the money in his pockets? This old nigga was tripping.

"You are insulting my profession, Felix," I said, each word deliberate, "and you are insulting my intelligence. I've made you money. I've put you back on top. And now you want to talk to me like I'm some young chump who doesn't know how to move in this business?"

Felix's eyes hardened, and the room seemed to close in around us. There was tension thick enough to slice with a knife.

"I tried to, but I don't respect you, Damier," he said, his voice low and final.

I stood up then, the words hitting me like a knife in the gut. I had to fight the urge to charge at him. "Don't trust me? After everything I've done for you? You want to disrespect me in front of my mother and uncle? Nigga, I will kill you."

The air in the room felt heavy, suffocating. My mother looked between us, her face betraying nothing, but I could tell she was waiting for this to blow over. Uncle King shifted on his feet, his hand sliding under his jacket, ready for whatever might come next.

But I wasn't backing down.

Felix's crew weren't just standing still, either. I heard the telltale sound of guns cocking, the sharp click of metal against metal. It was a clear threat, and I didn't flinch. Not now. Not ever.

My mother's voice broke the silence, cold and firm. "Felix, you've made your point. Damier's in charge here. You've made your money, but don't think you can push him like this. If you want to cut ties, you can. But insulting my son into violence is not happening."

Felix cocked his head to the side, his smirk never leaving his face. "Well, tell him to handle it then, Mrs. Knight. He's the one who needs to step up. He's the one who's supposed to be in charge."

I cut him off before my mother could respond. My temper was on edge, and I wasn't about to let him get the last word. "I said I'm handling it. You want to tug at your balls like you're the only one in this business with a dick, but let me remind you—you ain't the only one with one, and mine is bigger. Don't ever talk to me like I'm some young rookie, my nigga. I made you money. I brought you back from the dead."

I took a step forward, my voice growing louder, the heat of anger coursing through me. "I don't stand behind you, Felix. I stand next to you. You don't get to act like you're my fucking superior."

The room fell silent. My mother's gaze was sharp, but she didn't intervene. Uncle King moved slightly, his hand resting on the handle of his gun, though he hadn't drawn it. Felix's men hadn't moved either, their fingers still on their triggers, but there was something about the way they looked at me now—they weren't sure what to make of this situation.

I turned on my heel and walked out, slamming the door behind me. The cold air hit me like a slap in the face, but I didn't care. I didn't need to be in there any longer.

My mother and Uncle King emerged a few minutes later, and my mother's eyes were fierce with concern.

"We're leaving now," she said, her voice low and commanding.

I didn't respond; I didn't trust myself to say anything. I couldn't let my emotions get the best of me again. I could feel the anger radiating from her, and I didn't need to hear it. Not now.

The ride back to the resort was silent. The hum of the Maybach's engine was the only sound between us as I stared out the window, watching the lights blur past.

Finally, my mother broke the silence. "You've got to clean this up, Damier. You're letting your ego get in the way, and laying up with Dream is clouding your judgment. Maybe that's why you're missing all the key facts about Damian. You need to stop acting like everything's okay. You can't keep hiding behind this... this... distraction named Dream!" She waved a hand, frustrated. "If you don't handle the situation with Damian and fix the warehouse mess, I'll have to take you out of your position. I'll put Uncle King in charge. You can go be a fucking house nigga to another bitch who doesn't give a fuck about you!"

I stayed silent, letting her words hang in the air. My mother was always passive-aggressive, and I wasn't about to argue with her about her feelings on my personal life.

When we reached the resort, I stepped out of the car without a word to her. I didn't want to talk to her anymore. I didn't want to hear how disappointed she was in me. Not right now.

Uncle King caught up with me, his hand on my shoulder. “Don’t worry, nephew,” he said quietly. “We’re gonna fix this. We’ll get Damian. We’ll take care of whoever’s left who betrayed us. You’ll stay in your position. Trust me, I would never take your position. Your mother is just power-tripping like always. We got this.”

I looked into his eyes, and for the first time all day, I felt some relief. He wasn’t going to let me fail. He wasn’t going to let them take me down. I nodded, grateful for his reassurance.

I walked back to my room, and the sight that greeted me almost made me forget about everything that had just happened. The room was dimly lit with candles, the soft glow creating a peaceful ambiance. Low R she just looked at me as if she were searching for something deep inside. The silence hung between us. But as she nodded, I knew we were about to face whatever came next together.

As the evening wore on, the questions that had been swirling in my mind didn’t seem to matter as much anymore. For now, I had her, and maybe that was enough to keep me from falling apart.

But deep down, I knew I couldn’t ignore the darkness forever, and I couldn’t let her into it, not completely.

As I lay there with her, the weight of everything I had shared still heavy on my chest, I hoped that whatever was between us—this fragile connection—wouldn’t break under the weight of everything I had just revealed.

I hoped she was strong enough to handle it.

And I hoped I was, too.

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The plane touched down in California, its wheels screeching slightly against the tarmac as Dream smiled across the aisle at me. I hadn't said much during the flight. It wasn't that I didn't want to talk—I just didn't have it in me. My thoughts were elsewhere, drowning out her cheerful babble as she described how peaceful Mexico had been. I couldn't focus on the beauty of the place, the serenity of it. All I could think about was my next move. I wasn't even sure if I had heard all her words.

“...and I can't wait to go back,” she finished, her voice light, but I only half-registered it. The trip had been a temporary escape, a fleeting moment of peace, but nothing was resolved.

She was talking about the beach, about the sunsets, but it was all lost on me. I wanted to focus on her, on us, but there was too much on my plate. Too much waiting for me back in Cali.

The flight was short—too short for my mind to settle. I turned my head as we waited to get the sign that we could get up. I looked out the small oval window as the city came into view. California . The land where everything started and where it was all about to shift again.

I thought back to the night before. After Imani and I fucked, she fell asleep. I looked at my phone, and my mother was texting me to come to her room. I got dressed and went to her room, which was above mine.

It was late. I could feel the weight of the night in the air as I sat on the balcony. The only sound was the faint crackle of the blunt I was smoking. The ocean was even still, not a wave in sight.

My mother, sharp as ever, wasn't one to let anything go unnoticed. She was on one of her rants—her usual complaints about me not having my head in the game.

“You think you’re untouchable,” she’d said, the words sharp. “You can’t keep running this empire like you’re some thug in the street. You’re not the same kid anymore, Damier. You need to get your mind right and stop being distracted by women.”

I exhaled a cloud of smoke and stared out over the city, my mind already miles ahead.

“I hear you,” I muttered, not really listening. I didn’t need her lecture tonight. I didn’t need her words in my head.

But King—he was different. He always was. The silence from him was filled with wisdom. He wasn’t trying to talk over me like my mother. He let me breathe for a minute before cutting through the noise.

“Damier,” King said calmly, looking at me with a quiet intensity. “You’re missing the bigger picture. As soon as we land, we hit the streets. First stop? Tay. We need to get her to talk. Find out who set her up because I know she ain’t do this on her own.”

I looked at him then, his face serious but steady. King wasn’t about to let me get too deep into my own head. He’d seen enough of the world to know when it was time to act.

I nodded. I didn’t have to say much. I trusted him more than anyone.

“We get her to talk, and then we go from there,” King continued, putting out his cigarette and tapping his fingers against the stone balcony. “You got too many loose ends, Damier. Too many people who want you down. It’s time to clean it up.”

I nodded again, but I wasn’t listening to my mother anymore. I wasn’t listening to the frustration building inside me. King’s words—those were the ones that mattered. They always had.

I snapped out of my thoughts when Imani tapped me so we could get off.

We deplaned and made our way onto the runway, but I wasn't in the moment. Imani was beside me, still talking about Mexico while we waited for my car service to pull up, but my mind was already on the task ahead.

I hugged her and kissed her lightly on the lips as she mentioned how she was glad to be home. My hands lingered on her waist for a moment longer than necessary, and I saw the slight smile on her lips, but my mind wasn't there. I was a million miles away, focused on the business that awaited me.

"You good?" she asked, eyes searching mine.

I nodded, but it wasn't convincing. She could tell I wasn't all there. She always could.

"I'll be fine," I muttered. "You go home, and I'll get with you soon," I told Imani. I watched her slide into the back of a Maybach and got in the one behind hers.

Later That Night...

Uncle King and I hit the streets like we were just two regular niggas with only a few thousand dollars to our names. There was something about this kind of grind—the way we moved through the city—that brought me back to reality. It wasn't the money, the power, the empire. It was the rawness, the struggle.

King was behind the wheel of his Porsche, but tonight, I was the passenger. He always did this to me when I felt like I was failing. He always used these times to remind me that I was a boss. He took me around the city, checking in on our workers, collecting cash from various spots, and checking the pulse of everything we had running on the streets. I didn't say much as I smoked, leaning back in the leather seat.

We didn't talk about anything personal. We didn't need to. King's eyes were always scanning—watching, calculating while Tupac played in the background. I knew he had the lay of the land. I was just along for the ride, letting the smoke cloud my thoughts, trying to shut everything out, trying to clear my head. But it didn't work.

By the time we were deep in the city, the night had swallowed the day, and the clock ticked well into the early hours of the morning.

One a.m.

It was time for Tay.

By late night, we were parked outside a small house in Reseda. The air felt heavy, and the street was quieter than usual. The world felt like it was holding its breath.

We waited in the car, watching the house, waiting for her to return. It felt like hours, but it wasn't long before we saw her stumbling back toward her door from an Uber, clearly drunk, swaying as she walked.

King and I moved quickly, silently. She didn't see us coming. She was too drunk to resist, too scared to fight back. We shoved her inside, slamming the door behind us.

She looked terrified when she saw us, her face draining of color as she realized who had come for her.

"Please," she stammered, voice trembling. "I didn't want to do it. I didn't have a choice."

I didn't want to hear her excuses. "Who set you up?" I demanded.

She hesitated, looking between me and King. It was clear she was trying to figure out

how to save herself.

Finally, she cracked before we could say anything.

“It was Kita,” she whispered, her voice barely audible. “She made me do it. She gave me the drugs. Said I had no choice.”

That was all I needed to hear. It was Kita. The mastermind behind everything. Tay was just a pawn in her game, but that didn’t change what had to be done.

Without a word, King pulled out his gun. He didn’t hesitate, didn’t wait for any more explanations. He just put a bullet in her head.

It was quick and efficient. Necessary.

I stood over her body, my mind racing, but I felt numb. My thoughts weren’t on her anymore. They were on the bigger picture. Kita. Troy. Damian.

King stood beside me, his grin widening. “Two birds with one stone. Kita and Troy are next. Then, we go get Damian from Canada.”

I didn’t respond. I couldn’t. My thoughts weren’t on the next move, on cleaning up the family mess. My mind kept drifting back to Imani. To my Dream.

Our session echoed in my head. I was a narcissist.

I couldn’t get that out of my mind.

I drove home, but I knew I couldn’t keep pretending like everything was okay. I needed to lay low for a couple of weeks in Vegas to clear my head and get my mind right. The streets were loud and chaotic, but it wasn’t what I needed right now.

