



Beneath The Surface Of His Heart 3

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Category: Urban

Description: They thought I couldn't be touched. That I was untouchable. That's what power does—it makes people forget you bleed just like them. But this time, it's different. This time, the betrayal cuts deep.

My own twin, Damian, thought he could cross me and live to tell about it. Thought he could play in my world, take from me, set me up, and still breathe easy. No. That ends now. Blood might make us family, but betrayal? That makes you a dead man walking.

While I'm tying up loose ends, my world is shifting. Dream—my woman, my peace—isn't just here for the good times. She's with me even when the walls close in. Even when my past refuses to stay buried. But love isn't just candlelit dinners and whispered promises—it's war. And I'm about to prove I'll go to hell and back to protect what's mine.

There's a baby with my name, a brother who needs erasing, and a city that still whispers my name with fear. The last pieces are falling into place, and when the smoke clears, only one of us is going to be standing.

I built this empire. I wrote the rules. And I'll be damned if anyone—family or not—thinks they can rewrite my story.

This is the endgame. The final act. And I promise you this: it's going to be brutal.

Because when you cross a Knight... there's no turning back.

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

The sound of my jet's engine was steady, a quiet rhythm that usually helped me relax, but tonight, I was far from calm. I sat back in the plush leather seat of my private plane, my headphones on, listening to *The 48 Laws of Power*. The narrator's voice was crisp and calculated, each word sharpening my focus. It wasn't my first time hearing it—I'd read the book five times—but tonight, the words hit differently.

I stared out the window at the endless stretch of dark sky. I had been to Canada before, but this trip was different. It wasn't business, at least not the usual kind. I was heading there to drag my own identical twin back. The thought left a bitter taste in my mouth, and I clenched my jaw as the narrator spoke about crushing your enemies completely. I wasn't sure what Damian was anymore—blood or enemy—but either way, this had to end.

The audiobook droned on as my eyelids grew heavy. The weight of the past few weeks had finally caught up with me—Kita's betrayal, Troy's demise, and the knowledge that Damian had been hiding in plain sight. I started to drift, my thoughts swirling with anger and exhaustion.

Then, a nudge at my shoulder snapped me awake.

"Yo," Hocus said, his tone low but urgent. He had his phone in hand, the glow of the screen casting shadows on his face. "You need to see this."

I pulled my headphones off, blinking away the grogginess as I sat up. "What is it?"

Hocus handed me his phone, his expression serious. "Marco's Instagram. Check his story."

I frowned, scrolling to the video Hocus had queued up. Marco was in the foreground, laughing and talking shit in Italian, but it wasn't him I was focused on. In the background, sitting lowkey, wearing dark YSL shades and dressed in all black, was Damian.

The audacity.

The casual way he lounged in the background, sipping a drink, as if he didn't have the weight of betrayal on his shoulders. As if he hadn't been running from me for months.

I handed the phone back to Hocus, irritation running through my veins. "Get Marco on the phone. Now."

Hocus nodded, already dialing. The phone rang a few times before Marco's voice came through, smooth and cocky.

"Damier," Marco greeted, his tone light. "What can I do for you?"

I leaned forward, my voice cold and sharp. "Stop the bullshit, Marco. I know Damian sent you to do business with me. I just saw him in your Instagram story, sitting in the back like a sore thumb. Let me make this clear—if you want this deal to go through, you're going to hand him and his bitch over to me."

There was a pause on the other end. Marco didn't respond immediately, and I could practically hear the wheels turning in his head.

"Listen," I continued, my tone dropping to something darker. "I'm sure my weak-ass brother told you what I'm capable of. You want this venture to stay legit? You want to make money? Then you don't cross me. You hand him over to make my job easier, or this deal is off, and we're enemies. And trust me, Marco—you don't want me as an

enemy.”

The line stayed silent for a beat before Marco finally responded, his voice quieter now. “Alright. I’ll set it up. I’m a businessman, not a soldier.”

“Send the address where we can meet. It’s funny because I am already on my way out there to snatch him up,” I flatly said. “So, don’t try any funny shit. I’m not coming alone, and I’m strapped.”

Marco hesitated but eventually agreed. “Okay. I’ll text you a location where we can meet.”

I hung up, leaning back in my seat as I exhaled slowly. My blood was still boiling, but at least the first move was in play. Now, I didn’t have to walk into a death trap by kicking in Damian’s door.

King chuckled from across the aisle, his arms crossed as he watched me. “You think Marco knows what kind of shit he’s in now?”

I smirked, shaking my head. “He’ll figure it out soon enough.”

King leaned forward, grinning. “Man, Damian’s going to shit himself when he sees us. That boy thought he could run forever.”

“He’ll fight,” I said, my tone matter-of-fact. “He always does. But I’m ready.”

King’s grin widened, but I didn’t share his amusement. My mind was already running through every possible scenario. Damian wasn’t going to come quietly, and I didn’t expect him to. But whether he fought or not, this was going to end.

I turned my gaze back to the window, the lights of the jet blinking against the dark

sky. I wasn't there to negotiate. I was there to remind Damian who I was—and what happens when you cross a Knight.

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The warehouse had a cold, hollow feeling to it, but I didn't mind. It was quiet, isolated—a place where I could think and make my next move. Sitting at a scratched-up metal table, I focused on breaking down the blunt I was rolling. The repetitive motion of my fingers calmed the noise in my head.

Across from me, Kita sat sipping her water, her body tense but trying to look relaxed. She'd been quieter than usual, and I didn't know if it was the pregnancy or just her nerves. Either way, I didn't give a fuck. My mind was on bigger things.

Marco was supposed to meet me here. He'd assured me everything was in place and that shipments from Damier were a done deal. I knew I was playing a dangerous game, but I needed that supply line. If Marco wanted to stay in my good graces, he'd follow through.

"Relax," I told Kita, not looking up from my blunt.

"I am relaxed," she said, her voice clipped.

I glanced at her and smirked. "You should be. You're with the nigga who's about to take everything from his big brother."

But even as I said it, my stomach turned. The voice in my head laughed.

You think this is going to work? Damier's always two steps ahead, and you know it. He is going to know you are behind Marco.

I shook the thought away, licking the edge of the blunt to seal it. I was done letting

my brother live rent-free in my head.

As I sat back and lit the blunt, the distant creak of the warehouse door opening pulled my attention. I expected Marco's usual cocky stride to come through, but instead, I heard more footsteps than I should've.

The hair on the back of my neck stood up, and I felt the familiar buzz of paranoia creeping in. I stayed seated, though, pretending I didn't feel the shift in the air.

The footsteps got closer, and before I could even turn my head, an arm wrapped around my neck, yanking me backward.

"Yeah," a voice hissed in my ear, low and venomous. "I've been waiting to do this to you, pussy."

Damier.

My head flared with rage. His grip on my neck was tight, choking off my air as I clawed at his arm. My blunt dropped to the floor, forgotten in the chaos.

"Let me go, nigga!" I roared, my voice strangled as I thrashed against him.

"Shut the fuck up," Damier spat, dragging me backward until I fell from the chair onto the cold concrete.

Before I could gather my bearings, his fist connected with my face, the force of the punch snapping my head to the side. Pain exploded across my jaw, but I barely felt it through the red haze of anger.

From the corner of my eye, I saw Hocus grab Kita, slapping handcuffs on her wrists as she screamed in protest. The sound was muffled a moment later by the tape he

slapped over her mouth.

“Kita!” I tried to yell, but Damier’s fist silenced me again.

He didn’t stop. Punch after punch rained down, each one harder than the last. Blood filled my mouth, and I could feel my face swelling, but I refused to cry out. I refused to give him the satisfaction.

“This what you wanted?” he growled, his voice full of venom as he hit me again. “You thought you could run? Hide? Betray me and get away with it?”

The pain was distant now, my body starting to shut down. My vision blurred. The warehouse lights above me were spinning.

“You’re a bitch,” he hissed, leaning close to my face. “And now, you’re gonna pay for everything.”

I tried to speak, to spit some insult at him, but my voice was gone. My body gave out, the darkness swallowing me whole.

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When I came to, the air smelled like blood and dust. My vision was blurry from blood, but I could hear voices around me, sharp and loud. My head throbbed, and every breath sent a spike of pain through my ribs.

“Wake his ass all the way up,” I heard Damier say, his tone ice-cold.

A splash of cold water hit my face, shocking me fully awake. I blinked rapidly, my surroundings coming into focus. I was still in the warehouse, now slumped against the wall. Hocus stood over me, a water bottle in his hand, while King leaned casually

against the table, his arms crossed. Marco was nowhere in sight, but I knew he had set me up.

Damier crouched in front of me, his face expressionless but his eyes burning with fury. “Thought I wouldn’t find you?”

I spat blood onto the floor while glaring up at him. “Fuck you,” I muttered, my voice hoarse.

He laughed, but there was no humor in it. “Still wanna talk shit, I see.”

Kita whimpered from the corner of the room, her wrists bound and her mouth taped shut. Her eyes were wide with fear, darting between Damier and me.

“This your bitch now, my nigga?” Damier said, jerking his head toward her. “This pillhead, lying bitch? This bitch ran to you and tried to sic her brother on me.”

I clenched my fists, my body trembling with rage. “Leave her out of this. She’s pregnant,” I growled.

“You think I give a fuck?” he snapped, his voice rising. “She’s just as guilty as you are. Running, lying, trying to set me up. You two deserve each other but in hell.”

He stood abruptly, looking down at me like I was nothing. “You’re not my brother anymore,” he said, his voice cold. “You’re just another nigga I had to deal with.”

I felt the weight of his words, the finality of them. But as he turned to walk away, I forced myself to speak. “You’ll regret this. I’m not the only one out to get you. Once I die, things will come up missing in your life,” I said, my voice shaky but defiant.

He paused, glancing over his shoulder. “No, my nigga. The only regret I have is not

handling you sooner. I'm going outside. Get they bitch asses ready for this flight."

"A flight?" I frowned.

"Yeah, I gotta handle you in front of family. Thank ya mother." He chuckled, trying to be sarcastic.

I stared at him, my mind racing as the meaning of his words sank in. A flight. He wasn't just planning to handle me here, in the shadows of some warehouse. He was taking me back—to the family, to the estate, to where it all began.

For a moment, I felt something twist in my chest. Fear? No. Rage. Pure, unfiltered rage. He wanted to humiliate me, to parade me in front of the family like some kind of failure.

"You think dragging me back is going to fix shit? Kill me now!" I spat, my voice raw and full of venom.

Damier turned fully, his calm exterior cracking just slightly as a dark smirk curled on his lips. "Fix it?" he repeated, his tone mocking. "Nah. This isn't about fixing shit, dummy. This is about ending it."

He turned back to Hocus and King, giving them a nod. "Get him cleaned up enough to fly. This bitch, too. I don't want blood on my leather seats."

King chuckled, his low, gravelly voice filling the room. "Boy, this is gonna be one hell of a family reunion."

I clenched my fists, my blood boiling as Hocus grabbed my arm and yanked me to my feet. My head throbbed, my vision still swimming from the punches, but I refused to let them see weakness.

As they hauled me toward the exit, Kita whimpered again, her wide eyes locking on mine. I wanted to comfort her, to say something, but what could I say? I'd brought her into this mess, and now I didn't even know how to get us out.

Damier stayed behind, his back to us as we were dragged away. His presence loomed large, even in silence, and for the first time in years, I felt small.

But as the cold night air hit my face and we were shoved into the back of a blacked-out SUV, one thought burned brighter than the rest:

This wasn't over. Not by a long shot.

Damier thought he'd won, thought he had everything under control. But he didn't know me as well as he thought he did. He'd regret the day he decided to bring me back to face the family.

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Sitting on the new beige suede couch in my mama's living room, I felt like my chest had been cracked open and left raw. The smell of coffee lingered in the air, but I couldn't bring myself to sip mine. Mama sat across from me, her face worn with sleepless nights and too many tears. Her voice broke the silence, soft but heavy.

"There's a medicine, Imani," she started, her fingers twisting the edge of her sweater. "It'll put him to rest like he wants. Peacefully."

I blinked at her, irritated. "Not this again, Mama."

She sighed, her eyes glistening. "Please listen, Imani. He's tired, baby. He told me again last night he doesn't want to fight anymore. The chemo... it's too much for him. He just wants to go."

The words hit me like a brick in the chest. My throat dried as I stared at her, hoping I'd heard wrong. "And you're okay with that? Just letting him—" I couldn't even finish the sentence.

Mama nodded, her voice steady but her eyes betraying her pain. "I'm not okay with it, but I'm tired of seeing my boy suffer. His body is worn out, Imani. He's got a right to decide when enough is enough."

I shook my head, my vision blurring. "So, what now? We just... watch him die?"

She reached for my hand, her grip firm. "The doctor told me about a procedure. It's something we can do at home. It's peaceful, but it's expensive. Thousands, Imani, but cheaper than months and years of chemo."

The number didn't even matter. My baby brother, my heart, was slipping away, and there was nothing I could do.

"I'll pay for it," I said, my voice cracking. "Whatever it costs, I'll cover it."

Her face softened, and for the first time in days, I saw a flicker of relief in her eyes.

After a while, I stood and went to my brother's room. The sight of him broke me. He was sprawled on the bed in red thermo pajamas, his once-strong frame now frail and shadowed. His breaths were shallow, his skin dry. The pain medicine had him so out of it that he didn't even stir when I knelt beside him.

I took his hand, my voice trembling as I whispered, "God, if this is what he wants, help me accept it. But please, make it easier because I'm not ready to let go."

I kissed his forehead, my tears soaking onto his bald head. Then, I pulled myself together, handed Mama a few hundred dollars to get started, and left. With everything going on with my brother, I still had to live my life...

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Back at Damier's penthouse, I stared at my reflection in the mirror, dabbing concealer under my eyes to hide the evidence of my tears. My hands shook as I brushed out my silk press. I couldn't afford to look like I'd just been through hell—not today. It was Saturday, so Mrs. Knight had invited me to brunch, and while I didn't know what kind of event it was, I knew I had to look my best.

I slipped into a brown silk wrap dress that hugged my curves in all the right places and paired it with gold YSL heels. With one last swipe of nude MAC lipglass, I grabbed my clutch purse and headed out the door.

When I pulled into the parking lot of the restaurant in Beverly Hills, Mrs. Knight was already there, waiting for me next to her 7-series Mercedes. She looked as poised and regal as ever in her Versace shades, her tailored suit and diamond earrings practically screaming money and power.

“Dream, you look stunning. Thank you for coming,” she greeted me with a nod, her tone cordial but not warm.

“Thank you, Mrs. Knight. So do you. I wouldn’t have missed this for the world,” I replied, forcing a polite smile.

She studied me for a moment, her eyes sharp and calculating.

“Dream, I want to like you. I do. That’s why I brought you out with me to get a good feel of you. You seem sweet, and you’ve got a good head on your shoulders. But my family has been through hell watching Damier deal with broken relationships. Divorces, betrayals... you name it. I don’t want that for him again. He loves hard and easily, like his father. I’ve seen it in him as a kid. So, I try to protect his heart with my life.”

Her words stung, but I held my ground. “Mrs. Knight, I’m not like the others. I love Damier for who he is, not what he has. Even if that baby turns out to really be his, I’m staying. And I know what his position in the family means. I’m willing to take that risk because he’s worth it.”

She studied me for a moment before a faint smirk tugged at her lips. “My son really likes you, and we don’t need another timid woman in our family. I’m going to believe you are the woman you say you are. But, before we go inside, there’s something you need to know.”

I frowned, my stomach twisting. “What is it?”

She took a step closer, her voice dropping to a low, serious tone. “The women inside are married to powerful and dangerous men. Billionaires who work with and for Damier. This isn’t just a brunch, Dream. It’s a gathering of women who live in a world most people can’t even imagine. They’ll sense if you are tense or unsure, so whatever emotions you are feeling, leave them here in this parking lot.”

I straightened my shoulders, meeting her gaze head-on. “You don’t have to worry about me, Mrs. Knight. I can handle myself.”

Her lips curved into a faint smile. “Alright then. Let’s see how you fit into our environment.”

The restaurant was stunning, with high ceilings, crystal chandeliers, and floor-to-ceiling windows that overlooked the city. The brunch spread was lavish, with everything from smoked salmon and caviar to fresh fruit and pastries.

As we walked into the private dining room, I felt the weight of a dozen eyes on me. The women were dressed impeccably, their designer outfits and flawless makeup putting most runway models to shame. I recognized one face immediately: Chanel, who greeted me warmly with a hug. We’d bonded during the Jamaica trip, and her presence was a small comfort in the sea of strangers.

“Ladies, this is Dream,” Mrs. Knight announced, her voice carrying over the soft hum of conversation. “She’s with Damier now.”

There was a murmur of interest as the women looked me over, their gazes assessing. One of them, a tall woman with blonde hair and piercing hazel eyes, smiled warmly.

“Love your hair,” she said. “It’s so natural. Definitely Damier’s type.”

I smiled politely, thanking her, but before I could say more, another woman, bolder

than the rest, leaned forward with a smirk.

“So, Dream,” she said, her tone dripping with curiosity. “Are you really ready for this life? Because the last women... well, let’s just say they weren’t.”

I met her gaze without hesitation, my confidence unwavering. “I’m not the last women,” I said, my tone calm but cocky. “I know how to handle a man like Damier. I’m not here for the lifestyle; I’m here for him. That’s why I’ll last.”

The room fell silent for a moment before the bold woman leaned back, a sly smile spreading across her lips. “I like her,” she said, her voice carrying a note of approval.

The tension eased, and the women started chatting again, their attention no longer focused solely on me.

As the brunch continued, I found myself relaxing, even laughing at some of the stories the women shared. Mrs. Knight was a natural hostess, her presence commanding and elegant as she moved through the room.

But even as I enjoyed myself, my mind kept drifting to Damier. It had been days since I’d seen him, and the ache of his absence was becoming harder to ignore.

As the brunch wound down, I stood near the entrance with Chanel, exchanging light conversation while the other women gathered their coats and handbags. The sun streamed through the restaurant’s windows, casting golden light over the lavish space. Despite the heavy morning I’d had, I felt lighter, as if I’d just taken a big step into Damier’s world and held my own.

Mrs. Knight caught my eye from across the room and gave me a slight nod, her posture poised and commanding as always. As the women began to file out, she walked over to me, her heels clicking softly against the polished floors.

“Dream,” she said, motioning for me to follow her to the side, away from the others.

I followed her, my heart skipping a beat as I braced for whatever she was about to say. Once we were out of earshot, she turned to me, her expression softer than it had been earlier.

“I owe you an apology,” she began, her tone measured but sincere. “For the way I came at you in the parking lot. I’ve been overly protective of my son, and maybe that made me come off harsher than I intended.”

I blinked, surprised by the admission. “Mrs. Knight, I understand. You’re just looking out for Damier. I can’t fault you for that.”

She nodded, a faint smile tugging at her lips. “I see now that you’re different, Dream. You’ve got a good head on your shoulders, and you mean what you say. I’m going to trust that you’re sincere about your feelings for my son.”

Hearing her say it felt like a weight had been lifted off my chest. “Thank you,” I softly said. “That means a lot to me.”

Her expression shifted, and she leaned in slightly, lowering her voice. “I also wanted to let you know... I briefly spoke to Damier earlier today. He’s fine, and he should be back in a few more days. Maybe even less. I haven’t told him about the baby yet, but we will address it when he’s home. I’m sure he will come to see me first, so I will explain everything to him.”

Relief washed over me, and I let out a breath I didn’t realize I’d been holding. “He’s okay?” I asked, my voice barely above a whisper. I heard everything she said about the baby, but my concern was Damier.

She nodded. “Yes, he’s okay. I thought you’d want to know.”

“Thank you,” I said again, my voice steadier this time. The idea of seeing him soon, of knowing he was safe, gave me something to hold onto.

Mrs. Knight straightened, her regal demeanor returning. “Take care, Dream. I’ll see you again soon, I’m sure.”

I nodded, watching as she turned and left with the last of the women. For a moment, I stood there alone, letting the relief sink in. Damier was okay. He’d be back soon. That was all I needed to hear.

Instead of heading to the penthouse, I found myself driving back to my mama’s house. The weight of the morning had crept back into my eyes, and I didn’t want to be alone. When I walked in, the house was quiet, the air heavy with the same somber stillness it always seemed to hold these days.

I slipped into my brother’s room and found him lying in bed, his breathing soft and even. His face was peaceful, and for the first time in weeks, he didn’t look like he was in pain. I eased onto the bed beside him, careful not to wake him.

“I’m here,” I whispered. “I’m here, baby brother.”

Lying there in the quiet, I let myself just be. The exhaustion of the day caught up with me, and I felt my eyes grow heavy. Whatever came tomorrow, I’d face it. For now, being there with him was enough.

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The sound of the plane's engine was too loud, or maybe it wasn't loud enough—because even over the noise, I couldn't drown out Damian talking to himself. I was cuffed to my seat, the cold metal biting into my wrists, and every jolt of turbulence made the restraints dig deeper into my skin. Across from me, Damian sat slumped in his seat, his face bruised, his eyes red-rimmed from crying.

"They're gonna torture me," he said, his voice cracking. "You too, Kita. That nigga doesn't leave loose ends."

I rolled my eyes, even as my stomach twisted at his words. He might've been right, but I wasn't about to let him see how scared I was. "You think whining like a little bitch is gonna save us?" I snapped. "Shut up, Damian. You're the one who said he wouldn't find us."

He turned his head to glare at me, tears streaking his face. "Well, he did, Kita. Stop acting like you weren't knee-deep in this shit before I even came into the picture. Don't act innocent now."

"Oh, so this is my fault?" I shot back, my voice rising. "I didn't ask you to betray your brother or run your mouth about things you couldn't handle."

"I didn't ask you to suck my dick as revenge or send Troy after him!" Damian fired back, his voice shaking with anger. "I can't even say sorry because you're just as dirty in this as I am!"

I clenched my fists, the cuffs rattling against the armrests. "You're pathetic, Damian. Always trying to push the blame onto someone else. Grow the fuck up."

We went back and forth, our voices rising above the drone of the engine. Across the aisle, Hocus sat with his feet propped up on a seat with a Glock in his lap, watching us with an expression of pure irritation. Finally, he leaned forward, his deep voice cutting through our argument like a knife.

“Dead people shouldn’t be talking,” he flatly said, his dark eyes locking on Damian. “Y’all keep running your mouths like someone gives a fuck.”

Damian turned his anger toward Hocus, his lips curling into a sneer. “You’re just a flunkie,” he spat. “A lapdog for Damier. You’ll never be anything more. Damier’s the billionaire, not you.”

Hocus’s expression didn’t change, not even a twitch. Calm as ever, he reached into his backpack, pulled out a roll of duct tape, and tore off two strips. Before either of us could react, he slapped one piece over Damian’s mouth and then leaned over to do the same to me.

“Finally,” Hocus muttered, settling back into his seat. “Some peace and quiet.”

I glared at him, my chest heaving with anger, but the tape silenced me. Damian thrashed in his seat, his muffled protests falling on deaf ears. Hocus closed his eyes like he was about to take a nap, leaving us to stew in our frustration and fear.

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When the plane landed, Hocus yanked Damian out of his seat first, dragging him down the aisle. He didn’t even glance back at me as two more men appeared, their faces blank as they unbuckled me and hauled me to my feet. My wrists were still cuffed, and my legs felt like jelly as they marched me out of the plane. The cold night air hit my face, sharp and biting, and I shivered as I was shoved into a blacked-out SUV.

I tried to ask where we were going, but the tape over my mouth turned my words into muffled grunts. One of the men blindfolded me, the darkness pressing down on me like a weight. My heart raced as the car started moving. The smooth hum of the engine and the occasional bump of the road were the only sounds around me. I had no idea where they were taking me, and not knowing was almost worse than anything else.

I clenched my thighs, desperate to relieve the growing pressure in my bladder. “Mmmph,” I tried to say, twisting my wrists against the cuffs. The men ignored me, and I bit down hard on the inside of my cheek to keep from crying.

The drive felt endless, every second stretching out like an hour. Finally, the car came to a stop, and I was yanked out, my legs nearly buckling as my feet hit the ground. They marched me inside somewhere—I could feel the change in the air, the warmth of an interior space replacing the chill outside. The faint scent of expensive perfume and polished wood hit my nose. Wherever this was, it reeked of money.

When they sat me down, I barely had time to process before someone ripped the blindfold off. I blinked against the sudden light, my eyes adjusting to the sight of a tall, elegant woman standing in front of me. My stomach dropped.

Mrs. Knight.

Everyone in Los Angeles knew her. She wasn’t just Damier and Damian’s mother—she was a legend in her own right, a woman whose power rivaled that of the men in her family. And now, she was staring down at me like I was nothing more than dirt under her Prada shoe.

Before I could even think of what to say, her hand came down hard across my face. The slap rang out in the room, sharp and brutal, making my head snap to the side. My lip split against my teeth, and I tasted blood.

“You’ve got some nerve,” Mrs. Knight said, her voice cold and cutting. “Hiding out with my son. My crazy son, at that.”

I swallowed hard, my mind racing as she stepped closer, her piercing gaze pinning me in place. “I know everything, lil girl,” she said, her tone dripping with disdain. “I know you were on that ridiculous reality show Damier did. I know you worked at his club. I know you started dating Damian out of revenge because Damier didn’t pick you. And I know you sent Troy to try and destroy my son.”

Her words came like daggers, each one hitting a mark I couldn’t deny. “You think you’re clever, planting drugs in Damier’s club? Using your little schemes to get back at him? You’re not clever, Kita. You’re pathetic.”

I opened my mouth to protest, but the tape silenced me. She smirked, leaning down until her face was inches from mine. “Oh, and King filled me in on what happened in Canada. Congratulations on the baby. Too bad you won’t live long enough to raise it.”

Fear twisted in my gut as she straightened, her expression hard as stone. “Here’s how this is going to work,” she said. “You’ll stay here, in this house, until that baby is born. After that, Damier gets to decide what to do with you. My guess? He’ll take your head off.”

I tried to plead, tried to beg, but the tape muffled my words. Mrs. Knight snatched it off with one quick, painful tug, making me wince.

“Please,” I said, my voice shaking. “Mrs. Knight, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean for things to go this far. I was angry. I wasn’t thinking?—”

She held up a hand, cutting me off. “Save it. I don’t care about your apologies. There’s a bathroom in your room. You’ll stay there until I decide you’re worth letting

out.”

With that, she turned and left, the door slamming shut behind her. The sound of the lock turning sent a chill down my spine. I looked around the room—a plain, sterile space with nothing but a bed and sealed windows. It was like a prison disguised as a guest room.

My bladder screamed for relief, and I stumbled to the bathroom, my hands trembling as I fumbled with the door. After emptying my bladder, I sat on the cold tile floor, my head in my hands, sobbing uncontrollably.

When I finally crawled back to the bed, my tears soaked the pillow as I screamed into it. The fear, the regret, the anger—it all poured out of me until my body couldn’t take it anymore. Exhaustion finally claimed me, and I fell into a restless sleep, haunted by the knowledge that my fate was no longer my own.

Page 5

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

The dry heat hit me the second I stepped off the plane. The Santa Ana winds were in full force, carrying the faint, acrid scent of a brush fire in the distance. LA was on fire, and so was the blood in my family. I pulled the hood of my black jogger set over my head, shielding my face from the gritty wind. My Prada sneakers crunched against the asphalt as I made my way to the waiting Maybach. The air felt heavy, just like my mood.

I didn't want Kita and Damian on my plane. My temper was too volatile for that. One wrong move from either of them, and I might've laid them out midair. That wasn't the plan. Damian didn't deserve a quick death—not after everything.

The plan was to strip him of any dignity and to remind him who he betrayed in front of the family. He needed to feel the weight of his choices. He needed to squirm.

As I reached the car, King stepped out of his own vehicle, his expression calm but unreadable as always.

“Damian's at the location,” he said, his tone steady. “Kita's with your mama.”

I frowned, the mention of my mother sending a ripple of curiosity through me. “With her?” I asked, narrowing my eyes. “What's her angle?”

King smirked, shrugging slightly. “You'll have to ask her yourself.”

I grunted, not in the mood for guessing games. King climbed into his car, and I slid into the back of the Maybach. As the driver pulled onto the road, I leaned back, staring out the tinted windows as we wound our way toward the Hollywood Hills.

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The gates to the Knight estate opened with a quiet hum, and the sprawling mansion loomed ahead, its stark white exterior glowing softly under the evening sun. As I stepped out of the car, a faint sound reached my ears—a baby’s cry drifting down from one of the upstairs rooms.

I paused for a moment, listening, but then shook my head and pushed the sound aside. I didn’t have time to worry about whatever was going on upstairs.

Inside, the house smelled like fresh flowers and polished wood, a familiar scent that had greeted me since I was a kid. My footsteps echoed against the marble floors as I made my way through the hallways, my eyes briefly catching the pictures lining the walls.

My mother’s degrees were framed in gold. Her accomplishments were a testament to her brilliance. Next to them were family photos—my siblings and I as kids, my parents on their wedding day. My gaze lingered on one photo of my father, his strong, proud face staring back at me. He’d been gone ten years, but sometimes it felt like yesterday.

I swallowed hard, forcing the memories away as I reached my mother’s study. The door was cracked open, and I stepped inside, finding her seated at her desk, her iMac glowing softly in the dim room.

When she saw me, her face lit up, and she stood, pulling me into a hug. Her lips pressed to my forehead, a gesture she’d never stopped doing, no matter how old I got.

“My son,” she warmly said, stepping back to look me over. “You look tired.”

“I’m ready to handle Damian,” I said, cutting straight to the point. “The sooner he’s

dealt with, the sooner I can move on with my life.”

She nodded but held up a hand. “You will, but first, we need to talk.”

The change in her tone made me tense. “What is it?”

She took a deep breath, her expression softening in a way that made my stomach tighten. “There was a baby left at Dream’s job when you left. She called me because there was paperwork showing... it’s yours, Damier.”

Her words hit me like a punch to the gut. “What?”

“The baby’s birth certificate was in the car seat,” she continued, pulling a folded document from her desk. “The mother isn’t listed, which is weird. I called the hospital, and they had no record of the baby. We still need a DNA test to confirm.”

She handed me the paper, and I stared at it, my mind racing. I looked at the baby’s name: Donshay Knight.

“Where’s the baby now?” I asked, my voice low.

“With a nanny I hired.”

She stood and walked to the door, calling for the nanny on a baby monitor. Moments later, a woman stepped in, cradling a tiny bundle in her arms. My mother took the baby from her and dismissed the nanny, turning back to me with the infant in her arms.

“Here,” she said softly, holding the baby out to me.

I hesitated for a moment before taking the child. The baby couldn’t have been more

than a month old. It's tiny features scrunched up as it slept.

"Cute kid," I muttered, my voice flat. "But I need DNA, and the mother needs to be found. I know who I've been with in the last year. I'll figure it out."

She nodded, her expression unreadable as I handed the baby back to her. But as I let go, a strange feeling settled in my chest. Something about holding the child felt... right. I pushed the thought aside. There wasn't time to dwell on it. She called the nanny back into the room.

"What about Dream?" I asked, my voice quieter now. "How did she take everything?"

My mother's face softened. "I had a talk with her. She said she's standing by you no matter what."

I exhaled, relief washing over me.

"She's a strong woman," my mother continued. "I invited her to brunch with the wives I mentor. I've grown fond of her, Damier. She's not like the others."

I nodded, a faint smile tugging at my lips. "I can't wait to get back to her. Haven't thought about her much since I left for Canada. Had to stay focused."

She smiled knowingly, handing the baby back to the nanny and dismissing her again. Once the door closed, her expression hardened, and I knew the conversation was shifting.

"Now," she said, her tone all business, "let's talk about Kita."

I frowned. "What's your angle with her? I was ready to hang her and rip that baby out

of her.”

“We can’t do that yet ,” my mother bluntly said. “That baby will carry Knight blood, and I refuse to let her poison it. She’ll stay here until the child is born. After that, you can take her head off. That baby will be all I have left of Damian. Maybe I can give that baby a better life.”

I clenched my jaw, my fists tightening. I hated the idea of Kita still breathing, but I understood my mother’s stance. Blood was everything to her.

“Just keep her away from me, or that baby won’t make it,” I finally said.

She nodded, satisfied, and stepped closer, placing a hand on my cheek. “Now, focus on starving Damian. I can’t believe I have to watch one of my sons be tortured, but he made his choice.”

Her words were like ice, and I could see the pain in her eyes even as she said them. We both hated this, but it had to be done.

As we walked out of the study together, I glanced back at the room, my mind swirling with thoughts. The baby, Damian, Dream—it was all tangled together, a web I needed to unravel.

By the time we reached the Maybach, one question lingered in my mind: Who’s the mother of the baby?

I climbed into the car, ready to finish what I’d started.

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

The Santa Ana winds whipped through my hair, almost taking out my extensions as I stepped out of the car and onto the gravel driveway of the small mansion on the outskirts of Los Angeles. The house stood like a shadow against the dim night sky, a place of secrets and unfinished business. This wasn't a home—it was a tool, a property kept for moments like these. Moments of reckoning.

Damier climbed out first, his hoodie still up, the wind tugging at the fabric of his jogger set. His movements were brisk and focused, his body whirring with the kind of energy only rage could bring. He didn't wait for me, didn't even glance back. He was ready to unleash his wrath.

I stayed outside for a moment, pulling my THC pen from the pocket of my coat. My hands were steady as I inhaled, the vapor filling my lungs and calming my frayed nerves. Exhaling slowly, I leaned against the car and stared up at the night sky. The stars seemed indifferent, distant, like they didn't give a damn about the darkness we were about to unleash.

“You good, Ev?”

I turned my head to see King walking toward me, his coat billowing slightly in the wind. He looked every bit the stoic enforcer he'd always been, but there was concern etched in his features.

“Not really,” I admitted, taking another drag from the pen before handing it to him.

He took it, inhaling deeply before letting the smoke curl from his lips. “I figured,” he said. “This shit... it's heavy.”

I nodded, looking past him at the house. “I just... I never saw this coming, King. Those boys were so close growing up. Twins, inseparable. They took pride in it and even dressed alike until they were out of their teens. I thought they’d have each other’s backs forever.”

King sighed, his broad shoulders sagging slightly. “Yeah, me too. But Damian’s choices... you can’t protect someone from their own greed, no matter how much you want to.”

His words cut deep because they were true. There was nothing I could’ve done to stop this. No way to rewind the years and fix what had gone so wrong.

“I introduced you to Roman, remember?” King said, his voice softer now. “Back in the ’80s. I never thought we’d be standing here, dealing with something like this.”