I needed silence.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

Two weeks had passed since I last saw Damier, and his absence felt like a weight that lingered in the pit of my stomach. I had barely heard from him since he had his driver take me home. The way he left that night stayed with me—the way he barely looked at me, brushing a soft kiss on my lips as if it were an afterthought. It was almost like he was preparing to pull away, to distance himself from me. And in some strange way, I knew that would happen, even before I saw the way he closed himself off.

In the weeks that followed, I'd given him the space I thought he needed, but I couldn't shake the feeling that I was being pushed away. He hadn't responded to my messages like he used to. I'd sent him information about his condition—recommendations, articles, things that could help him—and the responses were either delayed or short, and even then, he'd hardly acknowledge the effort. Twice, I invited him to dinner, only to have him decline both times with some excuse.

I had told myself I wouldn't get too attached. I couldn't afford to. My job, my life, everything I had built—it didn't align with his world. Damier was too much for me. I had known that from the start. I never planned to change him, never expected to be more than a therapist who'd crossed paths with a troubled man. But somewhere along the way, the lines blurred. I had gotten too close, and now I felt myself pulling away, just as he had.

I sat in my office, the quiet hum of the fluorescent lights in the ceiling filling the space as I waited for my next client. Two weeks had given me enough time to reflect and come to the conclusion I had tried to avoid. Damier wasn't my problem to solve, and I wasn't willing to get hurt in the process of trying to fix someone who didn't want to be fixed.

There was a soft knock on the door. I glanced up to see my third client for the day, a mother of two struggling with anxiety. I offered a warm smile, the professional mask sliding into place as I invited her in. The rest of the day passed in a blur of therapy sessions, my mind drifting between my clients and the way Damier had left things hanging. I couldn't help but wonder if he even missed me or if he even thought about me the way I had thought about him.

By the time I finished my last session, I was mentally exhausted. I grabbed my coat and headed to see my brother, Donta, who had been ill again. The news wasn't promising. Donta's condition wasn't getting any better, and I could feel the weight of that in my chest. He was always the one to keep me grounded, the one person who would never ask for anything, never make me feel like I owed him. But right now, I didn't have the strength to give him the attention he deserved. I was drained. The emotional toll of everything—Damier, my patients, my family—was starting to take its toll.

When I finally got home, exhausted from the day's events, I was surprised to see a familiar sight. Damier's Ferrari was parked outside my house, the sleek black car catching the light of the street lamps. My heart skipped a beat, and I froze for a moment. What was he doing here?

He stepped out of the car with his usual swagger, that cocky smile on his face. But it didn't feel right. There was something about the way he approached me that made me uneasy. He held out a single red rose toward me, his eyes glinting with something unreadable.

"I figured I'd stop by," he said, his voice soft but with that same edge of confidence that made my stomach tighten. "I missed you."

I stood frozen for a moment, unsure of how to respond. The part of me that had once been drawn to him—compelled by his intensity, his raw energy—now felt like a



distant memory. I wanted to believe that things could go back to what they were, but I couldn't. I couldn't ignore the reality of his life and what it had done to me already.

I stepped back, holding up a hand. "Damier, no," I said firmly. "This here," I pointed between us, "I can't do this. We can't do this. You have your life, and I have mine. And it doesn't mix. Handle what you have going on, and I'll handle me. But this—what we're doing right now—I can't do it anymore."

The words felt like a weight was lifted off my chest, but at the same time, I could feel my heart pounding painfully. This was it. The final line was drawn.

He didn't say anything at first, just looked at me, that cocky smile faltering for the first time.

"I knew I shouldn't have let you in on my real life," he said, his voice tight with frustration. "You're scared, aren't you? Scared something's going to happen to you. I thought you said you wouldn't leave me."

"I'm not leaving you," I said, my voice softening for a moment. "I'm just asking you to handle your shit, Damier. Handle your life. And when you're ready, call me. But right now? I can't do this. I can't keep putting myself in the middle of all of it. Your world... it's too much."

He looked at me, his face faltering, his eyes showing a side of him I hadn't seen before—vulnerable, almost... weak.

"I am ready for us," he said, his voice barely above a whisper.

It hurt. It hurt more than I cared to admit, but I stood my ground.

"I gotta go, Damier," I said, my voice steady, even though I felt like I was crumbling

inside. “My brother’s sick again, so I won’t be available anyway. This was fun.”

I walked away from him, my heart racing as I moved toward the front door. I couldn’t look back, not now. I couldn’t let myself be pulled back into his world.

Before I could reach the door, he yanked me back, his grip tightening on my arm harder than I thought it would. His grip was firm, almost desperate.

“You’re not walking away from me like this,” he said, his tone low and dangerous.

I turned to face him, my emotions threatening to spill over. “I have to, Damier,” I insisted, my voice thick with emotion. “I can’t keep doing this.”

“Please,” he said, his voice shaking. “Don’t do this.”

But I wasn’t sure I had it in me to do this. I wasn’t sure I could keep doing this to myself.

With one final pull, I wrenched my arm free from his grip, the pain of doing so almost too much to bear.

“Goodnight, Damier,” I said softly, closing the door behind me before he could say anything else.

I walked into the house, the tears threatening to spill over, but I didn’t let them fall—not yet. I needed to numb the ache. I needed to block out the pain of what I had just done.

I poured myself a glass of wine, letting the warmth of the liquid hit my throat as I turned on some music, trying to drown out the emotions flooding me. I started a bath, the hot water comforting my tense muscles, but the moment I lay back in the tub, the

dam broke. The tears came crashing down, and I couldn't stop them.

I had just let go of him. I just walked away. And for the first time in two weeks, I allowed myself to feel the full weight of what I'd lost.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

I know you need space, and I get that. But I can't stop thinking about you. The truth is, I've never opened up to anyone like this, not even close, and it scares me. What we have means more than I ever let on. I'm not asking for things to be the same, but I need you to know that I'm trying to fix the mess I've made. I can't fix everything overnight, but I'm committed to you. I'm committed to making us work. Please, don't shut me out for good. I'll prove I'm worth it if you give me the chance.

The clock on my office wall ticked quietly, but my mind was far from the present moment. My desk, normally littered with files and paperwork, sat untouched. I hadn't been able to focus on anything for the past two days. All I could think about was her— Dream .

I had tried reaching out. Twice . The texts I sent her were long—longer than I had ever written anyone. I didn't do that. I didn't open myself up to people, let alone beg them to let me back into their lives. But here I was, spilling words to her, asking for another chance. Asking for her to see me differently. I guess my going off the grid for a week had her in a frenzy, but I had to detach. I had killed Tay, and she revealed to me that Kita was behind the drugs. I had to get my mind right like she wanted me to. I was selfish, though. Here she was, trying to help me, and I was shutting her out. And now that she was doing it to me, I couldn't stand it.

I missed her more than I cared to admit. The way she made me feel like I wasn't just this cold, ruthless ass nigga—like I could be something more, something good. But now? I was nothing but a nigga who had pushed her away.

She told me to take care of my life. But how? How could I fix the mess I created? How could I fix everything—my empire, my family, the damage to myself—that I

had ignored for so long?

It hit me like a gut punch every time I thought about her words: handle your life . She was right. I couldn't fix what I was. But somehow, I wanted her to be part of the solution.

She didn't answer my last text. Just left it unread. I wanted to give her space, but it didn't stop the frustration from gnawing at me. I couldn't let it go, and now the silence between us was more painful than anything.

I stood up from my desk, angry at myself. Angry that I couldn't just let things be, angry that I had destroyed the one good thing I had.

I slammed the door to my office behind me, needing to get out, to do something—anything. I drove my Ferrari through the streets, the engine's roar almost drowning out the thoughts pounding in my head. The world outside was blurred, nothing but a haze of streetlights and dark pavement. My mind kept circling back to Imani, her words, her eyes, and the way she'd looked at me when she walked away.

I didn't want to waste any more time thinking about my personal shit. It was time for business. I was going to meet Lil Ken. I needed to focus. I drove straight to Calabasas, my Audi turning heads as I rolled up to the driveway of Lil Ken's house.

His housekeeper let me in, and I was immediately escorted down a long hallway to Ken's office. When I stepped inside, Ken didn't bother with pleasantries. His fingers were already flying across his laptop. I didn't have to say much. He knew the score.

I tossed the papers onto his desk. His eyes flicked over the names, scanning them quickly, as always. It wasn't long before he narrowed in on one name— Cordale Ranklin.

I stood there, watching him work.

“Canada,” Ken muttered. “He’s hiding out in Toronto.”

I nodded. Canada, just like King told me. He’d really gone that far? It finally hit me that he was not in the United States. It was a hard pill to swallow. I should’ve expected him to run far, but part of me wanted to believe Damian would stay closer to home since he always needed money.

I nodded slowly, taking the papers with the information on Damian. “I knew that much. It’s not hard to get over there.”

“I’m sure you will handle it, my nigga. You always do.”

I left Ken’s and met up with my uncle.

I met Uncle King in the parking lot of my closed-down club. The place I had built and bled for was sitting in the dark, but I wasn’t dwelling on that. I had bigger problems.

King looked at me, his eyes scanning my face before he spoke. “So, Toronto. That’s where he is. We can’t even kill him there. We gotta drag his ass back here first.”

“Yeah,” I muttered, frustrated. “He’s hiding, but it doesn’t matter. We’re going after him. I’m not letting him get away with this.”

Uncle King gave a small nod, but there was a hint of something else in his eyes. “You know what you have to do with him. It’s not just about finding him. He’s made a mockery of this family. We teach him a lesson.”

I didn’t want to think about the lessons anymore. I wanted Damian back—damn

whatever lesson needed to be taught. But King was right. I had to deal with the problems as they came.

“I know,” I said, the tension in my voice making my words sound heavier than I wanted them to. “But first, we take care of Kita and Troy. That Kita bitch played a dangerous game.”

King smiled, his face lighting up in that cold way it always did when things got messy.

“We’re doing that tomorrow night, but that bitch Kita is missing in action. She might be with Damian.”

“We’ll find that bitch, but I need to get some rest. A nigga been up for days. I gotta knock out so I can have a clear head for tomorrow.”

We went our separate ways, and I headed to my penthouse.

I returned home, but sleep didn’t come. I was hoping a hot shower would put me to sleep, but it didn’t. I couldn’t stop thinking about her.

I tossed and turned when I got in bed, frustration building in my chest. Finally, I couldn’t take it anymore. I needed to see her.

I got dressed in a sweatsuit, grabbed my keys, and left, driving through the dark streets until I was outside her house. My car’s engine growled to a stop, and I sat there for a moment, staring at the front door. I knew I shouldn’t be here. I knew I should leave her alone. But I couldn’t.

I got out of the car and pounded on her door.

Imani's voice shouted from inside. "Go home, Damier!"

"No, open the fuckin' door, Imani. Stop fuckin' playin' with me!"