I smiled faintly at the memory of my husband, Roman Knight, the father of all my children—the brief flicker of warmth quickly swallowed by the cold reality of the night. “You did. And I’ve loved him every day since. That same night you hooked us up, I told him I didn’t want kids, and I ended up popping out five for him.”

King handed me back the pen and rested a hand on my shoulder. “This ain’t on you. It’s not on me, either. Sometimes, people just lose themselves.”

I nodded, straightening my spine. “Let’s get this over with.”

Inside, the house was cold and empty, the perfect place for dirty work. King led me to the basement, and with every step, the air grew heavier. By the time we reached the bottom, the room was thick with rage, disappointment, and something darker.

Damier’s great uncle, Lucian Knight, stood in the center, a cigar perched between his fingers, his long black fur coat brushing the floor. He turned when he saw me, a faint

smile breaking through his grizzled features.

“Evelyn,” he greeted, pulling me into a respectful hug. “You always bring the balance to this family.”

“Thank you,” I said, my voice steady, though my insides churned.

The rest of the family was already there—Damier’s uncles, cousins, and, of course, Hocus, who leaned against the wall with his arms crossed. And then there was Damier.

He was pacing, shirt and hoodie discarded. Two heavy gold and diamond Cuban link chains rested on his neck, catching the glow of the lone overhead bulb. A blunt hung from his lips, and he exhaled smoke through his nose like a dragon preparing to strike. His eyes flicked to me, dark and burning with impatience.

“‘Bout time you came in here,” he growled, picking up a bottle of cognac from the table and taking a long swig. “Haven’t we done enough waiting?”

“Watch it, son, talking to me like I am one of these niggas,” I said, my voice firm, giving him a sharp look.

He smirked but didn’t say more. Instead, he turned his attention to the broken figure hanging from the ceiling by his wrists. Damian was barely recognizable, his body covered in chain marks with blood dripping down his bruised skin. He was stripped to his underwear, his head hanging forward, his chest rising and falling in shallow breaths.

Damier stepped closer, the blunt still smoldering between his fingers. “I can’t believe a nigga I shared a womb with is a bitch,” he spat, his voice low and venomous. “I should have known when you let your homeboys jump me for my chain when we

were in high school. You probably set me up, like you've done for the last few years."

Damian didn't respond. He couldn't—the tape over his mouth muffled his cries.

"You're useless," Damier continued, pacing around him like a predator circling its prey. "Worse than a snake."

King walked over to Damier and handed him a knife glowing red from the torch he'd used to heat it.

Damier took it without hesitation, his lips curling into a cruel smile.

"You know what to do," King quietly said.

Damier nodded, turning back to Damian. With a swift motion, he pressed the heated blade against Damian's stomach, carving the Knight symbol into his flesh. The sound of sizzling skin filled the room, mixing with Damian's muffled screams.

I watched with a straight face, my heart hardened by years of witnessing moments like this. Damier's precision was almost artistic. He had that symbol down pat, even onto flesh.

When he was done, he stepped back, wiping the blade on a rag. Damian hung limply, his body trembling as blood dripped onto the concrete floor.

"You deserve to die slow," Lucian sneered, stepping closer to Damian. "You will sit in this basement until you deteriorate to hell."

With that, the chains were released, and Damian crumpled to the ground, unable to hold himself up. He lay there, breathing heavily, his spirit shattered. I'd never seen

him so defeated.

Hocus ripped the tape from Damian's mouth, eliciting a guttural scream of agony.

"Leave him," Lucian commanded, his voice cold. He pulled a massive key from his pocket and handed it to Damier. "Lock him in."

Damier didn't hesitate to follow the others out and slam the heavy door shut. The sound of the lock turning echoed through the space like a final nail in Damian's coffin.

As the rest of the family filtered out, I lingered with Damier, placing a hand on his arm. "You did what you had to do," I quietly said. "Don't let it weigh on you. Take some time for yourself before you go back to Dream."

He nodded, his jaw tight. "I'm headed to my penthouse in Vegas for a couple of days."

"Good," I said, squeezing his arm. "Clear your head."

I watched as he climbed into the waiting Maybach, and the car pulled away into the night.

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The ride back to the estate with King was silent at first, the weight of the evening pressing down on both of us. Finally, King broke the silence.

"My brother's probably turning over in his grave, seeing what his sons are going through," he said, his voice heavy with regret.

I sighed, looking out the window. “He’d hate it, but he’d understand. Blood has rules, and Damian broke them.”

“You know you can grieve for him, right? You don’t have to hide your feelings. He was still your son.”

“I don’t have room to grieve for Damian. I know how this life goes. I will be alright.”

When we arrived at the estate, King announced he was crashing for the night, not wanting to disturb his family. I waved him off. “You don’t have to tell me. Take any guestroom you want.”

After heading upstairs, I made my way to the baby’s room. The space was cozy, with soft lighting and every comfort a newborn could need. The crib was the same one I’d used for my daughters when they were born, and seeing it filled again brought a bittersweet ache to my heart.

The nanny was asleep in the rocking chair, her head tilted to the side. I covered her with a blanket before peeking into the crib. The baby slept soundly, its tiny chest rising and falling.

I hadn’t had a baby in the house since my youngest daughter was born seventeen years ago. All my kids had left the nest, including my seventeen-year-old, who now lived with her older sister. None of them seemed interested in having children of their own. That’s why I was giving Kita the chance to birth Damian’s baby, aside from having a piece of him that was left. And I hoped with all my heart that this newborn in my home was truly Damian’s. Having grandchildren would let me escape from the dark side of my family. I told myself that the first grandkid I had, I was going to retire from the family business. My husband had me set up for a lifetime. So, getting out wouldn’t cost me a thing.

I quietly left the room, heading to my master suite. The bathwater steamed as it filled the jacuzzi tub, the scent of lavender bubbles calming my frayed nerves.

Sliding into the warm water, I let out a deep sigh, my mind drifting. Kita would be dealt with in the morning. I'd get her an in-home OB-GYN and put her on a strict diet to ensure the baby was born healthy.

As I closed my eyes, the weight of the night began to ease, and for the first time in hours, I allowed myself to rest.

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

Vegas had a way of wrapping itself around you. The neon lights, the sound of energy, and the constant churn of people chasing something—luck, money, or just a moment of escape, like me. For the last two days, I'd been holed up in my penthouse at the Palms, the floor-to-ceiling windows offering me a panoramic view of the strip. But even with all that, my world felt dark.

The nightmares came harder than I expected. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw Damian's face—twisted in pain, his voice muffled behind the tape, his body slumped on that cold concrete floor. I told myself it was necessary, but it didn't stop the ache in my chest. Disciplining him wasn't just about loyalty or betrayal; it was about stripping away the part of me that had always protected him.

Damian was my twin. Growing up, we had an unspoken bond. We didn't need words to understand each other. I thought we'd take on the world together and build the family name even higher. But somewhere along the way, greed and ego had consumed him. I was furious with him, but part of me felt like a piece of me had died that night in the basement. Now, I had to figure out how to heal.

I rubbed my temples, leaning back on the plush sofa in the living room of the suite. The silence had been suffocating, so I'd been writing. Plans for rebranding my clubs, ideas to beef up operations in New York and Paris, and ways to make my empire more legit. I was tired of the dirt. Tired of collecting souls. I wanted peace—real peace.

Then, there was the baby I just found out about.

I'd been replaying my mother's words in my head since I left the estate. A child left

at Dream's job with my name on the birth certificate? It had to be a setup. I always wrapped up with no exceptions other than Dream. Whoever the mother was, she had an angle, and I needed to figure it out. And God help her if I found out this was some kind of ploy to extort me.

Still, when I held that baby, something shifted. There was a connection I couldn't explain, and it scared me. Maybe it wasn't a setup. Maybe this was fate's way of tying me to the next generation, but I couldn't think about that right now.

I stood and stretched, rolling my shoulders back. The silence was getting to me again. I needed to get out, to feel the pulse of the city and let the noise drown out my thoughts. Walking over to the hotel phone, I dialed my security team's suite next door.

Lou answered on the first ring. "Boss?"

"Meet me in the hall," I said. "We're about to take a ride to Bellagio. They've got the best craps tables in Vegas."

Lou chuckled. "Bet. Give me fifteen to get myself together."

By the time I stepped into the hallway, I was feeling like myself again. My emerald green suit was custom-tailored to perfection, hugging every muscle just right. My black dress shirt was unbuttoned at the top, giving a glimpse of my diamond chains. My Louis Vuitton cufflinks sparkled under the hallway lights, matching the shine of my diamond-encrusted watch. The suede black LV loafers finished the look.

Lou stepped out of his suite a moment later, grinning when he saw me. He was dressed to impress, too, in a sharp black suit with gold accents.

"Okay, boss," he said, giving me a once-over. "You looking flyer than a runway

model, my boy.”

I smirked, adjusting my cuffs. “You sharp your damn self, Lou. Let’s move.”

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The valet had my black Ferrari waiting out front, gleaming under the hotel’s lights. I’d had it shipped to Vegas because there was no way in hell I’d be caught in a rental. Sliding into the driver’s seat, I fired up my oldies playlist, and “Secret Garden” by Quincy Jones and Barry White poured through the speakers.

The smooth tunes set the mood as Lou sparked a blunt in the passenger seat. I weaved through the traffic on Las Vegas Boulevard, my foot heavy on the gas. Heads turned as the Ferrari roared past, the deep purr of the engine cutting through the night air. My tint was dark enough to keep my face hidden, but I could feel the stares. Vegas loved a spectacle, and I didn’t mind giving them one.

At the Bellagio, I didn’t need to announce myself. The moment I walked in, heads turned, and the staff parted like the Red Sea, trying to get me drinks and to the most exclusive tables. VIP treatment was a given wherever I went.

Lou trailed behind me as I made my way to the craps table, the emerald green of my suit catching the dim light of the casino floor. The energy at the table was electric, the kind of buzz that made you feel alive. I threw down a stack of cash, nodding at the dealer as I joined the game.

I was deep in the rhythm of the game, my focus razor-sharp, when a sultry voice cut through the din.

“Need a good luck charm, handsome?”

I turned to see a woman standing beside me, her dress hugging every curve. She was sexy, no doubt—the kind of woman the old me might’ve entertained for the night. She leaned closer, her perfume lingering in the air.

“What do you say?” she purred, batting her lashes. “You want a date?”

I chuckled, shaking my head. “Not tonight. I’m on my way to see my lady tomorrow.”

Her pout was dramatic, but she stepped back with a playful smirk. “Your loss. You know where to find me if you change your mind.”

I watched her disappear into the crowd before turning back to the table. The dice hit the felt, and I let out a low laugh as the dealer announced my win.

Still, even with the money piling up, my mind wandered. I thought about Dream—her smile, her fire, the way she didn’t flinch when the truth about my world came crashing down around her.

As I tossed the dice again, I made a decision. I’m taking her to Turks and Caicos.

Because, after everything, she deserved more than words. She deserved the world. And I’d give it to her.

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

The sun had already dipped behind the city skyline by the time I dragged myself into Damier's penthouse. The soft glow of the city lights spilling through the floor-to-ceiling windows did little to distract me from how exhausted I felt. I kicked off my Louboutin heels by the door, letting my work bag fall to the side as I inhaled the familiar scent of lavender and vanilla from the diffusers scattered around the house.

It had been almost two weeks since I'd seen Damier. Two weeks of silence, not knowing when he'd walk back through the door. I missed him more than I wanted to admit, but I kept myself busy, pouring my energy into my work at the office. Still, coming home to this empty penthouse every night was starting to wear on me.

Tonight, I planned to keep it simple. My takeout Thai food was calling my name, along with the lavender bath I was about to run. All I wanted was to eat, soak, and let New Edition serenade me to sleep. The soft croons of "One More Day" filled the penthouse from the surround sound system as I stripped out of my pin skirt and blouse and slipped into my favorite light pink silk nightgown. It clung to my curves, the high slits on the sides letting me feel a little sexy as I padded barefoot around the house on the overly cleaned marble floors.

The bathroom filled with steam as I bent over to test the water. My fingers swirled in the warmth, the scent of lavender bubble bath rising with the mist. I sang along to the song, swaying slightly, letting myself get lost in the melody.

Then, I felt it—a firm, deliberate grip on my ass.

I froze, my heart stopping for a second before I spun around, ready to swing. My breath hitched when I saw him.

“Damier,” I breathed, my voice caught between disbelief and relief.

He stood there, his dark brown eyes locking onto mine, his tired face softened by the sly smirk pulling at his lips. His hoodie was over his head, and the rawness in his expression hit me like a wave. He looked overwhelmed like he’d been carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders for days.

I didn’t even think. I threw myself into his arms, wrapping my legs around his waist as he caught me with ease. His arms tightened around me, and I kissed him like my life depended on it.

“Missed you so much,” I murmured between kisses as I slid his hoodie off his head.

“I missed you, too,” he said, his voice low and rough.

He carried me out of the bathroom, setting me down gently on the couch but keeping me close on his lap. I studied his face, taking in the slight shadows under his eyes and the tension in his jaw.

“You look tired,” I softly said. “We don’t have to talk about anything if you don’t want to.”

“I don’t,” he admitted, brushing his fingers over my cheek. “I just want to focus on us tonight. I’ll figure everything else out tomorrow.”

I walked him back to the bathroom, holding his hand like I was afraid he might vanish again. When we reached the tub, I gestured toward it with a playful smile. “Get in with me. You need to relax.”

He raised an eyebrow. “You know I’m not a bath type of nigga.”

“Tonight, you are,” I said, grinning. “Come on. For me.”

He sighed but nodded. “A’ight. But let me shower first. Pour me a glass of cognac while I rinse off.”

“Deal.”

As he stepped into the shower, I grabbed a glass of wine for myself and poured his drink, setting both glasses on the edge of the tub. When I came back, I slipped out of my nightgown and slid into the warm water. The bubbles kissed my skin, and I leaned back, letting the tension from the day melt away.

A few minutes later, Damier joined me. He grabbed his glass and leaned back against the bathtub pillow with a deep exhale. His muscles visibly relaxed as he took a sip of the cognac, and I couldn’t help but smile.

“Let me take care of you,” I said, grabbing the charcoal mask I’d brought into the bathroom for myself.

He didn’t protest, letting me apply the mask with careful strokes. As it dried, I sat on his lap and massaged his temples, neck, and shoulders, kneading out the knots and tension. He closed his eyes, a low hum of contentment escaping his lips.

“I’m taking you to Turks and Caicos,” he suddenly said, his voice quiet but firm. “You deserve to see every luxury island in the world.”

My heart swelled, and I couldn’t stop the grin spreading across my face. “I can’t wait.”

In that moment, nothing else mattered. I leaned forward, pressing a kiss to his lips, and let my hands drift lower, wanting him to feel good, to forget the weight he was

carrying—if only for a little while.

“Sit at the edge of the tub, baby. I want to taste you,” I cooed as I stroked his manhood until he was hard.

He chuckled and did as he was told.

I started sucking him slowly, taking my time as I moved him in and out of my mouth. He moaned low and sexy, causing me to get turned on. As I started giving him sloppy head, he rubbed my nipples. He went from rubbing my nipples to gripping my bun. He had me gagging and spitting like I was his personal porn star. I guess I was pleasing him too good because he gripped the side of the tub as his legs moved under the water.

“Mmm, I'm about to bust,” he uttered seductively.

I looked up, and he had his eyes closed while he bit his bottom lip. Before I knew it, I was swallowing his babies like a pro. I had never let a man cum in my mouth; that was how I knew this man was special. He had me extra submissive.

“Damn, woman, you fire.” He let out a laugh as he slid back into the warm water.

I giggled. “Only for you.”

Minutes later, we climbed out of the tub, the air between us warm and quiet. After I brushed and rinsed my mouth, I wiped the charcoal mask off his face while he dried off, chuckling when he grabbed the almond oil and told me to let him handle it.

His hands explored my body, rubbing the oil into my skin with slow, deliberate strokes. I returned the favor, letting my fingers linger on his chest and shoulders.

When we were both dressed—him in gray Nike Tech sweats and me back in my nightgown, no panties, at his request—we made our way to the kitchen.

The smell of my Thai food was still strong, and my stomach growled as we sat down to eat. I offered him some, and he wasted no time eating with me. Between bites, he brought up the baby that was left at my job.

“I’m sorry,” he said, his voice low. “I’m sorry you got pulled into this. I know it’s not fair, and I hate that the baby was brought to your job. I am going to figure it all out.”

I reached across the table, taking his hand. “I’m not mad, and I’m not worried. I’m here for you, Damier. We’ll figure it out together.”

He nodded, squeezing my hand before leaning over to kiss me.

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The next morning, I woke up with Damier’s arm draped over my waist. It felt good—right—to wake up next to him again.

“I’m happy to be back,” he murmured as I stirred.

“I’m happy you’re back, too,” I said, turning to kiss his cheek.

He stretched, sitting up in bed. “I’ll take you to work today and get you breakfast like I was doing before.”

“Okay, but you don’t have to get me breakfast. I have some meal preps,” I said, smiling.

We both got ready for the day, and I grabbed my breakfast and lunch.

When we pulled up to my office, Damier leaned over, kissing me passionately. “You won’t have to worry about me leaving suddenly again,” he said. “I’m focusing on the legit side of things now. My clubs, my businesses. I’m done with all the other stuff.”

I smiled, my heart full. “Don’t do it for me, Damier. Do it because you want to.”

“I do,” he simply said. “I’ll pick you up. Just text me thirty minutes before you’re ready to leave. We a do something tonight. I wanna hit the scene.”

We kissed again, and I stepped out of the car, feeling lighter than I had in weeks. The day ahead didn’t feel so daunting, knowing I’d see him again tonight. And for the first time in a long time, I felt like everything might just work out.

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

After dropping Dream off at work, I drove straight to my high-rise office in downtown LA. The sleek glass building reflected the morning sunlight, casting long shadows across the city. It had been months since I stepped foot in this place, and for the first time in a while, I felt like I was walking into something normal—something mine.

Mia was already in my office when I arrived, just like old times. She was sitting at the desk, a tray with breakfast and coffee neatly arranged in front of her. The smell of eggs, turkey bacon, and croissants filled the room, blending with the sharp, clean scent of her perfume. She looked up and smiled the moment I walked in.

“About time you showed up,” she teased, standing to give me a quick hug.

“It’s good to see you too, Mia,” I said, letting a rare smile break through.

“You’ve been missed around here,” she said, pulling back to look at me. “And by ‘missed,’ I mean I’ve been bored out of my mind since the club’s been closed.”

I chuckled, shaking my head as I took a seat. “You’ve been holding it down. I know I’ve been gone, but it’s good to see you kept everything afloat.”

“I did more than that,” she said, sitting across from me and sliding the coffee toward me. “I hired atmosphere models, security teams, promoters, a new chef, and bartenders for the reopening. We’re good to go whenever you’re ready.”

That caught my attention. I liked that Mia had been handling the hiring because it fit with the rebrand I’d been working on. I wanted everything about the club to feel

fresh—legit, polished.

“Good work,” I said, taking a sip of the coffee. “Let’s make it happen. We’re back, starting this week.”

Mia grinned and handed me a folder. “Here’s your to-do list for the week. Thought I’d get ahead of it since I know how you like things.”

I nodded, flipping through the folder as we started going over the details. We ate breakfast while running through the logistics—inventory, soft launch plans, and marketing ideas. It felt good to be in the flow again, like a part of me I’d put on hold was waking back up.

When we were nearly done, Mia reached into her bag and pulled out an envelope, sliding it across the desk.

“What’s this?” I asked.

“Lakers vs. Golden State,” she said with a smirk. “Courtside seats. Chief had his assistant drop them off this morning. He said it’s time for you to get back on the scene. And what better way than courtside at a game like this?”

I leaned back, twirling the tickets between my fingers. “That’s love,” I said.

Mia wasn’t done, though. “You should take Dream,” she added. “Show out a little. And maybe—just maybe—it’s time to think about another reality show. A couple’s thing. You and Dream showing off your life, polishing your image even more. It’s free publicity for the rebrand.”

I shot her a look. “Mia, you know I’m not doing another reality show. The first one was enough for a lifetime.”

She laughed, shrugging. “Had to try. But, seriously, take her. Let people see you’re still that guy.”

I nodded, sliding the tickets into my jacket pocket. “I’ll take her, but I’m not stopping there. Book a week-long trip to Turks and Caicos for us. She deserves it.”

“You got it,” she said, typing a note into her tablet.

Pulling out my phone, I texted Dream.

Got tickets to the Lakers game tonight. Courtside. You in?

She replied almost immediately.

My Dream: I’d love to go. I’m leaving work early to get my hair done. I’ll meet you at the penthouse.

I smiled, slipping the phone back into my pocket.

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The rest of the morning was a blur of calls and planning. By the time the afternoon hit, I was locked into my element, making moves for the reopening and finalizing contracts for my other clubs. The grind was steady, and for the first time in a while, it felt like I was in control.

Just after 3:00 PM, King and Hocus showed up at my office. King strolled in first, his usual calm demeanor masking the sharpness that always lingered beneath the surface. Hocus followed, nodding at me as he leaned against the wall.

“Good to see you back in your zone,” King said, dropping into the chair across from

me.

“Good to be back,” I said, leaning back in my chair. “What’s that word?”

King didn’t waste time. “I found us a new plug,” he said. “Bigger than Felix. Better connections, more reliable.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Good. I’m ready to cut Felix off. The family doesn’t need him, especially after he blatantly said he doesn’t respect me.”

“That’s why I moved quick,” King said. “I talked to your mama about it, and she’s on board. But pulling out from Felix is gonna come with a fight.”

“I’m ready for it,” I said, my tone cold. “I’ve been trying to calm down, but I’m ready to go to war if that’s what it takes. Felix has been in this game a long time, and he acts like he runs it. But my father told me all of Felix’s weaknesses before he died. He knew a day like this would come, and he made sure I’d know how to handle it.”

King nodded, his expression approving. “Then it’s settled. We’re moving forward.”

The three of us sat in silence for a moment, the weight of the decision sinking in. It wasn’t just about Felix—it was about solidifying the Knight name and ensuring no one ever questioned our place in the game again.

The conversation lingered in my mind as they left, but I pushed it aside. Tonight was about Dream, about getting back on the scene, and about showing the world that I was still in control. Tomorrow, I’d handle everything else.

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

Mia had everything handled, as usual. My fit for the game was waiting for me in my office, neatly pressed and ready to go. She'd even sent my barber to give me a fresh cut. By the time I was dressed in my custom-tailored black and gold Louis Vuitton varsity jacket, slim-fit black pants, and black-and-gold LV sneakers, I felt like a king ready to step back onto his throne. My chains glinted in the light, my watch sparkled, and I was feeling myself.

After making sure everything was locked down at the office, I headed to my penthouse to pick up Dream.

When she stepped outside, I had to pause and take her in. She was a vision in a preppy Clueless-inspired outfit—a soft pink mini skirt with a matching blazer paired with white thigh-high Louboutin platform boots. Her hair was softly curled, her makeup light but flawless, and her lashes dramatic enough to give her that extra edge. A white Chanel handbag hung from her shoulder, completing the look.

I got out of my brand new royal blue Bentley, and the valet stepped back as I approached her. The faint breeze carried her expensive perfume to me as I pulled her into a hug.

“You look sexy as fuck,” I murmured, my hands lingering on her waist. “You definitely need to be on a high roller’s arm tonight.”

She giggled bashfully, her cheeks slightly flushing. “You’re too much, Damier.”

I opened the door for her and helped her into the car, watching as she adjusted her skirt and got comfortable. Sliding back into the driver’s seat, I switched from my

usual oldies playlist to something that fit my age and mood. “South of France” by Future and Travis Scott filled the car as I pulled out onto the street.

The usual LA traffic caught us on the way to the Crypto.com Arena, and I sparked a blunt to pass the time. Dream didn’t smoke, but I loved that she didn’t mind being around it with me. She leaned back in her seat, her freshly done curls catching the dim light, looking every bit the goddess she was.

After a few minutes, she turned down the music.

“I know we’re supposed to be in a good mood tonight,” she began, her voice soft but weighted, “but I can’t stop thinking about my brother.”

I glanced at her, the blunt hanging from my lips. “What’s going on?”

She sighed, her fingers playing with the strap of her purse. “He’s not getting better, Damier. He told us he’s ready to go. The doctor mentioned medicine to help him pass peacefully, but it’s expensive.”

Her voice cracked, and I could see the pain in her eyes.

I exhaled slowly, putting the blunt in the ashtray. “Don’t worry about that,” I firmly said. “Whatever you and your family need, the Knight Foundation will take care of it.”

Her eyes filled with gratitude as she reached over to squeeze my hand. “Thank you,” she whispered. “You don’t know how much that means to me.”

I gave her hand a squeeze back, my focus returning to the road as I finally broke through the traffic.

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The Crypto.com Arena was packed, but the valet cleared a spot for my Bentley like clockwork. For the first time in a long time, I was stepping out without security hovering behind me, though they were close by, stationed outside the arena.

Dream and I were escorted straight to our courtside seats. The energy in the arena was electric, even before the game started. After settling Dream into her seat, I told her I would grab drinks and snacks. She told me what she wanted, and I headed to the “club lounge.”

When I came back with an attendant helping me hold our liquor and food, the photographers had already started circling, taking pictures of everyone who was somebody, and we were a part of that crowd. I handed Dream her drink and sat down, nodding at a few players I knew on the court from both teams. Dream snickered, leaning closer to me.

“You’re popular,” she whispered.

I smirked. “That’s why I decide when I want to step on the scene.”

The jumbotron lit up, and suddenly, the camera was on us. I leaned back, but Dream took the lead, pulling me into a kiss. The crowd went wild, and she didn’t hold back, biting my lip playfully before pulling away with a mischievous smile.

I laughed. “That’s enough—kids are watching.”

The game started, and the energy was infectious. Dream was into it, laughing and cheering, and I was too, though I couldn’t help scanning the crowd as the liquor got into my system. My instincts never turned off.

That's when I saw the bitch ass nigga—Lamari. He was a few seats down, and when our eyes met, he quickly looked away.

I chuckled, leaning over to Dream. "You see your ex?"

She frowned, following my gaze. "I hadn't noticed him. Don't worry about him, Damier."

I nodded, but I kept an eye on him.

At halftime, Lamari got up to walk past, and he stepped on my sneakers hard enough to feel intentional.

"Yo, watch yourself, my nigga," I snapped, my tone sharp.

Lamari turned, his face smug and full of liquid courage. "Relax, my nigga. You're just mad you're walking around with my leftovers."

Dream stiffened beside me, but I didn't let it slide. "Say that again," I said, standing up.

"You heard me," Lamari said, grinning. "Imani's always been a gold digger in her own way. You'll figure it out eventually. All the soft girl shit is a front to get your bread."

I clenched my fists, ready to swing, but arena security stepped in before it could go further.

"Let him talk," Dream said softly, pulling me back down. "He's just drunk."

Lamari walked off, laughing, but he didn't come back to his seat.

The rest of the game went smoothly, and by the time it ended, we were both drunk and laughing as we made our way back to my car.

“Order whatever you want to eat online,” I told her as I drove. “Have it sent to the house. I’ll make sure we get home safe.”

When we finally got home, it was like a switch flipped. The second the door closed, we were all over each other. Clothes hit the floor as we stumbled to the shower, the warm water washing away the tension of the night as we fucked under the water, lost in each other. Moaning loudly and making sure we got out satisfied.

Tonight had been chaotic, but as I blew Dream’s back out under the stream of water, I knew one thing for certain—I wasn’t letting her go.

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

Dream and I had been tight since college, back when life felt like a series of endless possibilities. We stripped at the same clubs for money in college, but she was the focused one. The girl who always had her head in the books, determined to make something of herself. Me? I was the friend who didn't mind getting my hands dirty? the one who handled drama and made sure nobody messed with her.

But life didn't pan out the same for us both. I dropped out of college halfway through, while Dream went on to collect her degrees like trophies. She was the type to chase her dreams with tunnel vision while I spent my days trying to figure out how to hustle my way through life. Still, we stayed close. No matter how different our paths were, Dream and I always had each other.

At least, that's how it used to be.

Lately, I couldn't shake the feeling that Dream was leaving me behind. Her life with Damien had shifted from being some made-for-TV fairytale to a real one, and I couldn't help but feel like an extra in her story. She had the billionaire boyfriend, the penthouse, the high life—and I was still scraping by in my tiny apartment in Burbank, wondering if I'd ever catch a break.

I hated that I felt this way. Dream was my best friend, and she deserved every good thing that came her way. But there was a small, ugly part of me that envied her. That part whispered, What if you'd gone on that billionaire reality show instead of pushing her to do it? What if that was your life instead of hers?

Whenever those thoughts crept in, I brushed them off, burying them deep. I wasn't about to let jealousy ruin what we had. But some nights, like this one, it was harder

to ignore.

I was sprawled on Lamari's leather couch after a sex session with him, puffing on a blunt as Moneybagg Yo blared through the condo. The bottle of D'usse on the coffee table was already half gone, and the room was hazy with smoke and liquor-fueled tension.

This wasn't the first night I'd spent here, and it wouldn't be the last. Lamari wasn't anything serious to me—just a guy who knew how to blow a bag and keep me entertained. He gave me money and dick, and I didn't ask for much else.

But there was one big, messy problem with this arrangement: Lamari used to be Dream's man.

Even worse, this wasn't new. I'd been creeping with him for a while, slipping into his DMs late at night and telling myself it didn't mean anything. Back then, I convinced myself it was harmless. Now, I knew better.

"Man, that nigga Damier really thinks he's King of LA," Lamari muttered, breaking my train of thought. He was sitting across from me, scrolling through his phone like he was searching for answers to a test he couldn't pass.

I rolled my eyes, taking another hit of the blunt. "You still on that? Let it go, Lamari. You sound bitter as hell."

He looked up, his jaw tightening. "I ain't bitter. I'm just saying. He was out there courtside with Dream like they the new Jay and Bey or something. Acting like he runs the city."

I exhaled a cloud of smoke, letting it hang between us. "And what? You mad he's doing what you couldn't?"

His eyes narrowed, but he didn't answer. Instead, he set his phone down and started pacing, the tension rolling off him in waves.

"You know what?" he said after a moment, his voice low and cold. "Fuck it. I'm gonna take her."

I blinked, confused. "Take who?"

"Dream," he said, his tone flat. "I'm gonna kidnap her. Hold her for ransom. That nigga Damier's gonna be sick about it."

I laughed, shaking my head. "Lamari, you sound crazy as hell. You're drunk."

"I'm serious," he snapped, his eyes locking onto mine. "Four million. I'll hold her for four million. And you're gonna help me."

The laughter died in my throat as his words sank in. "Yeah, right," I said, forcing a nervous chuckle. "I'm not getting involved in that."

"Why not?" he asked, stepping closer. "Think about it. One million, Zaraa. That's what I'm offering you. A million dollars just to lure her somewhere. You can finally stop living like this. Get out of that little ass apartment and start living like Dream. Don't act like you don't want that."

I froze, my mind spinning. A million dollars was no joke. It was enough to change everything for me. But the risk? The risk was too high. And Dream? She was my best friend. I'd already betrayed her once. Could I really do it again?

"It's too risky," I finally said, shaking my head. "I've heard stories about Damier. He's violent, Lamari. You don't wanna mess with someone like him. Don't take that man for a joke."

His face darkened, and his voice turned icy.

“Risky?” he repeated, stepping even closer. “You know what’s risky? Me telling Dream the truth about you. About how you’ve been creeping with me since before we broke up. About how you’ve been envying her for years, wishing you had her life.”

My heart dropped, the blunt forgotten in my hand.

“That’s right,” he said, his lips curling into a cruel smile. “I’ll tell her everything, Zaraa. I have videos of you venting to me about it while you were drunk. You really wanna play like you’ve got options here?”

I swallowed hard, my mouth suddenly dry.

“You don’t have to answer now,” he said, stepping back and picking up his phone again. “Think about it. You’re either with me or against me. But my plan is going down in a couple weeks, with or without you.”

He went back to scrolling like he hadn’t just dropped a bomb in the middle of the room.

I stared at him, my mind racing, the room spinning from the liquor and the weight of his words.

Damn. Do I wanna betray my friend again for money?

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

The day had been long, but I thrived on keeping busy. Sitting at my desk in the high-rise, I stared out at the skyline of Downtown LA. The city always had a way of reminding me of the balance I needed to maintain—one foot in the legit world, the other in the underworld that had built my family's empire.

I gazed at my burner phone on my desk and picked it up, dialing Marco's number.

He answered on the first ring. "Damier. I've been waiting days for your call."

"I was tied up, but I am calling you now to settle things," I said, leaning back in my chair. "You did good bringing Damian to me. I'm going to send you an incentive for it—a nice one. You did what was right."

"Appreciate that," Marco replied, his voice even.

"I'm not faulting you for working with him," I continued. "You didn't know the full story. Hell, none of us know everything about each other in this world. I'm sure he didn't tell you the truth."

Marco didn't deny it, so I pressed on.

"I'll tell you what you need to know. Damian's my twin, my blood, but he betrayed me. What you saw when you brought him to me—that's the fallout of family drama turned into war. And that's the reason I'm still going to do business with you. Loyalty is everything, Marco. I've been wanting to expand into Canada, and now you are my golden ticket. Don't fuck this up."

“I definitely won’t fuck this up,” Marco said. “I’m not in the business of betrayal, Damier. All I want to do is make money.”

“That’s how it should be,” I said. “Stay loyal, and the money will always follow.”

With that, we ended the call.

I was about to dial Hocus when my personal phone rang, Dream’s face lighting up the screen. I picked up immediately, leaning back and gazing out the window as her voice came through.

“Hey, baby,” she said, her tone soft but tired. “I just got out of a session and needed a breather. Figured I’d call you.”

I smirked, letting her words wash over me. Dream could talk about anything, and I’d listen all day. Her voice had a way of grounding me.

“How’s your day going?” I asked.

She sighed. “Busy. But better now that I’m talking to you.”

We talked for a while, and she talked about her patients and the little things that happened at work. Then, her voice softened. “I wanted to invite you to dinner at my mom’s tonight. My dad wants to thank you personally for everything you’ve done for Donta and the family.”

I didn’t hesitate. “Of course. Text me the address.”

Her voice lit up with happiness, and after a few more moments, we ended the call.

Once I got off the phone with her, I called Hocus and King on three-way about

Marco, and they were good with the decision I made. I also told them I would be ready to meet with Felix after I came from vacation with Dream. Things were back going my way, and it felt good.

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At 6:00 PM, I pulled up to a cozy one-story home in Woodland Hills. It was modest but warm, the kind of house where love lived. Dream met me in the driveway, her face lighting up like it always did when she saw me.

“Hey, you,” she said, opening my door for me.