I stood in front of her door, my knuckles aching from pounding on it. I knew I was pushing it, knew I was testing her patience, but I couldn't stop. I couldn't leave.

When she finally opened the door, her face was a mixture of sleep and irritation. She looked like she'd just been yanked out of a deep slumber, and I couldn't help but notice the exhaustion in her eyes. But there was something else too—something sharp, something defensive.

"What, Damier? I called it off days ago, and you are clearly on bullshit," she said, her voice low and steady, but I could hear the edge beneath it. She stepped back, holding the door open slightly as if she wasn't sure if she should let me in.

"I need to talk to you," I said, stepping forward without waiting for permission.

She sighed, crossing her arms in front of her chest. "About what? About how you've completely ignored everything I've said? About how I've asked you to handle your life, yet here you are, again, thinking you can just waltz back in whenever it suits you?"

My chest tightened at her words, but I wasn't backing down. "You think I'm just here to use you? I'm not like that, Imani."

She shook her head, her lips pressed together in frustration. "You really don't get it, do you? You think I'm some kind of... placeholder for your problems. You want me to fix you. To make everything right, but you're not willing to do the work. You want me to just be here, but I'm not a fucking crutch, Damier. I'm not going to let you keep using me to fill the voids in your life."



Her words cut deeper than I expected. “I’m not using you,” I said, my voice thick with frustration. “I want you. I need you. You think this is easy for me? You think I want to keep hurting you, keep pulling away? But I’m fucking lost, Imani. I can’t even figure out where I’m going, let alone how to fix this.”

She shook her head again, her eyes flashing with emotion. “You don’t want help, Damier. You don’t want to change. You don’t want anything but to keep doing this, running from what’s inside of you. You think I’m here to just make you feel better about your life, but you haven’t even tried to fix yourself. You’ve got so much inside you, and I’m supposed to just be there for you?”

I felt my anger rising. She was right, and it fucking stung. But I didn’t want to hear it, not now, not from her.

“Maybe my mother was right,” I muttered, running a hand through my hair. “Maybe you’re just a distraction. A nice, pretty distraction from the shit I have to face every day. Maybe that is all I need from you—just someone to fill the space, to make me feel like I’m not a fuckin’ murderer.”

Her eyes widened, and she took a step back. “You really are narcissistic,” she said, her voice barely above a whisper, but the sting was enough to hit me where it hurt. “I won’t let you pull that shit on me, Damier. I won’t be another person you manipulate. I’m not here to fix you. I’m not here to be your excuse or your crutch. You need to fix your own mental health, but that’s something you need to do alone because I’m not going to keep pretending like I’m the one who can change you.”

I saw her turn to walk away, and something in me snapped. Without thinking, I grabbed her wrist, pulling her toward me with a force I didn’t even realize I had in me. She gasped, her eyes wide with surprise, but I didn’t care. I couldn’t stop. I was drowning, and she was the only lifeline I had.

“I’m not leaving,” I growled, my voice low and dangerous. “You think you can just walk away from me like this? After everything we’ve shared? After everything I’ve shown you?”

She tried to pull away, her chest rising and falling rapidly with every breath, but I wasn’t letting go. I wasn’t ready to let go of her.

“I’m not going no fuckin’ where,” I said again, this time softer but no less firm. My fingers gently cupped her jaw, tilting her face to mine. I saw the hesitation in her eyes, but the anger had already burned itself out. What was left between us was raw, stripped of all pretense.

She opened her mouth to speak, but before she could say anything, I kissed her—hard. Her lips were warm against mine, and for a moment, all the noise in my head stopped. All the weight, all the tension disappeared. There was nothing but the feel of her—the softness of her lips, the way she melted into me.

She fought it at first, pushing back, but then she gave in, her arms going around my neck, pulling me closer. It was desperate, urgent. I needed her like I needed air, and I wasn’t going to let her walk away.

I kissed her again, deeper this time, my hands roaming to her waist, pulling her body against mine. She moaned softly in my mouth, the sound driving me wild, and in that moment, nothing else existed. Not my problems, not my empire, not my brother, not my damn mother, or the mess I was in. Just us.

But we couldn’t stay in that moment forever.

I broke the kiss, breathless, my forehead resting against hers. She looked up at me, her chest rising and falling as her eyes searched mine, filled with confusion, pain, and something else—something that was too complicated to name.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered, brushing a stray lock of hair from her face. “I shouldn’t have pushed you. I shouldn’t have come here. But I need you, Imani. I’m going to fix myself, I swear.”

She didn’t say anything; she just stared at me with those eyes—eyes that had seen too much, felt too much, yet still tried to understand me. But I knew she wasn’t sure anymore.

She stepped back from me slowly. I let her go, the emptiness inside me growing with every inch of space she put between us.

“I’m sorry,” I repeated, my voice breaking as I turned to leave. I grabbed my jacket off the chair and walked toward the door, unable to look back at her, knowing that once I did, I wouldn’t be able to walk away.

When I opened the door, I heard her voice behind me. “Damier...” she called softly. I paused, my hand on the knob, but I didn’t turn around. I couldn’t.

“I’ll handle my life,” I said, my voice low. “I will. And when I’m ready... I’ll come back to you. But you need to be ready, too.”

I left without another word, the door closing softly behind me. I wanted every inch of her body, but I knew we weren’t ready for sex again.

I drove home in silence, the car humming beneath me, the weight of what had just happened pressing down on me with every mile. I wasn’t sure if I had made things better or worse. All I knew was that I had to do something. I had to fix my life.

And I couldn’t keep running from what I had with her.

As I stepped into the emptiness of my penthouse, the hollow feeling of being alone

crept back in. I had made my choice, and now I had to live with the consequences.

I was ready for the fight ahead, for what was coming next. But somewhere deep inside, I knew it wouldn't matter if I didn't fix what was broken between us.

I had to be the one to change.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The sound of children's laughter echoed through the showroom of my car dealership, mixing with the faint hum of conversation and the clicking of high heels against the tile floor. I leaned against a sleek black Mercedes-Benz, watching my three kids run circles around a new Porsche we'd just added to the lot. They were loud and wild, and honestly, I wouldn't have it any other way.

My wife, Chanel, was standing behind the glass counter, her phone pressed to her ear as she spoke to a client. She was the real boss here, though she'd never admit it. When I set up this dealership years ago, I made her the manager. It wasn't just because she was good at it but because I wanted her to have something solid if anything ever happened to me. This life I lived wasn't guaranteed, and I had to make sure my family was taken care of, no matter what.

"Uh-huh, yes, Mr. Carter," Chanel said into the phone, her voice smooth and professional. She scribbled something on a notepad, nodding even though the man on the other end couldn't see her. "We'll have the car detailed and ready for you by tomorrow. Thank you for choosing us." She hung up and turned to me, a playful smirk tugging at her lips.

"We need a vacation," she said, walking toward me and leaning on the car next to me. Her voice dropped lower. "And I need my husband."

I raised an eyebrow, amused. "You got me every night, don't you?"

"Not like I want," she shot back, crossing her arms. "The kids are running around like they don't have home training, and I'm drowning in work while you're out here saving the world with Damier and King. I'm sexually frustrated, Ezekiel. You're

lucky I love you because another woman would've packed her bags by now."

I chuckled, pulling her closer by the waist. "I hear you, babe. We'll go somewhere soon. But tonight, I'll take care of you. Promise."

She rolled her eyes, pouting. "How about a quickie right now?"

I shook my head, laughing. "You know your good pussy makes me lazy. I still got work to do."

She playfully slapped my chest, but her smile told me she wasn't too mad. "Fine. But don't keep me waiting too long, Ezekiel."

I kissed her forehead and glanced over at the kids, who were now arguing over who got to sit in the driver's seat of the Porsche. Chanel went to corral them, and I turned back to the black Benz I'd been inspecting earlier.

I was about to head to my office when my phone buzzed in my pocket. I pulled it out and saw the name "Nino" flashing on the screen. One of my lieutenants.

"What's good?" I said, answering the call.

"Boss, we got a problem," Nino said, his voice tight with urgency. "Caught some boys lurking around the spot. Said they were scouting for Troy, and they mentioned Damian. But they don't know where he is."

I felt my jaw clench. Damian. Troy. Those names were becoming a bigger problem by the day. "Y'all got them locked down?"

"Yeah, we got 'em. But they're just kids, Hocus. I don't think they know shit. Just some runners Troy sent to stir the pot."

I nodded, thinking. “Keep them there, and I will be there later tonight. Don’t touch them yet. I’ll let King decide what to do. You don’t make a move without my word, a’ight?”

“Got it, boss.”

I hung up, shoving the phone back in my pocket. My mind was already spinning with possibilities. Damian and Troy were getting sloppy, sending kids to do their dirty work. But sloppy or not, he was still dangerous.

An hour later, I pulled up to one of our quieter safe houses, a nondescript bungalow tucked away in the outskirts of the city. Uncle King’s car was already out front, and as I stepped inside, the faint smell of cigar smoke greeted me.

King sat at the kitchen table, a glass of whiskey in hand and a smirk on his face. His presence always commanded respect, not because he demanded it but because he didn’t have to.

“What’s good, nephew?” King said, leaning back in his chair as I walked in.

“Got some shit to discuss,” I said, sitting across from him.

“You always do,” he said with a chuckle, pouring me a glass of whiskey without asking. “Let me guess—Damian? The Troy nigga?”

“Both.” I took the glass and leaned back, sighing. “Nino caught some kids scouting the spot. Said they were working for Troy, and they mentioned Damian, but they don’t know where he is. That bitch Kita disappeared too. They moving sloppy, but it’s still a problem.”

King nodded, his expression serious. “I don’t know this Troy cat like that, but

Damian has been a problem since day one. We've let him live because he's blood. Damier's been tied up with his love life, so I've let him handle shit his way. But it's time we bring Damian back to the States and deal with this shit head-on."

I nodded. "I'm with you. When do we leave?"

"Few days," King said, swirling his glass. "And you're coming with us. I need someone who can keep everything tight. You've always been that man, Hocus. Damier's good, but he's distracted. Too much on his plate. We need you."

I didn't respond right away. King had a way of saying things that stuck with you, whether you wanted them to or not.

"Did Damier ever tell you about his great-uncle Michael?" King asked, suddenly breaking the silence.

I nodded. Damier had told me about him on some drunk shit.

"Michael was Damian before Damian. Thought he was untouchable. Thought the family rules didn't apply to him. You know where he ended up?"

"Dead," I said simply.

"Locked in the basement until he starved," King corrected. "Because that's what happens when family crosses family. Damian thinks he's untouchable. It's time we remind him who the fuck we are."

Before I could respond, the back door creaked open, and one of our men who worked this location stepped inside, his expression tense.

"Yo, Hocus, I'm glad you're here," he started, glancing at me nervously. "You think



Damier's really got this? With all due respect, he's been... distracted."

The room went silent. I stared at him, annoyed.

"You questioning the boss?" I asked, my voice calm but sharp.