I stepped out, pulling her into a hug and taking in the soft floral scent of her perfume. “You’re always so happy to see me, woman. I’m not that exciting,” I teased.

She grinned. “Can you blame me?”

Before we walked in, I asked, “What are your parents’ names? You know, so I can greet them with respect.”

She laughed lightly. “Just call them Mr. and Mrs. Jaxton. Keep it simple.”

Inside, I was introduced as her boyfriend for the first time. Her mom smiled warmly, and her dad’s handshake was firm and genuine. Mr. Jaxton immediately thanked me sincerely for everything I’d done for Donta and the family, his gratitude catching me off guard.

“You’ve done what I couldn’t,” he said, his voice heavy with emotion. “I’ve tried my best as a father, but the Knight Foundation stepped in when I couldn’t. Thank you.”

I respected men like him—hardworking, humble, and not too proud to accept help.

“You’ve done a lot for your family,” I said. “I’m just glad I could help, though.”

Later, Mr. Jaxton asked to speak with me privately. He led me to the basement, which he’d turned into a man cave. The space was impressive—plush leather seating, a big-screen TV, and memorabilia on the walls.

He poured us a drink and got straight to the point.

“I know who you are, Damier. Really,” he said.

I stiffened but didn’t interrupt.

“Roman, your father, was my plug for decades,” he continued. “I did business with the Knight family when you and Damian were young. I went to jail for ten years, and I never snitched. Took my time like a man. When I got out, Roman was battling cancer, but he still gave me a couple of million. Told me to build a life.”

He paused, his voice growing heavier. “I bought this house with that money, paid it off. Saved the rest to go legit as a mechanic. Dream’s college tuition? I paid it. But when Donta got sick, that money drained fast. I love my son, and I went broke for him. Now... he wants to die, and there’s nothing I can do to stop it.”

His words hit me hard. “You’re a good father, Mr. Jaxton,” I said. “You’ve done more than most men would.”

He nodded, his expression softening. “I’m glad Dream has you. Beyond the money and chaos, I can see you’re a good man. Roman raised you right.” Then, he looked at me seriously. “How much does Dream know about your life?”

I met his gaze, my voice steady. “Everything. But I don’t bring her around the chaos.”

He nodded. “Just keep her safe.”

“I will,” I said firmly. “You have my word.”

“Well, let’s get back to the women before they come knocking.” Mr. Jaxton chuckled.

Back upstairs, Dream and her mom were laughing as they set the table. The sight made me pause. Dream had something I rarely saw—strong, loving parents. My exes never had that, always leaning on my family to fill that void.

Mrs. Jaxton spotted us and smiled. “We have a celebrity in the house, so I brought out my good china. Tonight, it’s filet mignon and lobster.”

We all laughed, and the dinner was just as warm and inviting as the house. Dream’s parents were down-to-earth, and I felt a level of comfort I hadn’t expected.

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After dinner, Dream was yawning constantly, but she insisted on checking on Donta before we left. I followed her to his room, my first time meeting him. The air in the room was cold and sterile, the faint hum of oxygen machines filling the silence.

Donta’s face lit up when he saw Dream. “Hey, sis,” he weakly said.

Dream introduced me. “Hey, baby brother. This is my boyfriend, Damier. We just came to check in before we headed out for the night.”

Donta nodded, his voice soft. “Nice to meet you. I’m... going away soon, so please treat my sister good. I’m going to miss her.”

The words hit me harder than I expected. Dream lightened the mood, and we talked briefly before leaving him to rest. After we told her parents goodnight, we left.

Outside, the night was calm, but my mind wasn't. Seeing Donta in that cold room had hit me harder than I expected. The hum of the machines, his frail body, and the way he spoke about leaving... It reminded me too much of my father in his final days.

As we stood by Dream's car, I pulled her close, taking in the warmth of her presence. "Seeing Donta," I said softly, my voice rough with emotion, "it fucked me up a little. Reminds me of when my dad was sick with cancer. Watching him suffer for years taught me to be humble. Makes me want to thank God for my health."

Dream nodded, her gaze steady but laced with sadness. "That's how I feel every day," she admitted. "But I try to save my sadness for when it's time. For now, I just take things one day at a time."

I admired her strength and the way she carried the weight of her family without breaking.

She tilted her head toward her car. "I'll follow you back to your place."

I smirked, pulling her closer by the waist. "Looks like somebody's trying to move in."

She laughed, the sound soft and comforting. "That's if you want me to."

"You know I want you to," I said, brushing a strand of hair from her face. "But I'm on your time, baby."

She smiled, her fingers lightly trailing over my chest. "Feels like I'm on your time, though. I stayed put like you said while you were gone. But I'll be ready soon. Just

know I'm not a penthouse type of girl. I like a home like mine."

I kissed her forehead, smiling at how simple yet grounded she was. "I like the simplicity of you. I've got homes, too, but whenever you're ready, we'll find a place you like. Or we'll move into yours. It's your call."

Her laughter softened as she leaned up to kiss me gently. "You always know what to say."

I watched her get into her car and waited until she pulled out behind me. The drive back to the penthouse felt lighter, and her presence in my rearview mirror was a reminder of everything I was working to protect.

When we got home, the weight of the night fell away. Dream talked my ear off about our upcoming trip to Turks and Caicos, her excitement filling the penthouse like fresh air. And as the night went on, we lost ourselves in each other, our connection making everything else fade into the background. With her, the chaos of the world didn't matter—it was just us.

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

I hadn't been the same since the night we locked Damian in the basement. It wasn't the screams or the blood—it was the silence that followed. The kind of silence that seeps into your soul, settling like a heavy fog you can't shake. Some nights, as I lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, I wanted to get up, grab my baby boy, and bring him out of that hellhole. But I knew if I did, I'd end up right down there with him.

I tried not to dwell on the thought too much. Damian had made his choices, but that didn't stop the ache in my chest every time I thought about him hanging from those chains. I wished the courts had given him life in the mental facility after his first stint there. Ten years wasn't enough. At least there, he would've been out of trouble.

The truth was, I blamed myself for the way both of my boys turned out. I should've never let Roman groom them for this life, but I knew what I was signing up for when I married him. I loved Roman, but I wished we'd gone a different route with our boys, the same way we had with our daughters. My girls were thriving, focused on their lives, but my sons? They were raised in chaos, and I couldn't ignore my role in that.

A knock at the door pulled me from my thoughts.

Asya, my assistant, stepped into my office, holding a box in her perfectly manicured hands. "Mrs. Knight, the DNA test kit for the baby came in."

I straightened in my chair, taking the envelope from her. "Thank you, Asya."

She nodded but hesitated at the door. "Is there anything else you need before I step out?"

I shook my head. “No, that’ll be all for now.”

As she left, I held the box in my hands, staring at it like it might explode. I’d been bonding with the baby these past few weeks, and I couldn’t help but see the family resemblance in him, but I needed to be sure. If he wasn’t blood, I didn’t want to raise him.

A few minutes later, another knock sounded at the door. This time, it was Damier.

He walked in, dressed immaculately in his work attire—a tailored navy suit, crisp white shirt, and a bouquet of colorful flowers in his hand. I stood and greeted him the way I always did, pulling him into a hug and kissing his forehead.

“You didn’t have to bring flowers, but thank you,” I said, placing them on my desk.

“Anything for you, Ma,” he replied, taking a seat across from me.

I slid the envelope across the desk. “It’s time to find out about the baby, Damier.”

He sighed, leaning back in his chair. “I know.”

I didn’t let him off easy. “You’ve been running from this. You love the act of sex, but you act like you don’t know what comes with it. Somewhere along the way, you fucked up, son. Now, you have to take care of it.”

He ran a hand down his face, looking more vulnerable than I’d seen him in a while. “After Arika and I were going through the divorce, I slept with a lot of women. Too many. There were nights I don’t even remember who I was with or if I used protection.”

I frowned, my disappointment evident. “You’re lucky you didn’t catch anything. But

now, all that rock star billionaire shit has caught up with you. I'm glad you're trying to settle down again, and I pray this one lasts forever."

Before he could respond, there was a soft knock at the door.

"Come in," I called.

The nanny, Marsha, entered, pushing a bassinet stroller with baby Donshay inside. She smiled politely, and I nodded at her. "Stay, Marsha. We're doing the test now."

She sat on the couch as I picked up the baby and handed him to Damier.

He cradled the baby carefully, his gaze softening as he looked down at him. "He doesn't have my eyes," he said after a moment. "He has Damian's eyes. And Uncle Lucian's. You know they have that same stare and those tighter eyes. Not like me, King, or Pops."

I nodded. "I saw that, too."

"But he looks like a Knight," he added, his tone firm.

I prepped the swab, taking it from the kit and holding it out to him. "Let's get this done."

Damier held the baby steady as I swabbed the inside of his cheek, sealed the sample, and placed it back in the envelope.

"These tests take a few days," I said, leaning back. "Even the rapid ones. Apparently, half of the country doesn't know who the father is these days."

He chuckled lightly, but the weight in his expression didn't lift. I noticed how long he

held the baby, playing with his tiny hands and gazing at him like he was trying to find answers in his small face.

Breaking the silence, he said, "I saw Donta, Dream's brother, the other night. His words hit me hard."

I tilted my head, waiting for him to continue.

"He told me he's going to pass away soon. Imani mentioned some medicine that would lay him to rest peacefully since he is only going to get worse. Says that was his choice, and he is tired of suffering."

The air in the room felt heavier. "That's heartbreaking," I quietly said. "I'll visit Mrs. Jaxton tonight and see what's going on."

He nodded. "The Jaxtons are good people. Found out Mr. Jaxton worked with Pops back in the day."

"I know," I replied. "I'll take care of everything for them."

Finally, he placed the baby back in the bassinet stroller and leaned back in his chair.

"How do you feel about becoming a father?" I asked, studying his face.

He exhaled slowly. "I don't know yet. I still want to find the mother."

I waved a hand dismissively. "If that's your baby, the mother shouldn't matter. You and Dream can raise him as yours."

He smirked but didn't respond to what I said as he stood to leave.

“I’m heading out. I won’t see you for a few days. I’m taking Imani on vacation.”

As he walked out, I watched him closely, hoping this baby might bring him out of the darkness he’d been carrying for so long.

After the room emptied, I sat back in my chair, staring at the flowers on my desk. My thoughts drifted to Donshay, to the possibilities he could bring.

If this baby is his, maybe it’s the light my son needs.

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

The hum of the jet's engines was low and steady, matching the peaceful vibe in the cabin as we made our way to Turks and Caicos. Dream sat across from me, curled up in one of the plush leather seats, sipping a glass of champagne. Her eyes sparkled every time she glanced my way, and it was the kind of look that made me feel like I had the whole world in my hands.

I leaned back, nursing my cognac, and decided it was time to bring up the thing that had been weighing on me. "So, I took the DNA test on the baby."

Her eyebrows lifted slightly, her glass pausing midair. "And?"

"I won't know for a few days, but..." I trailed off, swirling the ice in my glass. "I feel a connection to him. He looks like a Knight. I see it in his face—our blood is all over him."

She leaned forward, setting her glass on the table between us. "What has your mother said since she is taking care of him?"

I chuckled, shaking my head. "She's the one who said you and I could raise him as ours. She doesn't want me to find the mother. She thinks it will cause trouble."

Dream tilted her head, smirking. "That doesn't sound like a bad idea. I could savor my body a little longer before having a baby."

Her teasing tone made me laugh, but something about how she said it made me pause. "I don't know about all that," I said, my voice dropping lower. "After holding lil man, I've been thinking... I might want to get you pregnant sooner rather than

later.”

She gave me a wide-eyed look, her smirk fading into something softer. “Damier Knight,” she teased, pointing at me. “Are you catching baby fever?”

“Maybe,” I admitted with a shrug, a sly grin tugging at my lips. “You’d look good carrying my kid, Imani. Real good.”

Her face softened even more, but she quickly masked it by taking another sip of her champagne.

“We’ll see,” she coyly said, her tone light but her eyes holding a promise.

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We landed hours later at Providenciales International Airport , where the warm, salty air wrapped around us like a welcome embrace. Even though it was night, the island’s beauty was undeniable. Palm trees swayed gently in the breeze under the dim glow of airport lights, and the faint sound of waves crashing in the distance hinted at the paradise that surrounded us.

A black helicopter waited on the tarmac, its blades slicing through the humid night air. The pilot greeted us with a nod before helping us on board. As we lifted off, the view below was a patchwork of glowing villas and shadowy waters, the ocean stretching endlessly into the darkness. The rhythmic hum of the helicopter blended with the soft rustle of the wind, and even though it was too dark to see the famous turquoise waters, I could already feel the magic of this place.

“The water is incredible during the day,” the co-pilot said through the headset, his voice crackling. “You’ll be amazed.”

Dream and I exchanged a glance, excitement bubbling beneath the surface. We were both wide awake, thanks to the hours of sleep we'd gotten on the jet, and I couldn't wait to show her the villa I'd picked.

When we finally arrived at Bella Grace Beach, it didn't disappoint. The villa was everything I promised—exclusive, oceanfront, and equipped with everything we could want, including a personal chef who was already at work in the kitchen. The smell of grilled seafood and tropical spices filled the air as we walked in.

After we looked around, Dream disappeared into the bedroom to change, and when she reemerged, she was wearing a Chanel bikini that made my pulse skip a beat. The soft fabric clung to her curves, and her glowing skin made her look like a goddess.

“You must want to kill a nigga,” I teased, adjusting my Louis Vuitton trunks and pulling on a Tom Ford tank.

She smirked, tying her hair into a loose bun. “We're on vacation, baby. I have to set the mood.”

When we finally got settled, we went to the dining area. Dinner was a feast—lobster, fresh mahi-mahi, tropical salads, and a pitcher of frozen drinks for Dream. The liquor flowed easily, and by the time we finished eating, the warm night air had settled over us like a blanket.

I leaned back in my chair, lighting a blunt, and motioned for Dream to come closer. She laughed, standing and walking over to sit on my lap.

“Here,” I said, holding the blunt near her lips.

She hesitated for a second but then took a small hit, exhaling smoothly. “I haven't smoked since my quote-on-quote stripper days,” she admitted, laughing softly.

I raised an eyebrow. “Yeah? And why’d you stop?”

She shrugged, her voice turning serious. “As a psychologist, I need to keep my mind sharp. But... I do miss it. And honestly? I needed this tonight. My nerves have been all over the place.”

I took another pull, nodding as I leaned back. “You deserve to relax, Dream.”

We took our party outside to the infinity pool, the sound of waves crashing faintly in the distance. I poured another glass of cognac and let the old-school tunes flow through the speakers. “Adore” by Prince started playing, and the smooth melody wrapped around us.

Dream swam like a mermaid, her body gliding effortlessly through the water. I sat back in a lounge chair, Versace shades over my eyes, watching her every move.

When she climbed out of the pool, dripping and glowing under the soft lighting, I couldn’t help but smirk. “So, you gon’ show me some of them stripper moves?”

She laughed, grabbing her frozen drink. “I haven’t danced like that in years, and these knees ain’t what they used to be. But...” She sashayed toward me, her hips swaying just enough to make my blood heat. “I can still give you a lap dance.”

She straddled me, her wet skin cool against my warm body, and lifted my gold chain with her manicured stiletto nails. Gazing into my eyes, she whispered, “You really are a god out here in these streets, you know that?”

I chuckled, shaking my head. “Stop it, woman.”

“I’m serious,” she said, her voice soft but full of conviction. “You help people, Damier. Even if you don’t think so, you’ve got a big heart. You make things happen

for your people, your family. That's God behavior. People pray for the miracles you bring."

Her words hit me in a way I wasn't expecting. "I'm not God," I said, my voice low. "If I were, I would've saved my father, your brother, and changed Damian."

She placed a hand on my chest, her gaze tender. "That's deep, baby."

As Prince crooned through the speakers, she started moving her hips in time with the music. Her hands traveled to her bikini top, and with one smooth motion, she untied it and tossed it to the side.

Her lap dance was slow and deliberate, every movement designed to drive me wild. She leaned in, her lips brushing against my ear as she whispered, "You deserve to feel good all the time."

Before I knew it, she was sliding down, her hands tugging at the waistband of my trunks. I let her take the lead, her submission to me driving me over the edge. I loved how I didn't have to even show a hint about what I needed from her; she just did it.

The last lyrics of the song floated through the air as I gave in completely when she wrapped her lips around me:

"You could take all this love that I got for you."

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

Day three in paradise, and I still felt like I was dreaming. The air smelled of salt and sunshine, and every corner of the island seemed to glow with a kind of magic you only see in travel commercials. Turks and Caicos was the perfect escape, and I was soaking in every moment.

The morning had started with snorkeling. Damier wasn't into it—he said it gave him pressure headaches. Still, he encouraged me to go while he stayed behind. I floated above vibrant coral reefs, mesmerized by the schools of tropical fish darting between the rocks. The colors were unreal, like swimming in an underwater painting.

Later, we headed to see the iguanas on Little Water Cay, a trip Damier had insisted on. He had an amused look on his face as the little creatures scurried around us, and I couldn't help but snap pictures of him trying to get close. Afterward, we walked the beach hand in hand, the turquoise water lapping at our ankles as we talked about everything and nothing.

By mid-afternoon, it was time for something a little more adrenaline-packed. Jet skis.

We headed to the beach, where the rentals were lined up, sleek and ready for action. Damier's face lit up the moment he saw them—his love for the water was clear. I'd ridden jet skis before, but never in water this deep or overseas. I was excited but also a little nervous.

As soon as we hit the water, Damier took off like a pro, weaving through the waves with ease, his laughter carried back to me on the breeze. I tried to keep up, but my moves were nowhere near as smooth as his.

“You good back there?” he called, his voice teasing.

“I’m good!” I yelled back, determined not to look like a rookie.

After a while, he slowed down and gestured for me to follow him. “Come on, I wanna show you something.”

I followed his lead as he turned toward what looked like a cave entrance. My stomach flipped a little at the thought of going inside, but I trusted him completely. If Damier said it was safe, I believed him.

The jet skis slowed to a crawl as we entered the cave, the sound of the water echoing against the stone walls. Inside, it was stunning. The natural light filtered in through cracks in the rock, casting shimmering reflections on the water. There was even a stone seating area carved into the cave as if it had been made for moments like this.

“This is beautiful,” I said, my voice hushed as I pulled out my waterproof camera.

“Yeah, it is,” he agreed, though his tone was distracted like his mind was somewhere else.

I parked my jet ski near the stone bench and climbed onto it, dangling my feet in the water as Damier stayed in front of me. He looked up at me, his eyes dark and intense.

“What are you thinking about?” I asked, noticing the way he was watching me.

He didn’t answer right away. Instead, he slid my bikini bottom to the side, his movements deliberate.

“Baby, what are you doing?” I said, half-shocked and half-laughing, but before I could say anything else, his tongue was massaging my clit.

The sensation sent a jolt through me, and I grabbed onto the stone bench for balance. “Oh my God, Damier...” I moaned, my voice echoing off the walls of the cave.

He briefly looked up, a mischievous smirk playing on his lips. “Rich, saltwater pussy. My favorite.”

I giggled, my protest melting into pleasure as he continued. My hands rubbed across his hair, my head falling back as waves of sensation washed over me. The acoustics of the cave amplified every sound, and I couldn’t hold back the loud moans escaping my lips.

When he finally pulled back, I was breathless, my body trembling. But he wasn’t done.

“Come here,” he said, pulling himself up out of the water to sit on the bench.

I climbed onto his lap, straddling him as his hands gripped my ass. I slid down on his dick as we kissed passionately, his tongue down my throat.

“Ride me slow, just like that,” he uttered as he continued to grip my ass. He smacked my ass, causing it to echo through the cave. The moment was heated, electric, and I didn’t care about anything outside that cave as I rode his dick to ecstasy.

“Mmm, you feel good, woman. Now speed it up a bit,” he demanded.

As I bounced on his dick, I could feel him reaching his peak.

“Ouu, shit, I’m about to cum, Dream,” he uttered in my ear.

Suddenly, a voice echoed through the cave. “Is somebody in here?”

Panic shot through me, and I tried to move off him, but he held me steady, his climax hitting him just as I heard him chuckle low in his throat.

“Yeah, we’re in here!” he called back, completely unbothered, his tone almost daring.

The voice muttered something and retreated, leaving us alone again. I playfully slapped his shoulder, my cheeks burning. “You’re insane,” I said, laughing.

He grinned, pulling me in for a quick kiss. “And you love it.”

We got back on our jet skis and headed out of the cave, the sunlight hitting the water like diamonds. We spent the next hour zipping across the waves, the wind in our faces and the adrenaline coursing through our veins.

By the time we returned to shore, it was nearing 4:00 PM, and my body felt like jelly from the ride—and from everything else that had happened.

As we walked back to where we started, I glanced over at Damier, his confidence radiating with every step.

“What we did in that cave,” I said, shaking my head with a smile, “was so romantic and spontaneous. I know you’ll always keep things spicy, and I like that.”

He smirked, sliding an arm around my waist. “Baby, I’m just getting started. But let’s go get ready for our night out. We’re about to be back on the water.”

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The villa was quiet, the kind of calm that we needed. After hours of jet-skiing and exploring the island, I was grateful for the chance to unwind. Damier and I had napped sprawled out on the massive bed. The soft hum of the air conditioning kept us

cool. Even when we weren't talking, I felt his presence beside me, a kind of unspoken connection that didn't need words.

By the time we got up, the sun had set, leaving the villa bathed in a warm, golden glow from the outdoor lights. Tonight was special—a luxury catamaran ride awaited us. It was something straight out of a romance movie, and I couldn't wait to see how it all played out.

When we stepped onto the boat an hour later, Damier was already buzzed from the pre-dinner cognac he'd poured for himself back at the villa. He carried himself with that smooth confidence, his Louis Vuitton loafers tapping against the deck as he helped me on board.

The crew greeted us with polite smiles and glasses of champagne, and I could already feel the elegance of the night sinking in. The boat was breathtaking, its smooth design illuminated by soft lighting. It glided effortlessly over the turquoise water, the waves lapping gently against the sides.

Damier toasted the evening with a grin, his dark brown eyes gleaming under the soft moonlight. "To a night we won't forget," he said, his voice rich and steady, even with the liquor warming his veins.

I clinked my glass against his and laughed. "You're already halfway there, aren't you?"

"Maybe," he admitted, taking a sip.

Dinner was divine—fresh seafood served on porcelain plates with more champagne than I could count. The music was Damier's choice, a mix of old-school hits and smooth R&B that fit the vibe perfectly.

Just as I was settling into the luxury of it all, Damier stood and held out a hand.

“Come on,” he said, his tone teasing.

I looked at him suspiciously. “What now?”

He grinned. “You know what. The Mississippi Cha Cha Slide. You can’t come on vacation with me and not do it.”

I rolled my eyes but couldn’t help laughing. “You’re ridiculous.”

“And you love it,” he said, pulling me to my feet.

The deck became our dance floor as he started the steps, smooth and confident like he’d done it a hundred times. I matched him move for move, the rhythm of the music carrying us.

“You’re keeping up better than I thought,” he joked, his tone light but teasing. “Last time I did this, I had a bad leg, so I didn’t get to show off.”

I laughed, remembering all too well. “I remember, trust me. That leg didn’t stop you from acting like you were still the king of the dance floor.”

“I’m always the king,” he said with a wink, spinning me in time with the beat.

When the music slowed, “So Amazing” by Luther Vandross began to play. Damier pulled me close, his arms wrapping around my waist as we swayed to the song. The champagne had him looser than usual, his lips brushing against my ear as he spoke.

“You know,” he murmured, his voice low and intimate, “I know when I want to marry a woman. And I’m ready to admit that I want to take the next step with you,

Imani.”

His words sent a rush of warmth through me, and I leaned back just enough to look into his eyes. He was drunk, but I could see the truth behind his words.

“Tell me that when you’re sober, boy,” I said, teasing him lightly but unable to hide the way my heart fluttered.

His grin was slow and genuine. “You think I won’t?”

We stayed like that, swaying under the stars as the captain expertly guided the boat back to shore. The night was calm, the water smooth as glass, and I felt like we were the only two people in the world.

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Back at the villa, we stumbled inside, overly intoxicated but too happy to care. The first thing Damier did was close all the windows and doors, turning the AC on full blast. The sudden chill was a stark contrast to the heat of the day, and I couldn’t help laughing as I kicked off my heels.

“We’re not doing shit else tonight. Shit, I will be happy if we stay in for our next two days,” he announced in a drunken slur, pulling off his blazer and tossing it onto a chair.

“Not a thing. I couldn’t agree more with that,” I agreed, heading to the bathroom to start the shower.

The steam quickly filled the bathroom, and when Damier joined me, the moment turned steamy in more ways than one. The waterfall showerhead cascaded over his sculpted chest as he pulled me close, his hands roaming my wet skin with a kind of

reverence.

“I want to get you pregnant,” he whispered against my ear, his voice rough and low.

I froze for a moment, the words sending a shiver down my spine. Then, I smiled, leaning into him.

“Okay,” I said, the heat of the moment making it feel like the easiest decision in the world.

The shower turned into us going against everything we said because we definitely were doing something. The water only added to our fucking.

After we finally pulled ourselves out of the bathroom, we dressed in cozy clothes—him in his usual sweats and me in one of his oversized shirts. We climbed into the massive bed, pulling the fluffy covers over us as a movie played softly in the background.

I couldn't even tell you what we were watching. All I could think about was how content I felt, how right it all seemed.

As I drifted off to sleep, his arm wrapped securely around me, I thought about the way he'd spoken to me on the boat. Drunk or not, I knew he meant every word. And I couldn't wait for the day when he'd say it all over again, sober and ready to follow through.

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

The morning air was warm and still carried the quiet energy of Turks and Caicos. I stood on the balcony of our villa, a blunt in one hand and my phone in the other. The smoke curled lazily from my lips as I talked to King, my voice low and firm. These were the calls that mattered, the ones that kept the machine running smoothly while I was off the grid.

Below me, the turquoise water sparkled under the mid-morning sun, a view so perfect it didn't feel real. But my mind wasn't on the scenery—I was focusing on what King was telling me.

"I got that meeting set with Felix," King said, his tone a mix of business and casual like it always was.

I straightened slightly, my focus sharpening. "When?"

"A few days from now. He's coming to Cali," King replied. "Told him to come have a little vacation."

I chuckled, shaking my head. "Vacation, huh? You really said that?"

"Hell yeah," King said, a grin in his voice. "Figured it'd make him feel good about coming out. You know, relax him a bit. But let's be real—we just need him on our turf. In case things... go sideways."

The implication wasn't lost on me. "Smart move," I said, flicking ash off the blunt. "You already got everything lined up?"

“Always,” King smoothly said. “The team’s ready. Just waiting on you to get back so we can handle it.”

“I’ll be home in a couple of days,” I said. “We’ll make sure it goes exactly how it needs to.”

King’s laugh was low and brief. “Bet. Enjoy your island paradise while it lasts.”

“Don’t I always?” I replied, smirking.

When the last call ended, I powered down the phone and stared out at the horizon for a moment, letting the peace of the place wash over me.

I turned back into the villa, spotting Dream folding clothes into one of our suitcases. Her hair was in a tight, curly bun, and her movements were easy and methodical. She looked over at me and smiled, and for a moment, I forgot about everything King and I had just talked about.

“Don’t pack everything,” I said, leaning against the doorframe. “We’ve got dinner on the beach tonight. I don’t want you scrambling to find something to wear later.”

She playfully rolled her eyes. “You think I’d forget? I already have a dress picked out. The red one over there.” She pointed at the chair where her small dress lay.

I smirked and stepped further into the room, but before I could say anything else, my phone buzzed in my hand. I frowned, glancing at the screen, because I thought I powered it down. I couldn’t ignore it, though, since it was my mother.

“Hold on,” I said to Dream and answered the call. “What’s good, Ma?”

Her tone was calm but carried a weight I recognized immediately. “The results are

in,” she simply said. “You’re the father.”

The words hit me like a punch to the chest, and for a moment, I couldn’t speak. I cleared my throat, my voice steady but distant. “Alright. We’ll talk when I’m back in a day or two.”

“Take your time. Me and his nanny will take of him for as long as you need me to,” she said, her voice softer. “But, Damier, don’t go looking for his mother. I just feel like you will regret it.”

“I hear you, Ma.”

I ended the call and stood there for a moment, the phone still in my hand, my thoughts spinning.

Dream immediately noticed the shift. “Everything okay?”

I nodded, motioning for her to sit down on the edge of the bed. I joined her, exhaling deeply before meeting her curious gaze. “The DNA test came back,” I said. “He’s my kid.”

Her eyes widened slightly before her lips curved into a small smile. “Congrats, I guess?”

I chuckled dryly, running a hand over my face. “I don’t even know how to feel about it. I mean, I’m a father now. I have to man up for him. But...”

“But?” she prompted gently, her hand resting on my knee.

“My mother keeps telling me not to look for his mother, but I can’t let it go,” I admitted. “I need answers. I don’t understand how a woman could leave her newborn

in a random place. Why leave him at your office, of all places? What's the angle? Was there a motive?"

Dream nodded, her expression thoughtful. "I get it. If you feel like you need to find her to get closure, then do it. Whatever you decide, I'm here for you."

I stared at her, the sincerity in her voice and the calmness in her eyes cutting through the storm in my head. "I appreciate you, Imani," I quietly said, meaning every word.

She smiled, leaning in to kiss me. "You are going to do great as a dad, Damier, and I appreciate you too."

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I sat on the edge of the bed in the villa, the 300k diamond ring glinting in my hand as I turned it over under the soft light. It was flawless, just like her. The jeweler had followed my instructions to the letter—every detail was perfect, from the size to the brilliant cut that caught every sliver of light.

Dream didn't even know I had it. A week before this trip, I'd decided I was done waiting. I wanted her to be my forever, and this ring was going to seal it. It fit perfectly, too, thanks to one of the rings she'd left on my dresser weeks ago.

But now, sitting there staring at it, my nerves were shot. I'd been through this twice before, but this felt different—more real, more permanent. Dream wasn't like my exes. She wasn't the type to push for tradition, marriage, or kids. She'd never been married, didn't have children, and carried herself like she was all she needed in this world. But I wanted to be the one who changed that for her, the one who gave her everything she didn't even know she wanted.

A sigh escaped me as I dropped the ring into the top pocket of my Louis Vuitton

dress shirt, smoothing the fabric over it. I'd planned to propose in the cave a few days ago, but I'd chickened out. The moment hadn't felt right. Tonight, though, I knew there wouldn't be a better time.

With the news from my mother earlier about Donshay being my son, everything felt heavier. I had to step up, clean up, and make things right—not just for the baby but for Dream, too. She deserved the best version of me, and I wanted to be that for her.

I stood, straightened my shirt, and finally strolled outside. Dream had been waiting for fifteen minutes, and I could only imagine the look she'd give me when I showed up late.

The breeze was gentle as I stepped onto the sand, the R&B playlist I'd curated drifting softly through the night air. Dream was sitting at the table, the lanterns on the beach casting a warm glow over her face. For a moment, I just stood there, taking her in—the way her curls framed her face, the way her smile lit up even when she was just sitting quietly.

In my head, I thought, She's going to be my forever.

Finally, I walked over, reaching for her hand and pulling her to her feet. She giggled as I kissed her neck, her scent wrapping around me like a familiar song.

“Hey, baby,” she said, her voice teasing. “What took you so long?”

“I had to make a call,” I said, my tone easy.

Her brows lifted slightly, but she didn't press.

“Walk with me for a minute before we eat,” I said, leading her down the shore.

We walked along the edge of the water, the soft waves brushing over our feet. The moon hung low in the sky, and everything felt still, like the world was waiting for this moment.

Halfway down the beach, I stopped and turned to face Dream. I suddenly got on one knee in front of her and grabbed her hand.

She looked up at me, her eyes questioning but filled with warmth. “What’s going on?”

I took a deep breath, reaching into my pocket and feeling the weight of the ring. “I’ve been through so much my whole life, Dream,” I started, my voice steady but raw. “And for the first time, I’m finally finding peace. That peace is with you. And I never want to let that go.”

Her face softened, her lips parting slightly as she listened.

“I want to start my life over—fully—with you,” I continued. “Finding out about having a surprise kid... it shook me. But it also made me realize I need to clean up my act to be better for him, for you, and for the family I want us to build together.”

I paused, the words catching in my throat. Then, I added, “I want to change Donshay’s name to Donta in honor of your brother. To show you that I’m all about you, about us.”

Her eyes filled with tears, and a smile broke through her surprise. “I’m with all of that,” she said, her voice thick with emotion. “But... why are you down on one knee, boy?”

She laughed through her tears, and I couldn’t help but smirk as I pulled the ring from my pocket. Holding her hand, I looked up at her.

“Imani Dream Jaxton,” I said, my voice low but sure, “will you marry me?”

She let out a deep sigh, her tears spilling over as she grinned down at me. “Yes,” she whispered, her voice breaking. “Yes, yes, yes.”

I slid the ring onto her finger and stood, pulling her into a hug as her arms wrapped tightly around my neck. Our lips met, the kiss deep and full of promises as the waves brushed over our feet.

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Back at the table, Dream kept staring at the ring, her fingers turning it so the light caught every facet. “I can’t believe I’m going back home engaged,” she said, her voice full of awe.

I poured her another glass of champagne, smiling at her. “One thing, though,” I said, my tone turning serious. “Do me a favor, and don’t tell the public yet. Let’s keep it to ourselves for a while—or at least until the wedding. You can tell your mom and family, but I don’t want anyone putting bad juju on our engagement.”

She laughed, shaking her head. “Bad juju? You sound like my grandma.”

“I’m serious,” I said, chuckling. “Let’s keep it quiet.”

She nodded, her smile softening. “Okay, I get it. And I agree. It’s ours. Just ours.”

We finished dinner, and the night flowed into a celebration of us. Liquor and music filled the villa as we danced, laughed, and eventually fell into each other’s arms, making love until the early hours.

When we finally passed out, tangled in the sheets, I knew one thing for certain: this

wasn't just the end of a vacation. This was the start of a new life, one I was ready to build with her.

The next morning, hungover but ready, we packed our bags, and I couldn't stop thinking about what was waiting for us back home. Whatever it was, I was ready.

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

The results didn't surprise me. The moment I first laid eyes on Donshay, I saw the Knight blood in him. It was in the shape of his face, the tilt of his chin, and most of all, in his eyes—sharp and discerning, just like his father's. Still, hearing the confirmation had settled something in my chest. The baby was family.

I sat at my desk, the soft coo of Donshay filling the room as I thought about everything that would come next. Damier had taken the news maturely, but I knew him well enough to sense the weight he was carrying. Being a father would be the start of a new chapter for him, and while I was proud of how far he'd come, I couldn't help but worry. Was he ready for this? Truly ready?