"I'm just saying, Troy's out there running wild, and Damier's caught up living the billionaire lifestyle. It don't look good."

I stood up, stepping closer to him. "Listen, don't let the calm fool you. Damier built this empire, and he's the reason you're still breathing. You don't like how shit's run, there's the door. But you spread doubt like that again, and I'll handle you myself. Got it?"

The man nodded quickly, backing down. "Well, Nino had me bring the niggas here to y'all. What you wanna do with them?"

"Murk them niggas, and we will be handling Troy ourselves."

The boy walked out and closed the door.

King chuckled, shaking his head. "Nephew, you've got a fire I've always admired."

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When I finally made it home, the house was quiet. Chanel was putting the kids to bed, her voice soft as she read them a bedtime story. I stood in the doorway, watching for a moment before heading to the kitchen to pour myself a drink.

A few minutes later, Chanel joined me, wrapping her arms around my waist. "Long day?" she asked, her voice muffled against my chest.

“You don’t know the half of it,” I said, kissing her forehead.

She smiled up at me. “Well, I’m glad you’re home. Now, about that promise...”

I chuckled, letting her pull me toward the bedroom. For now, I could let the chaos wait. But I knew that in a few days, it would be time to face these niggas—and nothing about that was going to be easy.

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*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

I was back on the grind now that my sister was out of sight. She had been getting on a nigga's nerves about laying low, so I did. But as soon as she told me she was moving out of the country because her friend was killed, I knew it was time to make my moves again on Damier. Kita told me Damier might have been the one who killed her friend, but I didn't give a fuck. The nigga hadn't come for me yet, but it was kill or be killed. I had been going by his spots, shooting up his workers, and robbing they bitch ass. Damier didn't scare me.

I drove to his sister's condo, adrenaline pumping as we parked a few streets away, hidden under the cover of darkness. I watched from a distance as Damier's younger sister stepped out with a group of friends, her laughter ringing out in the night air. But she wasn't alone. Security guards flanked her, keeping a close eye on everything around them.

"Damn," Danni muttered. "Looks like she's got protection."

I gritted my teeth, watching them pile into a waiting Maybach. There was no way to get to her, not with the security detail surrounding her. "Fuck it. We'll hit the club and burn that shit down. Then, I'm going get at his momma," I said, gripping the wheel. "He can protect his sister all he wants, but his dead-ass club is ours tonight."

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The clock on the dashboard blinked 4:00 a.m. The world outside the car was dark, the streets deserted, the only sound being the hum of the engine and the occasional swipe of the windshield wipers. I gripped the wheel tighter, the leather creaking under my hands as my mind raced. Every thought in my head was consumed by the same

thing—revenge.

Damier was going to feel my wrath. The time for waiting was over. The time for caution had passed. I was done playing nice. I'd been patient, yes, but patience had only gotten me so far. Now, it was time to make him understand the consequences of crossing me.

As I pulled into the parking lot of the club, the world outside felt strangely quiet—eerily quiet like the calm before the storm. The parking lot stretched out before us, almost empty except for a few scattered cars and the looming silhouette of the club. The dim lights of the club reflected off the polished asphalt, casting long shadows. It looked almost too still, too peaceful. It didn't match the chaos brewing inside me.

I parked the car and shut off the engine. The interior of the vehicle fell into an oppressive silence. I could feel my heartbeat quicken as the weight of what I was about to do settled over me. I wasn't just about to burn down a building; I was about to take everything Damier had built, everything he loved, and watch it burn to the ground. That wasn't something I could take back, but it was something I needed to do.

For a moment, I let the stillness wash over me. Then, I reached for the gas cans in the backseat. The metal rattled as I grabbed them, the sound sharp in the dead of night.

"You ready?" I asked, turning to my companion—Danni.

He gave me a brief nod, his face shadowed under the hood of his jacket. There was no hesitation in his eyes. He'd been with me from the start and was the only one left alive in my crew. We both knew what needed to be done.

"Let's go," I muttered, my voice low, steady. There was no room for fear, no room

for second-guessing. Only purpose. Only the fire of my revenge.

We stepped out of the car, and the air felt colder than usual. A strange chill crept over my skin as we walked toward the club's entrance. The quiet night was unnerving as if the whole city was holding its breath.

Our footsteps echoed off the pavement, a rhythmic sound that felt almost ominous in the silence. I could feel the weight of the moment pressing down on me with every step. The flames, the smoke, the destruction—I could see it all in my mind, feel it rising inside me like an unstoppable force. Every ounce of my being was focused on one thing: Damier's downfall. And this was how it would begin.

We reached the front doors of the club, and I could almost taste the revenge in the air. The thought of watching everything Damier worked for go up in flames made my dick hard. It would be swift. It would be final. He would never see it coming.

As I stepped forward to light the first match, a sudden rustle from the shadows stopped me in my tracks. I froze, my hand tightening around the gas can.

Before I could even react, two massive figures emerged from the dark, stepping out from behind the dumpsters and the shadows like shadows themselves. Their movements were too swift, too calculated. In an instant, they were on us. Strong arms grabbed me from behind, dragging me off balance. I struggled, trying to break free, but their grip was iron-tight.

"Shit!" I hissed, twisting my body, trying to get out of their grasp, but it was no use. They were too strong, too fast. My limbs were pinned down, and my heart was pounding in my chest.

I heard Troy's muffled shout, but before I could react, a cloth was pressed over my face. The fabric was rough against my skin, and the sharp, sickly-sweet scent filled

my nostrils, making my stomach lurch. I struggled harder, gasping for air, but the smell was overpowering. My head spun, my vision blurred, and my limbs began to grow heavy like they were made of lead.

“Bitch ass—” I tried to curse, but the words came out slurred and weak. The world around me was fading. The last thing I remembered before everything went black was the weight of the cloth over my face and the feeling of my body giving in to the darkness.

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I don’t know how long I was out, but when I came to, my head was throbbing, and my vision was blurry. Blinking, I took in my surroundings, trying to shake off the lingering haze. I was tied to a chair in the middle of the desert, my hands bound tightly behind me. Panic gripped me as I struggled against the ropes, my breath coming in short, frantic gasps.

And then I saw him. Standing in front of me, his arms crossed, a smug, satisfied smirk on his face. Damier’s bitch ass.

“Finally woke yo’ bitch ass up,” he drawled, stepping forward. “You really thought you could come after me, my nigga? I run LA. Can’t nobody come for me.”

I gritted my teeth, defiantly meeting his gaze. “You don’t run shit, Damier. And your brother runs you. Just because you got me, don’t think my peoples won’t hunt you down.”

He chuckled, the sound low and menacing. “You’re right about one thing. It’s not over. Not until I say it is.” He leaned in closer, his voice dropping to a whisper. “And right now, you’re at my mercy.”

My stomach twisted as I looked down and saw it—a bomb strapped to my chest, the timer ticking down slowly. The sight of it sent a cold wave of terror through me, and I struggled against my restraints, my mind racing.

“You wouldn’t,” I managed to choke out, my voice trembling despite myself. “You’re not that ruthless.”

“Ruthless?” Damier laughed, stepping back, his eyes gleaming with a cold, merciless fire. “You don’t know the first thing about ruthlessness, my boy. But you’re about to find out.”

He straightened, his face hardening. “You fucked with the wrong person, and now you’re going to pay. See you in hell, bitch ass nigga.”

As he turned to leave, I felt the weight of my actions crashing down on me. The timer on the bomb ticked louder, each second stretching out into an eternity. I could feel my heartbeat pounding in my ears, my mind racing as I realized just how far out of my depth I was.

This was the end. And it was all my fault.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

I was in a pure haze as I sat in an Italian diner in Hollywood, way in the back, waiting for King to walk back in, along with a few men we were having a meeting with. After taking out Troy, I was officially numb with every soul I'd taken in the last few months on my shoulder. But here I was with my poker face that was starting to fade.

I missed Imani and what we were building. I had been texting her every morning, just to say good morning, in the middle of the day to see if she ate, and sending her a goodnight text. She responded very briefly, but she let me send her lunch a couple of times. I thought if I did the little things she liked, maybe it would mean something. Maybe starting slow was what we needed, but I knew this was all about what was revealed with my mental health. I was going to fix it. I promised her I would, so I was going to keep my word.

I snapped out of my thoughts when Uncle King walked in after taking a phone call, looking like he had nothing bothering him. I envied his strength, and I thought I was strong like him, but I wasn't. I was broken with a bunch of demons attached to me, and I couldn't keep a woman to save my life.

"What's up, nephew? You ready for this meeting? Boy say he can bring in millions in a matter of months!" Uncle King said excitedly.

"Yeah, you told me," I bitterly replied. Money hadn't moved me in years.

"Oh," he said, snapping his fingers. "You remember Mady, right?"

I squinted my eyes. "Nah, not that I recall."



“Ol girl that was flirting with you at the spot the other night. Madilyn.”

“Oh, yeah, what about her?”

“I think she crushin’ on you, nephew. Maybe a hood chick with a lil class might be what you’re missing. You are always going for the stuck-up ones when you need a woman who has the same interests as you, which is the streets.”

I chuckled. “Not interested. My life is complicated enough with women.”

“Well, outside of that, she is a teacher at Lynwood High, and she asked me to give you her card. Tonight is career day there for the seniors, and she was wondering if you would come sit in as the entrepreneur.” He smirked.

I chuckled. “Get the fuck out of here, Unc. A teacher? She works at a fuckin’ trap house.”

“Working for us is her side job, but she’s good peeps. She been trying to get out of the streets for a while. Shit, the streets paid for her teaching degree.” He shrugged.

“I just strapped a bomb to a nigga’s chest, and you think I am some role model? Only thing I can teach them kids is how to scale a key of coke.”

“I think it’s a good look. You are always worried about your public image, and this could be another thing to slap on your professional resume.” He slid me her card. I gazed at it.

Madilyn Love.

She had an interesting name, and I suddenly remembered her face. She did have the look of a teacher. She had long black hair, but she had a streak of gray in the front.

She was very soft-spoken, and she had a nice body, but I wasn't interested. However, going to the career day did cross my mind.

“Let's see how this meeting goes, then I'll think about popping in on a career day.”

Minutes later, the door opened, and a crew of Italians walked in like they were the bosses. I sat back in my chair, sizing them up, my face a mask of calm. I wasn't fond of working with outsiders, especially after the Felix incident. They were through King, so I had to respect it. He told me that these men had what we needed—money and the kind of connects out of the country that could keep the family on top.

Their leader, Marco, stepped forward. He was tall and sharply dressed with slicked-back hair and a gold chain peeking out from beneath his collar. His crew followed him, each one wearing an air of quiet confidence.

I gestured to the table. “Have a seat.”

They sat, exchanging nods but no words. These were businessmen, and I could already tell this meeting wasn't going to involve small talk or pleasantries.

“I'll get straight to the point,” I said, slightly leaning forward. “I know who you are, and I know what you bring to the table. But one thing my source didn't give me is where you're based.” My gaze flicked between them, sharp and probing. “I know you're Italians, but where's home?”

Marco hesitated, his fingers drumming lightly on the table. He exchanged a brief glance with one of his men before finally answering. “Canada,” he said, his voice steady.

I raised an eyebrow, feigning mild interest while my mind raced. Canada . A wave of annoyance hit me instinctively, but I didn't let it show. Damian . He was hiding

somewhere in Canada, and now these men—Italians connected to the same underworld—were saying they were based there, too. Coincidence ? I doubted it.

“Canada,” I repeated, my tone neutral. “That’s unexpected.”

Marco nodded. “Our family moved there years ago on a business venture. We were kids then, but we grew up there and built something. It’s home now, but we don’t have the plug we need. We have all the connects to make money but no product.”

I leaned back, steepling my fingers as I processed his words. My instincts told me there was more to this connection than Marco was letting on, but I kept my thoughts to myself. Damian’s name didn’t come up, and I wasn’t about to bring it into the room either. This wasn’t the time or place to tip my hand. I knew where Damian was, so I didn’t need any leads. King was handling everything for us to get to him. I was just waiting for him to tell me our next move. Until then, it was business as usual.

“Fair enough,” I smoothly said, shifting the conversation. “Let’s get to business.

The meeting with the Italians went exactly as I expected—efficient, cold, and all about the money. They talked numbers, distribution routes, and promises of quick returns. They had access to planes and niggas who knew how to cross the border. I listened carefully, nodding where necessary, but my mind was still turning over their connection to Canada. It didn’t sit right with me, but I stayed focused.

I stood up after they finished their pitch. My eyes swept across the room, cutting through the calculated confidence they wore. I wasn’t here to impress them; I was here to make sure they understood who they were dealing with.

“You want to promise millions in a few months?” I started, my voice low but commanding. “That’s fine. I’ve heard bigger promises from men with smaller pockets. But let me make one thing clear before we go any further.”

I paused, letting the weight of my words sink in. The room was silent, their attention fixed on me.

“You don’t get to disrespect me,” I said sharply. “Not when I’m the one bringing the weight to the table. You treat me with the respect I give you, and we’ll all eat. Disrespect me, and I’ll show you just how dangerous a nigga can be.”

Marco’s expression remained neutral, but I saw the flicker of something in his eyes—respect, maybe even a hint of unease. Good. I wanted them to understand exactly who they were dealing with.

Finally, Marco nodded, his tone measured. “Understood.”

“Good,” I said, my voice firm. “Now, let’s talk terms.”

As the Italians filed out of the room an hour later, I leaned against the edge of the table, watching them go. They’d agreed to everything I laid out, but I could still feel the tension lingering in the air. These men weren’t the kind to bend easily, but they’d bent tonight. And I knew why.

Respect. It was the only currency that mattered in this business, and I’d made sure they understood exactly how much mine was worth.

King smirked from his spot by the window. “Let’s hope they don’t turn on us, especially saying they are in Canada. I knew we needed our product in Canada, but I can’t help but think of Damian being there. Italians got a way of smiling in your face while they’re sharpening the knife behind your back. But we gon’ see.”

I nodded, still deep in thought. My mind wandered back to Canada, just like Uncle King, to Damian, and to the possibility that these men knew more than they were letting on. But I pushed the thought aside. For now, I had bigger things to handle.

“Let’s get out of here,” I finally said. “I’ve got shit to think about.”

King and I exchanged a glance, but he didn’t push me for more. He knew better than to ask questions I wasn’t ready to answer.

We cruised through the streets of Los Angeles, the Porsche’s engine growling beneath us as we headed to South Central. The usual lights and noise of the city felt distant as if I was floating through it all without really being a part of it. I didn’t feel the connection to the streets that I used to. This life, this empire—it was mine, but it was also a cage.

At some point, I pulled out a blunt, the familiar weight of it in my hand giving me something to focus on. I lit it, inhaling the smoke deeply, trying to clear my mind, but all that filled my thoughts were the echoes of everything I had lost.

“I’m a narcissist, Unc, and I’m depressed. I might hand this shit over to you soon,” I blurted as the THC got the best of me.

King glanced at me from the driver’s seat, his voice breaking through my thoughts. “You know, nephew, you gotta stop letting these women get in your head because I’m sure that’s where you got them thoughts from. Ain’t no room for that shit right now.”

I exhaled sharply, the smoke curling in the air. “Yeah, I know. It’s just... a lot. I’m trying to figure it all out, but it feels like I’m losing control.”

King shrugged, keeping his eyes on the road. “You gotta focus on the business, my boy. Focus on what’s important. All this mental health shit? Ain’t nobody got time for that. Look at Damian. That boy’s got more issues than a fuckin’ magazine, but he’s still out here pulling strings. Ain’t nobody got time for a soft heart. Just keep your mind on the prize.”

I knew he wasn't going to understand. King didn't believe in mental illness. He never had. To him, it was a weakness, something to be ignored, shoved aside. I expected him to say that, but it still stung.

We pulled on Crenshaw, and the juice bar came into view, its neon sign casting a soft glow over the parking lot. King pulled in, parking next to Hocus's black Range Rover. Even from outside, the place looked spotless—employees moving efficiently, customers sipping on their overpriced smoothies. Hocus ran a tight ship, and I respected that about him.

We stepped out of the car, the cool night air hitting me as I flicked the blunt away. The faint smell of fruit and freshly blended drinks greeted us as we walked inside.

Hocus was behind the counter, dressed clean in a button-up and slacks, looking more like a corporate exec than a man tied to the Knight empire. He spotted us immediately, nodding to his employees before stepping out from behind the counter.

“What's good, fellas?” he said, clasping my hand in a firm shake. “Y'all looking like you just handled business.”

King smirked, leaning against the counter. “We did. Italians are in. Took a little convincing, but they know who's running shit now.”

Hocus chuckled, nodding toward me. “You give 'em the speech?”

I shrugged, a small grin tugging at my lips. “Let them know the deal. Respect me, and I'll respect them. Disrespect me, and I'll show them what a real nigga looks like.”

“They take it?” Hocus asked.

King nodded. “They didn't have much choice.”

We all laughed, but the energy shifted when Hocus's expression grew more serious.

"The Troy nigga. That shit's all over the news," he said, crossing his arms.

I chuckled darkly, the memory of the explosion still fresh in my mind. "Just how I like to see niggas—smoked out and handled."

King shook his head, his smirk fading. "Yeah, well, it's drawing heat. But that's not our biggest problem right now."

He turned to Hocus, his tone growing sharper. "I already told you a few days ago, but now that we know Damian's in Canada, it's time to bring him back to the States."

Hocus nodded, his jaw tightening. "I'm ready whenever y'all are."

King looked at me, his gaze heavy. "What about you, nephew? You ready to handle this? We have to, knowing these Italians are from out there. We don't want him somehow interfering. That boy is crazy, but he's smart, just like you."

I didn't answer right away. My eyes fixed on the counter as I rubbed a hand over my face. "Give me a few days," I finally said.

King raised an eyebrow. "Why a few days?"

I sighed, the weight of it all pressing down on me. "Because I can't believe my own blood is after me. Every move Damian makes, it's like he's daring me to end him. And I've been trying to avoid it because... I don't know if I can."

The room fell quiet. Even Hocus, usually quick to jump in with a comment, stayed silent.

King leaned forward, his voice softer. “Look, nephew, you’ve got nothing to worry about once it’s done. Damian made his choice. It’s him or us. And you know what happens when family crosses family.”

I nodded slowly, the truth of his words sinking in.

King straightened up, his tone shifting back to business. “Just be ready. We leave soon, and I don’t want any hesitation when the time comes.”

I exhaled sharply, the tension in my chest refusing to ease. “I hear you, Unc. But I don’t want to think about it tonight.”

King nodded, letting it go—for now. “A’ight. Let’s get you back to your spot. You’ve got some thinking to do.”

“Yeah,” I muttered. “Take me home.”

As we left the juice bar, I glanced back at Hocus. He gave me a quick nod, his way of letting me know he had my back, no matter what. That’s what I needed to focus on—the ones who were still loyal. The ones who still believed in me.

King pulled out of the parking lot, the city lights flashing past the windows. I leaned back, closing my eyes, but the thought of Damian lingered. No matter how much I tried to push it away, his shadow was always there, waiting.

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It was 6:00 p.m. when I found myself parked in my garage, sitting alone in the driver’s seat of my Bentley. The weight of the day was pressing on me, but I had to focus. I couldn’t keep letting everything distract me.



I had promised Imani I would fix myself. That's why I had been texting her every morning—just to say good morning. Then, in the middle of the day, I would check in, asking if she had eaten and making sure she was okay. She responded, but only briefly. Still, I held onto the small victories, thinking maybe starting slow was what we needed. But, deep down, I knew it wasn't about small victories anymore. It was about fixing the shit that had gotten out of hand.

I pulled out my phone, staring at the screen for a moment. I wasn't ready to beg Imani for forgiveness. So, I dialed a different number. I called Madilyn.

"Hey, Damier!" she answered quickly, her voice light. "What's up?"

I exhaled, running a hand through my hair. "Not much. Just trying to stay busy. What's the deal with career day?"

"Oh! You're coming? It's starting in an hour, but you can speak last if you want. You'd be perfect for the entrepreneur slot," she said, her voice soft and inviting.

I thought about it for a moment. "Yeah, I'll be there. I need to get out of my head for a minute."

I heard the playful tone in her voice as she continued. "I think the kids are gonna love you. You're a billionaire entrepreneur, after all."

There was a slight pause before she added, "And maybe we can grab some food after?"

I wasn't falling for it. I had to keep my focus. "We'll see," I said, trying to keep things casual.

As we disconnected the call, I couldn't help but smile a little. I knew she was trying

to flirt, but I wasn't going to let that get the best of me. Not tonight.

I sat back in the seat, thinking to myself, I'm too easy. I gotta stop letting women get the best of my emotions. It wasn't just Madilyn—it was all of them. I couldn't let that define me.

I arrived at Lynwood High, walking into the gymnasium with the sound of students chatting and buzzing around. It was a simple career day, but something about it felt... different. I wasn't just here for the kids—I was here for myself. I needed to remind myself that I was more than what I had been doing. More than just a drug lord.

The lawyer, the doctor, the firefighter, and the chef all spoke first, each one presenting their career, but I could feel the room's energy shift when I walked in. The kids were already intrigued. The fact that I was a billionaire seemed to spark their interest before I even said a word.

When it was my turn, I stood up confidently, letting the room quiet down. Madilyn introduced me as a billionaire entrepreneur with several ventures under my belt.

I began, "I have degrees in business and finance. I turned my family's nightclub business into an empire within ten years. I own clubs in Paris and New York. But that's not all—I've also invested in fast food chains, supported local charities, and worked with the city's mayor and manager on several projects."

The kids' eyes lit up as I spoke about the Knight Foundation—what we were doing for the community, building computer labs, providing scholarships, offering jobs, and helping sick children.