The door opened, pulling me from my thoughts. Damier stepped inside, dressed in a crisp black dress shirt and tailored slacks, his presence commanding as always. His eyes immediately found the baby, who was nestled in Marsha's arms.

"Ma," he greeted, walking over to me and placing a kiss on my cheek.

"Good to see you, son," I said, standing to hug him. "You're looking sharp and refreshed."

He smirked. "A week's vacation in Turks will do it to you."

Marsha stood, smiling warmly as she handed Donshay to Damier. The baby looked up at him with wide eyes, and for a moment, the room seemed to pause.

"He knows you," I said softly, watching as Damier cradled the baby like he'd been doing it his whole life.

He didn't say anything, just stared down at the tiny face in his arms. His expression softened in a way I rarely saw, and I felt a flicker of hope.

"He really does look like us," he finally said, his voice low.

"He does," I agreed, sitting back down.

"I've been thinking about something," he said, glancing at me. "I want to change his name to Donta... Donta Knight. For Dream's brother."

The suggestion caught me off guard, but only for a moment. A smile spread across my face. "That's thoughtful, Damier. I like it. It's a good way to show her—and everyone else—that you're serious about this."

He nodded, bouncing the baby gently in his arms. "I'm going to make moves to have him in the house with me. I need to do this right. He's my responsibility now."

I leaned back in my chair, studying him. "You've grown a lot, son. I can see it in the way you're carrying yourself. But remember, it's not just about doing what's right—it's about being consistent. That baby will need you, and so will Dream."

At the mention of Dream, he smirked, his expression shifting into something lighter. "Speaking of Dream..." He hesitated, but only for a moment. "We're engaged."

The words hit me with a mix of pride and relief. "Engaged?" I repeated, a smile breaking across my face.

He nodded, his eyes meeting mine. "I proposed in Turks. She said yes."

For a moment, I just stared at him, taking it all in. "Well," I said, standing and walking over to him, "it's about damn time. Dream is a good woman. She's

grounded, and she's bringing out the best in you. I couldn't be happier for you two."

He chuckled, shaking his head. "You think she's grounded now? Wait until I bring her around for more family dinners. You'll see how much she keeps me in check."

I laughed, resting a hand on his shoulder. "That's what you need. A partner who balances you."

I watched Damier carefully, noticing the way his shoulders relaxed when he talked about Dream. The news of their engagement had softened the edges of his usual demeanor, and I couldn't help but feel proud of him.

"King mentioned the meeting with Felix. He's been keeping me in the loop."

Damier's smile faded slightly, replaced with the sharp focus I knew all too well. "Yeah, about that. I don't want you there, Ma."

I raised an eyebrow, folding my hands on the desk. "Excuse me?"

"I mean it," he said firmly. "I'll handle Felix. I don't want you dragged into it. You've already done enough, and I don't want to risk anything going sideways while you're there."

I studied him for a moment, letting his words hang in the air. "And what makes you think I can't handle myself, son?"

He smirked, leaning forward slightly. "I know you can. But you're a granny now, Ma. It's time for you to retire and leave the heavy lifting to me, King, and Hocus."

I couldn't help but laugh, shaking my head at his audacity. "A granny, huh? That's what we're doing now?"

“Tell me I’m wrong,” he said, the grin on his face unmistakable.

I sighed, my laughter fading into something more reflective. “I’ve been thinking about it, you know. Retiring.”

He raised an eyebrow, clearly surprised. “You? Really?”

“Yes, me,” I said, rolling my eyes. “I’ve been in this life for decades, Damier. And while I’ll always protect this family, I’ve been wondering what it would feel like to step back. To focus on being a grandmother instead of running the show.”

He nodded slowly, the weight of my words sinking in. “You’ve earned it, Ma. Nobody would question you if you did.”

I smiled, reaching across the desk to place a hand on his. “I’ll think about it. But, for now, I’ll let you and King handle Felix. Just make sure you don’t let that man think he has any leverage.”

“Don’t worry,” he said, his voice dropping to a more serious tone. “I’ve got it under control.”

I squeezed his hand, a small smile tugging at my lips. “I know you do.”

As he leaned back in his chair, still holding the baby, I couldn’t help but feel a sense of peace. My son was stepping into his own, taking control of his life and responsibilities in a way that gave me hope. And while the thought of retiring was still new to me, I knew one thing for sure—if anyone could carry the Knight legacy forward, it was Damier.

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

I couldn't get Lamari's voice out of my head, no matter how much I wanted to. His threats, his smooth-talking promises of a million dollars, the way he dangled the power to ruin my friendship with Dream over my head—it was all too much. Every time I thought about what he wanted me to do, my stomach twisted.

I'd spent the past few days replaying his words, trying to decide what to do. Part of me wanted to tell him to go to hell and block his number for good, but another part—the part that was still angry and jealous—wondered if I should just go through with it.

Maybe if I told Dream the truth...

The thought lingered. If I had the guts, confessing might be the only way out of this mess. She deserved to know the kind of person Lamari was—and, let's be real, the kind of person I'd been.

But what if she never forgives me?

As if on cue, my phone buzzed. It was Dream, calling for the third time today. My chest tightened. I knew I couldn't avoid her forever.

"Hey, girl," I said, trying to sound normal.

"Hey! You've been hard to catch," she said, her voice bright. "What are you doing tonight? I have some big news to share, and I need my best friend here for it."

My throat felt dry, but I forced a smile she couldn't see. "Big news, huh? Alright.

What time?"

"Eight. My place," she said. "Be ready to celebrate."

I agreed, and we hung up. The moment the call ended, the pit in my stomach grew deeper.

All day, I couldn't shake the conversation. I kept pacing around my apartment, lighting blunt after blunt, trying to calm my nerves. But then my phone rang again.

Lamari.

I hesitated before answering. "What do you want, Lamari?" I snapped.

His chuckle on the other end made my skin crawl. "What's with the attitude? I'm just checking in. You make up your mind yet?"

"Stop calling my phone with bullshit," I said, trying to sound firm, even though my voice wavered.

"You think you can ignore this forever, Zaraa? Time's running out," he said, his tone sharp.

I hung up before he could say more. My head was spinning. I smoked another blunt to calm myself and eventually dozed off, but when I woke up, it was time to head to Dream's.

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When I woke up, it was already 7:30 PM. I rushed to get ready, throwing on a casual but cute outfit. Dream's house in Woodland Hills was the picture of comfort and

wealth—a one-story home with manicured lawns and warm lighting that made it look straight out of a magazine.

When I pulled up at 8:00 PM, she was already at the door with a glass of champagne that had strawberries floating in it. She smiled brightly, her energy infectious.

“Hey, girl!” she said, pulling me into a hug.

I took the glass, my eyes quickly scanning her. Even in her house clothes—a soft white Chanel shorts set with gold jewelry that caught the light—she looked rich. And I hated how much I noticed it.

“You look good,” I said, forcing a smile.

“So do you,” she said, stepping back. “Come in. I’m so happy you’re here!”

Her energy was radiant, but as I walked inside, my mind churned with bitterness. I sipped the champagne, hoping it would dull my jealousy. Her living room was immaculate, as always. The view of the backyard pool shimmered through the sliding glass doors, making the place look even more luxurious.

“I haven’t been home much,” she admitted, handing me another glass. “I’m always working, and I’ve been staying at Damier’s penthouse for weeks, but I’m finally back. And guess what?”

“What?” I asked, feigning interest, though my nerves were on edge.

She held out her hand, the massive diamond on her finger catching the light. “I’m engaged!”

I froze, the champagne glass halfway to my lips. “Engaged?”

She nodded, her smile so big it almost hurt to look at. “Damier proposed in Turks. I wasn’t supposed to tell anyone yet because he doesn’t want bad juju on it, but I couldn’t wait to tell you.”

The jealousy hit me like a punch to the gut, but I forced a smile. “Congrats, girl. That’s... big.”

She didn’t seem to notice my hesitation. “I’m so happy, Z. He’s everything I didn’t know I needed.”

The champagne was working its way through my system faster than I thought, and with it, my bitterness bubbled to the surface.

“Bad juju, tho’?” I said with a smirk. “I think he’s just trying to start hiding you from the world now that it’s real.”

Her smile faltered, and she looked at me, confused. “Damier would never,” she said firmly, brushing off my comment.

We moved on, the tension easing as we drank more, listened to music, and caught up like we always did. For a while, I felt like myself again, the jealousy fading into the background. But when Dream brought out some imported ass tequila she had gotten from her man, it stirred up the ugly feelings I’d been holding back.

We were playing Uno, vibing to music, when I finally let the bitterness slip as I couldn’t stop glaring at her big ass ring.

“All this engagement shit you got goin’ on,” I said, smirking, “means Lamari’s on the market now.”

Dream laughed, her brows furrowing. “What?”

“You heard me,” I said, leaning back in my chair. “You got a new money giver. You might as well let me have Lamari.”

She set her cards down, staring at me. “First off, I’m not with Damier for money. And second, I wouldn’t recommend my leftovers.”

I chuckled darkly, the tequila making me bold. “Dream, cut the act like you’re some good girl. I raised you, bitch, and don’t forget that I am the one who told you to go on the show you met his ass on for money. I taught you how to get a bag out of these rich niggas when we were dancing at Stars. You’re using that man for money in your own cute ass way, so you might as well hand over Lamari.”

Dream’s eyes narrowed, her tone sharp. “Girl, that liquor got you tripping. If you want Lamari, have him. With your shady ass.”

That hit a nerve. I stood up, my voice rising. “You wanna know what’s really shady? I’ve already been fucking and getting money out of Lamari’s corny ass for years. You ain’t stopping nothing, and I don’t need permission to fuck a nigga.”

Dream froze for a second, and then she snapped. She pounced on me, her strength catching me off guard as she knocked me to the floor. It was as though she had started lifting weights to get her strength up because her punches were powerful. Her fists came down fast, and all I could do was grab at her hair, trying to defend myself.

“Bitch!” I yelled, trying to grab her, but she was too quick. Her fists connected with my face more times than I cared to count. I tried to fight back, but she had the upper hand.

When she finally stopped, my lip was bleeding, and my eye throbbed with pain. Her messy hair from where I’d pulled it was the only thing wrong with her.

“Get the fuck out of my house,” she yelled, her voice shaking with anger. “You can have Lamari’s weird ass. I got a real nigga now—something you’ll never experience. You might’ve gotten close to my leftovers, but you’ll never get close to Damier. You’re not to be trusted, so our friendship is over!”

She pushed me toward the door, and I stumbled. “Stop pushing me, bitch!” I yelled. “You want to cut me off over money and a nigga, fine! You’re gonna get yours. I promise that! Remember who taught you this game, bitch! You ain’t get that nigga on your own!”

She shoved me out and slammed the door behind me.

Fuming, I stormed to my car, wiping blood from my lip. Without thinking, I called Lamari.

As soon as he answered, I screamed into the phone. “You can’t blackmail me anymore, you punk-ass nigga! I already told her what I did, and our friendship is over. I’ll help you, but I want my fucking million dollars as soon as it touches your hands, you bitch nigga!”

He chuckled, the sound low and mocking. “Yeah, I just saw you leave there, beat the fuck up. I’ll see you in a couple of days with my plan.”

He hung up, leaving me seething as I drove home. My face hurt, my pride was shattered, and my friendship with Dream was over. But it didn’t matter anymore.

It is what it is.

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

The steady rhythm of “Hail Mary” by Tupac filled my ears, the beat pounding through my wireless headphones like a war drum. My feet hit the treadmill in time with the music, the speed cranked all the way up as I pushed myself harder, faster. My lungs burned, but I didn’t stop. The pain didn’t bother me—it never did. It was a reminder that I was alive and that I still had control.

I’d been walking and running for close to forty minutes, the sweat dripping down my back, soaking into the waistband of my shorts. The view from my gym overlooked the city, but I wasn’t paying attention to the skyline. My mind was somewhere else.

Dream.

The thought of her had been running laps in my head since we got back from Turks. Every time I replayed the way she said “yes” to my proposal, a weight lifted off my chest. She was my peace in a world full of chaos, and now I had the ring on her finger to prove it.

But peace didn’t come easy—not for me, not in this life.

After finishing my run, I stepped off the treadmill and grabbed a towel, wiping the sweat from my face before moving to the punching bag in the corner. My gloves were already on the floor, waiting for me. I slid my hands in, the familiar tightness grounding me as I squared up to the bag.

The first punch landed hard, the impact jarring up my arm. I followed it with another, then another, each one carrying the weight of everything on my mind.

The baby. The meeting with Felix.

Finding out Donshay was mine had shifted something in me. I wasn't just living for myself anymore. I had responsibilities now—a son, a fiancée, a future I wanted to build. But I also had questions.

I thought about what my mother said, telling me to let go of the search for my baby's mother. She wanted me to focus on the present, to leave the mystery behind. But how could I? How could I ignore the fact that someone left my son in a random place, at Dream's office of all places?

What if there's more to it?

The punches came harder, faster, the chain rattling as the bag swung under the force.

After over an hour in the gym, my body felt lighter, my mind slightly clearer. I took off the gloves and headed to the mini-fridge. I grabbed a bottle of water and headed back upstairs, the morning sunlight flooding into the panoramic windows.

When my phone buzzed in my pocket, I grabbed it, pausing the music that was still in my ears. King's name flashed on the screen, and I swiped to answer.

“What's that word, Unc?” I said, catching my breath.

“Waddup, youngin'? Why I gotta hear from the streets that you got a secret baby?”

I shook my head, smirking as I leaned against the wall of my gym. “Man, who told you that?”

“You know ya momma told me everything,” he said, laughing. “You slipping, nephew. A secret baby and secret engagement? What's next, you secretly going to

church?”

I laughed, shaking my head. “You wild, Unc. I haven’t told anyone yet. Only my momma, now you, and Dream know about the baby. I proposed to Dream in Turks, and I told her to keep it to herself for a while. I been having too much bad luck. I’d rather not have anybody hating on my shit.”

“Baby and engagement, huh? Ya momma even told me you ain’t want her at the meeting with Felix. Sounds like my nephew coming off the titty,” he joked, but there was a layer of sincerity in his tone. “Proud of you, though. You stepping up. Your pops would’ve liked to see this side of you.”

I let his words sink in, nodding even though he couldn’t see me. “Thanks, Unc. Trying to get my shit together. But you know this life ain’t easy.”

He sighed. “Ain’t that the truth. But let’s get to it. Felix will be here tomorrow evening, and I told him we were meeting at your club.”

“That’s good. I’m officially opening the spot up tomorrow, so that’s perfect.”

“Let’s throw that nigga a party of his own,” he said, his tone carrying a hint of amusement.

I chuckled, shaking my head. “A party, huh? You been watching State Property again?”

He laughed. “Yeah. You know how these Spanish niggas are tho’—act like they’re cool until you pull the rug out from under them. I figured we just get him over with.”

“Stand down for now,” I said, wiping my face with a towel. “I want this to go as peacefully as possible. Let’s check his temperature first.”

“Fair enough,” King said, though I could hear the reluctance in his voice. “But you know I never liked this Felix nigga. This is your dad’s mans. Get him out of the way. He might not even make it to dessert before he pops off.”

“Then we’ll handle it,” I firmly said.

King sighed. “Alright, nephew. I’ll make sure everything’s ready. See you tomorrow night.”

“Bet, Bring Aunty and tell all my cousins to come outside. I know my shit is private, but not tomorrow night. I want to be around my peoples after I handle this Felix nigga.”

“No doubt,” and with that, we ended the call.

I was still pacing around the gym, my thoughts circling, when my phone buzzed again. This time, it was Dream.

“What’s up, beautiful?” I answered, my voice softening as I headed to the shower.

“Hey,” she said, her tone light but carrying a hint of frustration.

“You good?” I asked, catching the edge in her voice.

She sighed. “I didn’t call you last night because I had a fight with my best friend.”

I smirked, tilting my head. “You throwing hands? That sounds crazy. But I was wondering why you didn’t call me or answer my text. I thought you passed out on that tequila I gave you.”

“I know how to handle myself when it comes to beating a bitch’s ass,” she said, and I

could hear the sass creeping into her voice. “I beat the brakes off her scandalous ass. After we drank that damn tequila, she was spilling all the tea, but I poured it on her ass.”

I laughed, shaking my head. “You serious right now?”

“Dead serious,” she said. “She deserved it, though. I’ll tell you everything when you come by after I get off work.”

“I’ll be there,” I said, grabbing my towel.

“Thank you,” she said, her voice softening.

“Always,” I replied. “I’ll bring dinner.”

As I ended the call, I couldn’t help but smirk. Dream fighting was a new one, and I was curious as hell to hear the full story. But if someone had crossed her enough to throw hands, they’d better hope I didn’t get involved next.

I showered for thirty minutes and then got out to get dressed for the day. I wasn’t going to the office today, so I threw on something casual. I had to meet with my boy Lil Ken because I was looking for Donshay’s mother, but I wasn’t telling my mother. I knew my boy could find anyone, even if we had to use DNA.

After getting dressed, I grabbed my keys and headed out. Lil Ken’s mansion in Calabasas was about thirty minutes from my penthouse, depending on traffic. The drive was smooth, the LA sun blazing as I weaved through the morning congestion.

I hadn’t seen Ken in a minute, and knowing how lupus had been hitting him lately, I wanted to check in. Ken wasn’t family by blood, but loyalty made us closer than most relatives. He’d built his empire in the music industry, but more importantly, he was

the kind of man you could trust to get things done. If anyone could help me find Donshay's mother discreetly, it was him.