"Before I go, I just want to say one more thing. Respect yourself, and others will respect you," I said, quoting something that had always stuck with me.

By the time I finished, the room erupted in applause. It wasn't because I was a billionaire. It was because I was more than that. I was a man who had built something from nothing, and they knew that.

At the end of the session, the lawyer and the doctor came up to me. The lawyer, Spencer, spoke as he shook my hand. "After hearing your journey, I admired you, Damier," he said. "I wanted to be like you, even when I was studying to be a lawyer."

One of the students came up for an autograph, saying her mom loved me from the show. I hesitated, but Madilyn urged me to sign. I did, and for a moment, I felt the weight of my celebrity status—something I had almost forgotten about.

Once everyone cleared out, Madilyn and I stayed behind and talked.

"How does a woman who works in a trap house become a teacher?"

She smirked. "The same way you're a drug lord and a billionaire."

She went on to explain how she cared about the youth and wanted to help them, even if her side job could get her fired. She told me she wanted to get out of the streets, especially now that she was pushing forty. I sympathized with that because it was something that had been nagging at the back of my mind as well.

"I respect that," I said, nodding. "Come by my office tomorrow. We'll have breakfast. I might have a legit job for you."

She smiled, agreeing, and I left feeling better than I had in a long time. It was a small step, but it felt like a big one.

For the first time in a while, I wasn't thinking about the next move. I was thinking about what came after that. And maybe I was finally seeing that I was more than just

the man I had been.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The bathroom lights hummed quietly, their glow casting a faint, golden sheen over the sleek marble tiles. I leaned over the polished sink, staring into the mirror at a face I barely recognized. Bloodshot eyes, hollow cheeks, and a haunted expression. I looked like a man unraveling—and I was.

The bottle of Don Julio rested on the counter next to me, already halfway empty. I gripped it tightly, lifting it to my lips for another swig. The burn in my throat was the only thing keeping me tethered to reality, but even that was starting to slip.

“You think he’s coming for you, don’t you?” The voice was sharp and cruel, and it echoed in my mind like a bad song on repeat.

I shook my head, muttering under my breath. “Shut up. Just shut the fuck up.”

“He knows where you are, Damian. He’s always known. You brought her here, and now they’re coming. You think you can run forever?”

I slammed the bottle down on the counter, the glass rattling against the sink. My breathing was shallow, my heart racing. “He ain’t coming,” I whispered, trying to convince myself. “He doesn’t know shit.”

“Oh, but he does,” the voice taunted. “You saw the way she looked when she got here. She was followed. You’re not safe here. Not anywhere.”

I gripped the edge of the sink. “I’m not scared of that nigga,” I muttered, my voice barely audible. “If he comes, I’ll send someone to kill him first. You hear me? I’ll send someone to take his ass out.”

The voice laughed, a cruel, mocking sound that made my skin crawl. “You’ve always been scared of him. He controls you, Damian. Always has, always will.”

I squeezed my eyes shut, the memory of our first real fallout hitting me like a brick.

It was six years ago, before I looked at Arika, back when Damier still trusted me enough to let me manage one of the Knight family’s warehouses alone. The money was good, but it wasn’t enough for me. I started skimming off the top—small amounts at first, nothing he’d notice. But Damier noticed everything.

I still remember the way he stormed into the warehouse that day, his presence commanding the room. He didn’t even yell. That wasn’t his style. He just walked up to me, his eyes cold, and said, “You been taking money off the top, Damian?”

I tried to play it cool, but the look in his eyes made my stomach drop. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

He scoffed, shaking his head. “You really think I’m stupid, huh? I’ve been watching you, little bro. You’ve been skimming, and you’re lucky I don’t kill you for it.”

I clenched my fists, my blood boiling. “You ain’t gonna do shit,” I snapped. “You don’t control me, Damier. You are my twin, not my boss.”

His laugh was low and dangerous. “Huh? You’re only standing here because I let you. Don’t forget that.”

He walked out after that, leaving me standing there humiliated in front of our cousins. He didn’t fire me, didn’t punish me. He only put my cousin over the money. That was worse than punishing me. He let me stay under supervision, but I knew I’d never be more than a pawn in his game. I hated him for it.

The memory faded, replaced by the cruel laughter of the voices in my head.

I gripped the sink tighter, my chest heaving. “I hate him,” I whispered, my voice breaking. “I hate him so much.”

“You should,” the voice replied. “He ruined your life. He made you lose your mind. He’s the reason you’re hiding like a coward.”

“I’m not hiding,” I growled. “I’m surviving.”

The voice laughed again, a chilling sound that echoed in the small bathroom. “Keep telling yourself that, Damian. But he’s coming for you. And when he does, you won’t stand a chance.”

The bathroom door creaked open, snapping me out of my spiraling thoughts. Kita stepped inside, her face pale and concerned.

“Damian?” she said softly, her eyes scanning the scene. “Who are you talking to?”

I stared at her, the bottle still clutched in my hand. For a moment, I didn’t say anything. Then, finally, I muttered, “My friend.”

Her brows furrowed as she stepped closer. “Your friend? What friend?”

I sighed, my shoulders slumping. “He’s in my head. He’s been there for years. The voices I hear tell me shit, fuck with me. Sometimes they stop, but they always come back.”

Her eyes softened, and she reached out to touch my arm. “Damian... why didn’t you tell me?”

I let out a bitter laugh. “What difference does it make? I’m already fucked up. And now you’re here, carrying my baby, and I can’t even guarantee we’re safe. He’s gonna find me, Kita. He’s gonna lock me away and starve me like my grandfather did my great-uncle Michael, and there ain’t shit I can do about it. I know he isn’t just going to blow my head off.”

She shook her head, her voice steady. “You’re not the only one with demons, Damian. I have bipolar depression. I’ve had it for years. That’s part of why I... why I felt drawn to you. I saw the pill bottles. I knew you were fighting something, too.”

Her words caught me off guard. I stared at her, my mind racing.

“You think that’s supposed to make me feel better?” I snapped, pulling away from her touch. “I don’t need a fuckin’ support group, Kita. I need to figure out how to stay alive. How to keep us alive. I know he is going to kill you and my baby too.”

She didn’t flinch, her voice calm but firm. “I’m not trying to fix you, Damian. But you can’t keep fighting this alone. You need help.”

“Help?” I scoffed, the bitterness spilling over. “You think I can go to therapy? Talk about how my own brother has me hiding in a fucking foreign country?”

She grabbed my face, forcing me to look at her. “Damian, stop. You’re letting him live rent-free in your head. You’re letting him win.”

Her words hit me like a punch to the gut. My chest tightened, and before I could stop it, tears spilled down my face. I hated crying. It made me feel weak.

The voices in my head laughed louder, mocking me. “He’s coming for you, Damian. He’s coming.”



I covered my ears, sinking to the floor. “Shut up!” I screamed. “Shut the fuck up!”

Kita knelt beside me, pulling me into her arms. “It’s okay,” she whispered. “I’ve got you.”

For the first time in a long time, I let myself lean into someone else.

I snapped out of the moment, remembering I had a meeting with my new crew in Canada. They were some Italian niggas who I had met at the club that were from here and were hungry for some Mexican product. I told them my family was the only one with that plug, so I pulled some invisible strings to link them. They knew my beef with Damier, at least what I told them, just so they wouldn’t speak my name to him. I needed money and my family’s plug, so I made it happen, even though it was risky. There was no way I could touch Damier, so I was going to continue to hit his pockets. He was going to supply me one way or another.

“I’m about to have some niggas come through. Open the door for them while I shower, and then take yo’ ass straight to the room, and don’t come out until I say so.”

Kita nodded and then left the bathroom.

I got in the shower, the voices still going, but I pushed them to the back of my mind as much as I could so I could get through this meeting.

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My apartment smelled of expensive cologne and cigars, with my new Italian crew lounging in my living room as if it was their shit. I adjusted my black Versace sweater and Cuban chain around my neck as I stepped out of the hallway and into their line of sight.

“There he is,” one of them said, a smug grin on his face.

His name was Marco, the mouthpiece of the crew. The rest of them—Luca, Sal, and Enzo—watched me carefully. They were all dressed sharp, like they had just stepped out of a mafia movie, but their eyes told me they weren’t here to play.

“You’re late,” Marco said, his voice clipped.

I ignored him, taking a seat across from them. “Nigga, don’t try to check me. Let’s get to it.”

Marco leaned forward, steepling his fingers. “We need to talk about your brother.”

“Do we?” I said flatly, keeping my face unreadable.

Marco chuckled darkly. “We weren’t fond of Damier’s attitude when we met him. He’s got this... superiority complex. Like he thinks he’s untouchable. We’re not interested in being under him. We want the product, not the man. He made it a point to tell us to respect him. I don’t respect anyone.”

The room went silent for a beat, tension thick in the air.

“You want the work?” I asked calmly, leaning back in my chair. “Then you respect him. That’s the deal. You respect him, and you’ll get what you need. I want the nigga dead, but he has what we need.”

Sal scoffed, shaking his head. “And if we don’t? What then? One wrong word from Damier, and he’s out of here?”

I was irritated, but I didn’t take the bait. “Listen,” I said slowly, my tone steady. “I get it. My brother rubs people the wrong way. Hell, he rubs me the wrong way. But if

you think you're going to rob him or take him out, you're dead wrong. Only I make that call."

The room fell into a tense silence again. I could feel their eyes on me, judging every word, every movement.

"Damier's untouchable," I firmly said. "And not because I'm protecting him. It's because there's a bigger picture here. You fuck with him, you fuck with the entire Knight empire. And trust me, you don't want that smoke."

The Italians exchanged glances, their expressions unreadable. Finally, Marco leaned back, a sly smile tugging at his lips. "Fair enough. But let's hope your brother learns how to keep his mouth in check. For all our sakes."

I nodded, standing up. "I know for a fact that is your first and last time seeing him. He does the deal, and then he passes over the dirty work to his team. This meeting is over, though. You've got what you came for. Don't fuck it up."

The Italians filed out one by one, their presence leaving a heavy weight in the room. As the door clicked shut behind them, I let out a slow breath, the tension in my shoulders refusing to ease.

I stepped into the bedroom to find Kita sitting on the edge of the bed, her shoulders hunched, her face buried in her hands. She was crying softly, her body shaking with each breath.

"What's wrong now?" I said, keeping my voice neutral. I was too tired to deal with more chaos tonight.

She looked up at me, her eyes red and swollen. "I called my mom," she said, her voice trembling. "I found out... Troy's dead."

I froze. “What?”

“They found his remains in the desert days ago,” she whispered, her voice cracking. “Blown up. They said he’s gone, Damian. Gone.”

I frowned, the image of Troy’s mangled body flashing in my mind. I knew immediately who was responsible. Damier. This had his signature all over it. But what pissed me off more was that Kita had made a call without letting me know.

“You called your mom?” I repeated in a sharper tone.

She nodded, tears streaming down her face. “I needed to know?—”

“Are you fucking stupid?” I snapped, cutting her off. “You know how dangerous that is? You don’t think niggas are watching us?”

She flinched at my tone, but I couldn’t stop. The anger, the paranoia—it was bubbling over. “You wanna end up like your weak ass brother? You wanna get me killed? Get yourself killed? That baby killed?”

Her face crumpled, and for a split second, I wanted to hit her. My hand twitched at my side, but the voice in my head stopped me.

“Don’t,” it hissed. “She’s pregnant. Don’t be stupid.”

I took a step back, running a hand over my face. The voice in my head was right. I couldn’t lose control. Not now. Not like this.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered, her voice breaking. “I didn’t mean to?—”

“Shut up,” I muttered, snatching her phone off the nightstand. I scrolled through the

call history, my blood boiling. “No more calls. You hear me? None. You wanna be reckless, go back to Cali. Let Damier kill you and that baby. I don’t give a fuck, but don’t drag me into your bullshit.”

Her sobs grew louder, but I didn’t care. My chest felt tight, the voices whispering again. “He’s coming for you, Damian,” they said, laughing darkly. “He’s coming.”

I dropped the phone onto the dresser, gripping the edge to steady myself. Kita was still crying, but her voice felt distant, drowned out by the chaos in my head.

“Damian...” she said softly, but I couldn’t respond. I couldn’t think. All I could do was listen to the voices.

And they wouldn’t stop laughing.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

I sat in the driver's seat of my new 7 Series BMW, the engine softly purring, parked in the quiet corner of a parking lot. The sun was beginning to dip lower in the sky, casting an orange glow over everything, but I barely noticed the beauty of the evening. My thoughts were consumed with everything that had been weighing on me.

The therapy session I just had with Jackie, my mentor and psychiatrist, kept running through my mind. I had gone in there with every intention of unloading, of venting about Damier, about how lost I felt after everything that had happened. But I left with my heart heavier than when I had walked in.

Jackie had listened patiently as I poured my heart out. I told her about how Damier had shut me out for two weeks, how I felt like I had been too much for him, too intense with my “diagnosis” of his mental health, and how I had ended things when I wasn't ready. I talked about the confusion, the way he seemed to spiral, and how I felt like I couldn't do anything to fix it.

But Jackie didn't comfort me. No, she did something worse—she told me I was wrong. The words hit me like a punch to the gut. She didn't say it harshly, but it stung nonetheless.

“Imani,” she said, her voice firm but kind. “You can't fix him. You shouldn't have diagnosed him, either. That's not your place if you are trying to enter a relationship with him. He's not a patient. He's a man, and you crossed a line. You've been pulling him into your own mess of anxiety and trying to make sense of his life when you need to focus on your own.”

Her words rattled me. They cut through the self-righteous armor I had been wearing.

She was right. I hadn't been treating Damier as a man—I had treated him like a case study. I had been so focused on trying to help him that I hadn't even acknowledged how much I needed help myself.

Jackie continued, “You need to fix things with him. You're not perfect, and neither is he, but pushing him away because you couldn't face your own feelings was a mistake. You've been through a lot—your brother's health, your career—now it's time to face your own anxiety, your own fears. You need to take care of yourself before you can help anyone else, especially him.”

That last part hit hard. I had been trying to help Damier, but I hadn't even started to deal with my own baggage. My mental health, my anxiety, my relationship with my brother—it all needed attention. I couldn't fix everything around me if I didn't start with myself.

I left Jackie's office feeling like a hypocrite. I knew she was right. I had been avoiding my own problems while trying to fix everyone else's. And the truth was, I was scared. Scared of confronting the mess inside me. Scared of what I might find.

But now, I couldn't avoid it anymore. I had to face the truth—about myself and about Damier.

Snapping back into the present, my hands gripped the steering wheel as I took a deep breath. I had to fix things; I knew I couldn't keep running from this. Although I wasn't sure how to face Damier yet, I had to try. I had to go to him and apologize for pushing him away. It wasn't about fixing him; it was about meeting him where he was.

I drove to Roscoe's, trying to clear my head. As soon as I walked through the door, I felt my best friend's familiar presence. Zaraa was sitting in our usual booth, grinning as I slid into the seat across from her.

“I’m so over reality TV,” Zaraa said, rolling her eyes. “I’m getting back to school. Gonna go for my nursing degree. Gotta stop letting these producers control my life.”

I couldn’t help but laugh, though my mind wasn’t fully on her words.

We ordered our food, and it came back quickly. I picked at my meal, a half-hearted attempt at enjoying the crispy wings in front of me. My mind kept wandering to Damier. I couldn’t ignore it anymore. The pain of breaking up with him, of pushing him away... It was suffocating. However, it was nobody’s fault but mine.

“Ugh! You need to make up with your man,” Zaraa said, frustrated, her hand waving toward me. “I don’t like this side of you, Dream. You used to be all bubbly, and you are hardly eating. But now? You’re all up in your head.”

I sighed, the heaviness of her words making my chest tighten. I had vented to her the night before. “I know. I’ve been stupid. I don’t even know how to approach him anymore.”

Zaraa raised an eyebrow and smirked. “Oh, I know what you need to do. Go get yourself some sexy lingerie. Show up at his place. Tell him how you feel. Apologize if you have to! You know how to get a man’s attention.”

I chuckled despite myself, but the idea lingered in my mind. “I’m not sure I’m ready for that. Plus, I did that at the beginning of our relationship. He isn’t fond of surprises, but he did let me in.”

“Girl, so what! You gotta make the first move. I know these niggas. He’s not gonna chase you down. You need to go get him before someone else does. A rich single man doesn’t exist for too long!”

I laughed again, this time a little louder, but it didn’t change the fact that Zaraa was



right. I needed to face my fears. I needed to apologize, to be honest with him, and most importantly, with myself.

We finished up at Roscoe's, and Zaraa and I headed to the mall. Taking her advice, I picked out a few lingerie pieces, each one making me hesitate a little more than the last. However, when I got home, I got cold feet.

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I woke up the next morning with Damier on my mind. It felt like an endless loop—thinking about him, missing him, wondering how I could fix what I had broken. But I knew I couldn't keep running away. I couldn't keep pretending that I wasn't scared.

I got dressed quickly, and before I could second-guess myself, I was heading out the door. I was going to his office. He hated surprises, but that was exactly what he was going to get. I needed to see him.

I got to the reception desk, and Mia was standing there talking to the receptionist. She was deep in her conversation, so she quickly told me Damier was in his office and pointed to the door. When I walked into the office, I didn't expect to see what I did. Damier was sitting across from a woman, and they were laughing—laughing like they had history together. She was leaning in a little too close to him for my comfort. The sight twisted something inside me.

Damier looked up and froze when he saw me. His eyes widened, and for a moment, I saw something flash in his gaze—surprise, maybe even guilt.

“What you doin' here?” he asked, his voice tight.

“We need to talk,” I said, my heart racing. “Can she excuse herself?”

The woman glanced at Damier, and he turned to her. “Wait in the lobby. We’ll finish in a few minutes.”

The woman and I briefly locked eyes, and I didn’t even ask about her. I didn’t care. This wasn’t about her. It was about us.

Damier and I sat on the couch in his office, and for the first time, I let myself break down in front of him.

“I’m sorry,” I started, my voice trembling. “I pushed you into something you weren’t ready for. I shouldn’t have diagnosed you. It wasn’t my place to do that. I don’t want you to feel like I’m judging you. I just... I’m sorry for how I acted. You were right. I was scared, and I didn’t know how to handle my feelings.”

Tears welled in my eyes. I hadn’t let myself cry in front of him before. But now, it was the only thing that felt right.

Damier scooted closer, wrapping his arms around me. “You don’t have to apologize,” he said, his voice soft. “I know my life isn’t easy to adjust to, but I’m gonna make it comfortable for you. I never meant to hurt you. We can take it slow, but we’ll get through this. Together.”

We stayed like that, silent, for what felt like an eternity. When he finally pulled back, he kissed the top of my head and said, “Come to my penthouse tonight. We’ll finish this talk then. I got a long list of shit to do here at the office. My mother is supposed to come with good news about my club.”

I looked up at him, finally able to ask, “Are you fucking her?”

He shook his head. “No. She’s just here for breakfast. She works for me, but I’m looking to find her something legit.”

I believed him. And with that, I finally felt the weight in my chest lift.

I left his office feeling lighter, ready to face whatever came next with him. I had apologized. Now, we could rebuild. But when I went to see my brother and mother, my day took a different turn.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

I watched the door to my office close behind Dream. Madi had left minutes ago while she waited for me to finish up. I didn't mind the distraction, but now that Imani had walked her ass into my office, she was stuck to my brain. I could still feel her softness in my arms, the vulnerability she'd shown.

Madi reentered the room quietly, her expression more neutral than before. She slid back into her seat, and we resumed our meal. But something was different now. The air was thick with unspoken tension, and it wasn't just the food sitting untouched between us—it was me. It was my thoughts on Dream.

The silence hung heavily for a while, and then Madi broke it, her voice easy but curious. "Is that your girlfriend?" she asked, her gaze flicking toward me.

I didn't have to think about it. "Yeah," I replied, not adding any more details.

She nodded, her lips curling into a small, understanding smile, though it didn't quite reach her eyes. We continued to eat, but the quiet between us felt suffocating. Every movement I made, every word I spoke, seemed to bring me back to Dream.

I let the conversation go silent, focusing on my laptop and trying to get back to business. As I scrolled through some messages, something caught my eye—a financial literacy class being held at Prince Bank in Beverly Hills. It seemed perfect for Madi.

"This might be something for you," I said, turning my laptop to her. "It's a class at Prince Bank, teaching financial literacy. The owner is a mentor of mine and a good friend. He's got a program running, and I can get you a spot. Good pay and it's right

up your alley.”

She leaned over and read the details, her eyes lighting up as she absorbed the information. “You really think I could do it?”

“I know you can,” I replied, knowing she’d excel in this position. “Since you’re a math teacher and an economics teacher, it should be easy for you.”

Her smile spread across her face. “Thank you, Damier. I really appreciate this. I value our friendship more than anything—more than any potential relationship,” she said, her voice sincere.

I chuckled softly, leaning back in my chair, relieved. “That’s good to know.”

I was glad we were on the same page. Madi wasn’t looking for anything more from me. And frankly, I couldn’t juggle another woman right now. With everything going on in my life, I needed a clean break from complications.

Just as we finished eating, Madi walked out, and my mother walked into my office, her face alight with a smile that was rare for her. I knew she only came in with good news when she looked like that.

“Please tell me you got good news, Ma,” I said, already half-smiling.

“I do, by the grace of God,” she replied, her tone triumphant. “I got the club back. We’re reopening this weekend.”

A weight lifted from my shoulders, and I couldn’t hide the grin that spread across my face.

“Tell me more,” I said, leaning forward, eager for more details.

“I had to remind the city manager who the fuck I am. He wasn’t trying to budge, so I almost had to blow his damn brains out,” she said with a casualness that made me laugh. “Had to remind him how much I’m paying him. He got the picture after that.”

I chuckled, shaking my head, realizing where my own hot temper came from.

“I can’t believe you sometimes, lady.”

She grinned. “It’s the family blood. We don’t back down.”

After she delivered the good news, she left, and I was on the phone with my staff in no time, telling them to get ready to return to work on Friday night. Everything was falling back into place.

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By the time I made it to my penthouse, the sun was setting, and I was hungry. I ordered wings and cognac to celebrate the reopening of the club. The day had been long, but I knew things were starting to shift. I was back on top.

Just as I was getting into my food, I heard my doorbell. I went to the door, and Dream was standing there, carrying her overnight bag with a determined look on her face. I couldn’t help the smile that crept onto my lips. She wasn’t leaving. I felt a quiet relief flood through me.

But then I noticed it—there was a bitterness in her expression, something I had seen lately. The tension that had built between us wasn’t just gone. It was still there, lingering like a cloud.

I let her in and greeted her with a hug. We sat at the island, and I set my wings aside, pushing them toward her. She picked at the meal, but her mind clearly wasn’t on

food.

“I know we have to talk about what happened between us, but I have something to tell you. My brother has to go through chemo again,” she said, her voice heavy. “I visited him after I left your office, and he said he wanted to die. It crushed me, Damier, especially because my mother is thinking about letting him pass. The doctors said he’ll never get better.”

My heart sank. I reached for her hand across the counter, my throat tight with emotion. “I’m so sorry to hear that. I’m here for you, Dream. For your family, whatever you need.”

She broke down in front of me, her tears flowing freely. I wiped my hands and pulled her into my arms. I didn’t care about anything else we had been going through. She was hurting, and I would be there for her. I couldn’t fix everything, but I could damn sure be there.

“I’m glad I can cry in your arms,” she whispered between sobs. “I’m just... so tired of being strong all the time.”

“You don’t have to be strong right now,” I whispered back, holding her tighter. “I’ve got you. Don’t worry about anything.”

After a few moments, I let her go, but the weight of her brother’s condition stayed heavy on both of us. After knowing his condition fully and how long he had been suffering. I knew why he felt the way he did. I didn’t bring up what we were going through; I didn’t want to put any more weight on her. She had apologized earlier, and her being in my presence let me know we were ready to move forward and not argue.

We finished eating, the silence hanging between us like a heavy curtain.

I turned on some oldies, letting the music settle the mood, and rolled a blunt. Dream, in her usual playful way, began to pull out lingerie. She flashed each piece, and they all were sexy to me.

“Which one do you want me to wear for this makeup sex?” She smirked as she tossed the sexy red one onto my lap. I laughed, almost spitting out my cognac.

“You’ll be wearing all of them,” I said. “Because you’re not going home anytime soon.”

We spent the next couple of hours just vibing. The atmosphere was lighter now, though there were still moments of quiet between us. When Dream headed to the bedroom to take a bath, I stayed behind, drinking and smoking, my thoughts swirling. The weight of the day and the emotional strain of the past few weeks were catching up to me.

Dream stayed in my jacuzzi tub for an hour, and I dozed off on the couch. When I woke up, it was to the feeling of Dream straddling me in black lingerie. Her body pressed against mine, and I could feel myself instantly responding. My manhood hardened as she slid down and took me in her mouth, her tongue working me with a precision that made my toes curl.

“I’m sorry, baby,” she whispered between strokes with her hand, her voice sultry and apologetic. “I won’t ever pry into your mental again. I want you for who you are. I don’t want to change you.”

My body responded impulsively, but in my mind, it wasn’t just about the pleasure. It was about the connection, the bond between us that had been fractured and was now slowly healing. We made love, and it was like we were both trying to say everything that words couldn’t express.



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Three Days Later

It was early in the morning when I heard a knock on my door while I lay on the couch with Dream. We had just gone to sleep an hour ago, so I was tired. We stayed up all night for the third time, talking about everything. The last three days were just us in the house, getting to know each other mentally and physically. We stayed wrapped up in each other, finding solace in the quiet moments, the intimacy, and the connection we shared. It was something we needed. We had closed out the world and focused on us. But all good things had to come to an end.

I rubbed my eyes and glanced at my phone. It was King telling me to open the door. When I opened it, he and Hocus stood there with smug looks on their faces.

“Pack a bag, nephew,” he called through the door. “Our flight to Canada is waiting.”

I looked over at Dream, still asleep on the couch. I had made my decision. I was going to take care of business, but when I got back, I was going to make sure we were good.

I walked over and kissed her gently on the forehead, waking her up. “I’ll be back soon. Don’t go nowhere. If you go to work, come back here.”

She looked nervous but nodded. “Okay. Be careful.”

I left my penthouse, hoping I would be gone for no more than two days, but as I closed the door behind me, I couldn’t shake the feeling that things were about to change again.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

It had been five days since Damier left for Canada. Five days of silence, no calls, no texts, no explanations. He'd told me to stay at his penthouse before he left like it was some kind of casual suggestion, but something about the way he said it felt... permanent.

At first, I thought I wouldn't like staying there. The penthouse was too big, too empty without him. But as the days passed, I found myself settling in by bringing in my work clothes to hang up. The luxury kitchen became my favorite space. I'd started stocking the fridge with groceries, buying things I could cook, and imagining what it'd be like to live with him. Damier wasn't exactly domestic, but I could picture him leaning on the marble island while I made breakfast, his deep voice teasing me about my "hood girl" cooking techniques.

This morning, I was up early, moving through the walk-in closet he had all but offered me, pulling on a fitted dress for work. I glanced at the dresser, where his black credit card lay beside a note in his bold handwriting.

Buy whatever you want for the house.

I laughed softly to myself. He didn't have to tell me twice. I'd already stocked the kitchen with enough food to feed a family of five and grabbed a few homey things to make the place feel less... sterile.

As I brushed my long, slick ponytail and slipped into my Chanel heels, I thought about how strange it was to feel so comfortable here. I'd never lived with a man before, never even considered it. But with Damier... it felt possible. It felt right .

Before leaving, my eyes fell on the Bentley key fob on the counter. I hesitated for half a second before grabbing it. I knew he wouldn't care if I drove it, but something about taking his car felt intimate like I was stepping even deeper into his world.

Sliding into the driver's seat, his scent immediately hit me—the Creed cologne he always wore. It clung to the leather like a reminder of him, and I smiled to myself, shaking my head. “Damn,” I muttered under my breath, gripping the steering wheel. “I really am starting to love this nigga for real.”

I pulled into the clinic parking lot earlier than usual. The sun was just beginning to rise, casting a soft glow over the city. It was quiet—just how I liked it. Arriving before my staff gave me time to breathe, to center myself before the chaos of the day began.

As I stepped out of the Bentley, my eyes immediately caught sight of something unusual near the clinic door. A car seat.

My brows furrowed in confusion as I walked closer. The car seat had a blanket draped over it, and when I got closer and took the blanket off, it wasn't empty. A baby was inside.

I froze for a moment, staring down at the tiny figure inside. The baby was awake, looking up at me with wide, curious eyes. He couldn't have been more than a month old, clean, and bundled tightly in the blanket.

“What the hell...” I whispered, leaning down to pick up the car seat.

My hands trembled slightly as I pulled back the blanket, revealing the baby's small, round face. He let out a soft coo, as if completely unbothered by the fact that he'd been left here.

As I lifted him, something slipped out from beneath him and fluttered to the ground.

A birth certificate.

I bent down to pick it up, my heart racing. My eyes quickly scanned the document, and my stomach dropped when I saw the last name Knight .

“What the...” My voice trailed off as I stared at the paper, my mind racing. Was this... Damier’s baby?

I cradled the baby against me, his tiny body warm and fragile in my arms. My first instinct was to call the police, but something stopped me. If this child was connected to Damier, I needed to handle this carefully.

I put the baby back down to fish my phone out of my purse. I dialed his number, but it went straight to voicemail. I tried again and again, but the result was the same. Frustration bubbled up in my chest as I stared at the baby. “Of course, you’re unreachable,” I muttered.

My next thought was Mrs. Knight. She’d know what to do.

My hands trembled as I dialed her number. She answered on the second ring, her voice calm and collected as always.

“Mrs. Knight, it’s Imani,” I quickly said, my voice tight. “I need you to come to my clinic as soon as you can. I will text you the address.”

There was a pause on the other end before she responded, her tone laced with concern. “What’s going on, Imani? You sound upset.”

I glanced at the baby in the car seat, then back at the birth certificate in my hand. “I don’t feel comfortable saying it over the phone,” I said, my voice faltering. “But it’s important. Please, just come. I really need you here.”

Another pause. Then, her voice came through, steady and firm. "I'm on my way. Hang tight, and don't do anything until I get there."

"Okay. Thank you."

I took the baby inside and sat in the lobby. I still had an hour until I opened, and I was hoping Mrs. Knight would take the baby. There wasn't anything I could do for it with my full schedule. There was no way I could have a baby in my clinic.

Within twenty minutes, Mrs. Knight arrived, looking more regal and more composed than I would've been in this situation. She stepped into the clinic with a mix of urgency and calm, her eyes immediately finding me and the baby in the car seat.

"Oh, lord," she said, exhaling sharply. "What happened?"

I gestured to the car seat on the couch. "I found him outside the clinic this morning. He was just... sitting there. Then, this fell out." I handed her the birth certificate.

She glanced at it, her face tightening as she read the name. "Donshay Knight," she murmured.

"Do you think this is real?" I asked, my voice barely above a whisper. I suddenly walked over and picked him up. He was too cute to just let him sit in the car seat.

Mrs. Knight looked at the baby as I picked him up, then back at me. "I don't know," she admitted. "But if this child has our name, there's a reason for it. And we need to figure out what that is."

I nodded, shifting the baby slightly in my arms as he let out a tiny yawn. "Do you think... he knows?"

"Damier?" she asked, raising an eyebrow. "If he does, he hasn't told me. And I doubt

he'd keep something like this quiet unless he had a damn good reason."

We both fell silent, the weight of the situation settling over us. The baby squirmed slightly, his little fingers reaching out to grab my necklace. I couldn't help but smile despite the chaos swirling in my mind.

"What do we do now?" I asked.

Mrs. Knight sighed, running a hand over her perfectly styled hair. "We wait. Until Damier gets back, there's not much else we can do. Just keep him safe. Keep him close. I will take him to my estate for now. I don't want the state involved yet."

I nodded, my grip on the baby tightening slightly. As much as I wanted answers, I knew they wouldn't come until Damier returned.

As the day wore on, I couldn't stop thinking about the birth certificate. The baby's name was listed, but the space for the mother's name was blank.

Who is this baby's mother? And why had she left him here?

The questions swirled in my mind, but the answers felt just out of reach. All I could do was wait and hope that when Damier came back, he'd be able to explain everything.

For now, the baby was safe. But deep down, I knew this was only the beginning.

To Be Continued...