When I pulled up to his sprawling estate, the gate swung open automatically, and I eased the car into the driveway. His house was massive, the kind of place that screamed success, but it still felt like a home. Kids' toys littered the yard, and the faint sound of music spilled out as I walked to the door.

"Yo, what's good, big dog?" Ken greeted me as I stepped into his home office. He was sitting behind a massive desk, a glass of water in one hand and his phone in the other. Despite everything he was dealing with, he still had that sharp, unshakable energy.

"Chillin', my nigga," I said, dapping him up. "How you feelin'?"

He shrugged, leaning back in his chair. "You know how it is with this lupus shit. Some days are better than others. Today's decent, so I'm making the most of it. What brings you out here?"

I sat down across from him, pulling the folded birth certificate from my pocket. "I need your help. I'm looking for someone."

Ken raised an eyebrow. "Who?"

I hesitated, but there was no point in dancing around it. I told him everything, starting with the bitch leaving my son at Dream's office.

Ken's expression shifted, his usual laid-back demeanor replaced by sharp curiosity. "That shit sounds crazy, bro."

"I know, my nigga," I said, leaning forward and handing him the paper.

Ken unfolded it and scanned the information, his face immediately twisting into a frown. “This birth certificate is fake as fuck, my nigga,” he said, shaking his head. “Whoever this chick is, she either had that baby at home or in a damn back alley. No hospital is attached to this.”

Anger flared in my chest, but I kept it in check. “So, what’s next?” I asked.

Ken leaned back in his chair, tapping the paper. “We can track her through DNA. Ancestry databases, paternity connections—it’s not fast, but it’s thorough. Also, you need to get the security tapes from Dream’s office. If there’s any footage of the drop-off, that’s your best lead.”

I clenched my jaw, frustrated with myself. “Why the fuck didn’t I think of that?”

“Don’t beat yourself up,” Ken said, his tone calm. “You’ve had a lot going on. This ain’t about how fast you move—it’s about moving smart, especially with a kid.”

I nodded, taking a deep breath. “Alright. I’ll get the tapes. And I already got my DNA test done—he is mine. No doubt about it.”

Ken gave a low whistle, leaning forward. “How does it feel, being a father?”

I hesitated, running a hand over my face. “I don’t know yet. I haven’t spent time with him, you know? It’s still sinking in.”

Ken nodded, studying me closely. “You’re stepping into some real shit, my nigga. But I know you’ll figure it out.”

“Yeah, I will.”

We spent the next hour going over how he’d dig into Donshay’s mother, with Ken

promising to get started immediately. As I left his mansion and headed back toward the city, I felt a mix of anticipation and determination. With Ken on the case, I was one step closer to getting the answers I needed.

Now, I just had to keep everything else in my life from falling apart in the meantime.

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

The sun dipped below the horizon as I turned into my neighborhood, the streetlights flickering on one by one. All I could think about was getting home, showering, and preparing for Damier's first visit to my house.

As I pulled into my driveway, my eyes flicked to the rearview mirror, catching sight of a dark car with tinted windows that had been behind me for the last couple of turns. A chill ran down my spine as it slowed near my house, the engine rumbling low.

I gripped the steering wheel, watching it carefully. For a moment, it idled as if the driver was debating something, but then it rolled past my driveway and disappeared down the street.

Relief washed over me, but the unease lingered. I shook it off, convincing myself it was just someone lost or turning around.

Don't let it ruin your night, I told myself as I stepped out of my new royal blue M3 BMW.

With a deep breath, I walked into my house, ready to make everything perfect for Damier. This was his first time in my space, and I wanted it to feel like home—for both of us.

Work had been good, and despite everything that had gone down with Zaraa, I was in a surprisingly calm mood. Sometimes, losing people wasn't a loss—it was just life clearing space for better things.

Tonight, I wasn't thinking about Zaraa or her betrayal. I was focusing on being a wife for the first time. All I could think about was being engaged. I was still struck by my ring, and even after Zaraa tried to make me feel bad for being engaged, I was still feeling like the luckiest girl in the world.

I stood in front of the mirror, adjusting the soft, emerald green, form-fitting silk nightgown I'd chosen. My hair, usually tied back in a bun for work, now cascaded over my shoulders.

By the time 7:00 PM rolled around, I was settled in the living room, sipping on a glass of champagne. The house felt peaceful, the faint sound of soft R&B playing in the background. When the doorbell rang, my stomach fluttered, but I stayed calm as I walked to answer it.

When I opened the door, Damier stood there in a tailored black dress shirt and slacks, looking every bit the man women pinned to their vision boards. His eyes swept over me, and for a second, he just stood there, almost drooling.

"Damn," he said, his voice low and full of heat.

I laughed, stepping aside to let him in. "No hello?"

He pulled me into a hug, kissing my neck in a way that sent a shiver down my spine.

"Fuck, you ain't knocked up with my baby yet?" he teased, his tone light but his hands lingering on my waist.

I laughed again, swatting at his chest. "Dear God, not yet," I said, but in the back of my mind, I couldn't help wishing it were true.

As he walked in, I watched his eyes roam over the space. My house wasn't a

penthouse or a sprawling estate, but it was cozy, functional, and had everything a family could need.

“This is a dope-ass house,” he said, surprising me.

“Thank you,” I replied, a small smile tugging at my lips.

We headed to the kitchen, where he immediately gravitated toward my bar. He spotted his favorite imported cognac and chuckled, picking up the bottle.

“Now, how did you get this?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

I smirked, leaning against the counter. “Your mother brought it by my job yesterday for me,” I said.

He nodded, pouring himself a glass. “Figures,” he muttered, grinning.

We sat at the glass table in my kitchen, the night feeling warm and easy. But as we sipped our drinks, I decided to rip the Band-Aid off.

“My best friend’s name is Zaraa. We fought because she and my ex, Lamari, were creeping behind my back when we were together, and as of now,” I admitted, the words tumbling out before I could second-guess myself.

He raised an eyebrow, his expression hardening. “The bitch nigga who thinks he can fight me?”

“Yeah,” I said, swirling the champagne in my glass. “I feel betrayed, but honestly? I’m trying not to let it bother me. I just keep thinking about how Zaraa was my only friend for years. I’ve been so focused on my career and my life that I haven’t thought about making new friends. I’ve always been stuck with Zaraa.”

He nodded, his voice calm but firm. “I get it. You had tunnel vision. Maybe you should start hanging with Hocus’s wife. Y’all always vibe when we’re all together.”

The idea caught me off guard, but in a good way. “You think so?”

“Yeah,” he said. “She’s relatable and on your level. She can help you with the wedding planning, too. I’ll set something up where y’all can start hanging out.”

The mention of the wedding made me pause. “I haven’t even thought about the wedding yet,” I admitted, sighing. “I grew up in a two-parent household, but marriage wasn’t something I dreamed about. I never had a dream wedding idea.”

He moved closer, his hand brushing my cheek. “Take your time, baby. You don’t have to rush. And you don’t have a budget—whatever you want, it’s yours.”

I smiled, my chest warming. “You always know what to say.”

He leaned in, his voice soft. “I know this is all new to you, but I promise you, Imani—I’ll be your first and only husband.”

I laughed, feeling the weight of his words settle in my chest. “You damn right you will.”

After a few quiet moments, he broke the news that a chef was coming to cook for us in the next thirty minutes.

“I like that,” I said, grinning. “But next time, you’re letting me show you my cooking skills.”

We moved back to the kitchen, and I finally slid into what had been on my mind all night.

“So, you really like my place?”

He chuckled, leaning against the counter. “Yeah. It’s cozier than the penthouse or any house I own.”

I bit my lip, nervous but determined. “Good. Because I want you to move in with me.”

He raised an eyebrow, surprised. “I ain’t never moved in with a woman.”

“Don’t look at it like that,” I quickly said. “This house is perfect for showing our future kids—and Donshay—that there’s balance in being wealthy. We can remodel it, make it ours.”

He nodded slowly. “I’ll give it some thought.”

I smirked. “Stay a few days with me, and I bet you’ll have your answer in two days or less.”

He laughed, shaking his head. “You’re persistent, woman.”

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The chef arrived, and the smell of soul food filled the house, making it feel even cozier. The chef prepared a mouthwatering feast of smothered pork chops, mac and cheese, collard greens, cornbread, and chocolate pie for dessert. We ate and laughed, the night flowing effortlessly until my phone buzzed. It was my mother.

When I answered, her voice was calm but heavy. “Mrs. Knight funded the medicine for Donta to pass peacefully. It’s set to be done here, in his room, in two weeks.”

I felt my chest tighten, but I kept my voice steady. “Okay. I’ll come over tomorrow.”

As I hung up, I felt the weight settle over me like a dark cloud.

“What’s wrong?” Damier asked, his tone soft but concerned. He was sitting across from me, finishing up rolling his blunt.

I couldn’t answer at first. My throat was tight. Finally, the tears came, spilling out uncontrollably as I told him what my mother said. Damier tucked his blunt behind his ear, stood immediately, walked over, and lifted me into his arms like I weighed nothing. He carried me to the living room, settling me in his lap as I cried into his chest.

He stroked my hair, his voice low and soothing. “Everything gon’ get better with time, baby. Your brother’s going to be at peace, and you know he wants you to be at peace, too.”

His calm presence and the steady rhythm of his breathing soothed me in a way I couldn’t explain. He put his blunt to my lips, and I took a hit, the sharp inhale grounding me.

“I’m here,” he murmured, his voice steady. “I got you.”

And in that moment, I knew he meant it.

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

I stepped into Dream's room after getting dressed and ready to head to my club's relaunch. The place had been gutted inside and rebuilt—new design, new staff, and even atmosphere models to keep the vibe right. It was more than a renovation; it was a statement. This was a fresh start, and I couldn't wait to see the outcome.

Dream stood at her vanity, her fingers adjusting a diamond necklace around her neck. Her reflection in the mirror was stunning, but her sad eyes told a different story. She was already grieving, even though Donta wasn't gone yet. It killed me to see her like that, and I wanted to show her that I was here for her.

I walked up behind her and set a box vase of dark red roses from A Million Roses on her lit-up vanity, catching her attention.

She glanced at the roses, a small smile breaking through her sadness. "Thank you," she softly said.

I bent down and kissed her lips, lingering for a moment. "You look beautiful for my relaunch," I said, my voice low.

"Thank you," she replied, "but my red eyes aren't."

I smirked, trying to lighten the mood. "They're about to be even redder because we're about to smoke some fire-ass weed on the way to the club."

She laughed, shaking her head. "I still can't believe I smoke again."

"Ain't nothing wrong with it," I said. "It's to keep you calm."

As she adjusted her necklace, I sat on the edge of the bed, watching her. “You should take some time off work,” I said.

She frowned, glancing at me. “Damier, you know how I feel about leaving my clients hanging.”

“Yeah, I know,” I said. “But you don’t have to work every day to keep your business going. You have the means to step back—at least until you’re not grieving. You don’t have to carry everything at once.”

She sighed, nodding slightly. “You’re right. But not just yet.”

Once we were ready, Dream grabbed one of the roses to take with her, and then we headed to the front of her house—where my brand-new black Aston Martin DB12 was waiting. I needed something sporty and small to commute in LA traffic, and this was it.

I opened the passenger door for Dream, and she slid in gracefully, her satin black Valentino dress hugging her body just right. Once I got in and started the engine, I put my playlist on and sparked a blunt, placing it between my lips. Reaching over, I intertwined my fingers with hers, kissing the top of her hand before pulling out of the driveway.

I weaved through traffic, the LA lights blurring past as we vibed to the music. Smoke curled lazily around the cabin, and I glanced over at her every so often, admiring how good she looked in my passenger seat. She was everything—more than I deserved, but I wasn’t about to let her go.

When we arrived at the club, I pulled into my private rooftop parking. The place was buzzing, the energy electric. Dream and I were escorted to the elevator, where she held onto my arm, her presence grounding me.

Once we stepped into the club, I nodded toward my VIP section, where Chanel and some of my people were waiting to keep her company. I leaned in close, kissing her temple. “Go enjoy yourself. I’ll be back soon.”

Her smile was small but genuine as she walked off, leaving me to head toward my office.

As soon as I stepped away from Dream, my mindset shifted. The lightness I felt around her was gone, replaced by the cold focus I needed for business. In my office, King, Hocus, and a couple of my men were waiting, their expressions serious.

“Felix here yet?” I asked, pouring myself a drink.

“Not yet,” King said, leaning against the wall. “But you know he ain’t pulling up alone.”

“Of course not,” I said, swirling the glass in my hand. “He’s probably got half of Mexico outside, thinking that’ll keep him safe on my turf.”

We made small talk, the tension in the room thick as we waited. Fifteen minutes later, Felix walked in with his right-hand man, Juan, his demeanor cool but cautious.

“Welcome,” I said, gesturing toward the chairs in front of my desk.

Felix smirked, nodding as he sat down. “Nice setup you’ve got here, Knight. You always did know how to show off.”

I poured him a drink, sliding it across the desk. “Figured we should do this right.”

He took the glass, his fingers lingering on it as he studied me. “So, what’s this about?”

The conversation started off cordial, with me talking about numbers and how much I owe him, but the undercurrent of tension was impossible to ignore.

“So, after I pay you, it’s time we part ways,” I said, leaning back in my chair. “You’ve been good for business, Felix, but we’re moving in a different direction.”

His smirk faded, replaced by a cold, calculating look. “Part ways? You brought me way out here for that?”

“It’s not personal,” I said, my tone calm but firm. “Your methods don’t align with where we’re going. It’s time for something new.”

Felix chuckled darkly, taking a sip of his drink. “And you think I’m just going to walk away?”

I shrugged. “You don’t have a choice.”

Juan shifted in his seat, and I caught King tensing out of the corner of my eye.

“You’ve got a lot of nerve, Knight,” Felix said, his voice low. “You think you can just cut me out without consequences? I know things about your family—things that could make your empire crumble.”

I didn’t flinch, my gaze steady. “And I know things about you too, Felix—more than you think. You’ve been in this game long enough to know how this ends, my guy. The only question is whether you want it to be clean or messy.”

The room went silent, the weight of his words hanging heavy. I could see King itching to make a move, but something in me said this wasn’t the time.

“You’ve got your answer,” I said, standing up. “Now, finish your drink and get out of

my club.”

Felix stared at me for a long moment before standing, his smirk returning. “This isn’t over,” he said quietly.

“Probably not,” I replied, my voice even.

He turned and walked out, his right-hand man following close behind.

Once the door closed, King turned to me, his eyes blazing. “We should’ve handled him right here, nephew. You know he’s gonna be a problem.”

“I know,” I said, sitting back down. “But not tonight.”

King didn’t look convinced, but he nodded. “Your call. But you better keep your eyes open.”

“I always do,” I said, pouring another drink.

As I sat there, the weight of the meeting settled over me. Felix wasn’t done, and I knew it. But for now, I had other things to focus on—and I’d deal with him when the time was right.

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After the club, we went back to my penthouse since it was closer to the club. The city lights twinkled below us, a reminder of the night’s success. The relaunch had been a win—a million dollars in one night, and the liveliness in the club had been electric. But now, it was just me and Dream, and that was all I needed to close out the night.

The massive tub in my bathroom was filled with warm water and rose-scented

bubbles, the steam curling into the air as I slid into it. Dream climbed in after me, her body easing into my lap, her soft curves pressing against me as she faced me. Dream had me doing shit I never did. Bubble baths, staying the night at a woman's house. It was all new to me, but I liked being in her world.

We were both drunk, the liquor from the club still fizzing in our systems. Her lips found mine, tasting sweet and familiar as she kissed me deeply, her hands roaming over my shoulders and chest. I kissed her back, my hands gripping her ass under the water.

After a while, she pulled back, her lips glistening, her eyes hazy but locked on mine.

“Do you think we’ll always be like this?” she asked softly, her voice carrying something heavier than the question.

I looked at her, taking a moment to give her the real answer she deserved. “People change, baby,” I said, my voice low but honest. “Circumstances change, too. But me? I’m not going to change. I know what I want, and that’s you. That’s us.”

Her gaze softened, her fingers brushing my cheek. “I hear you,” she whispered. “But me? I’m not changing, either. Even though it’s only been close to a year, I already know. You’re it for me.”

I pulled her closer, my lips brushing against hers. “Good,” I murmured, my hands sliding down her back.

The way her body melted into mine, the way her lips moved against me, the way her eyes held mine—it was all-consuming. The connection between us felt raw, real, and unshakable.

She rode my dick slowly in the tub, the water sloshing gently around us as we moved

together. Her moans filled the space, mixing with the faint sound of the city outside. Every touch, every kiss, every look felt like it deepened the bond we already shared.

When we finally climbed out, the cool air hit our damp skin, making us both shiver slightly. Dream grabbed a towel, wrapping it around herself as she moved to her side of the bathroom.

She stood in front of the mirror, lotioning her body with slow, deliberate movements, her skin glowing under the soft lights. I leaned against the counter, watching her with a lazy smile as I slid on a pair of boxers and rubbed a little lotion on myself.

“You know I could watch you all day, right?” I said, my voice low.

She glanced at me in the mirror, her lips curving into a small smile. “I know. That’s why I take my time.”

When we finally climbed into bed, the room was dark except for the faint glow of the city through the windows. She curled into me, her head resting on my chest, her hand splayed over my heart.

The rhythm of her breathing matched mine, and as we drifted off, I thought about her question again.

Do you think we’ll always be like this?

I didn’t know the future. But lying there with her, feeling the weight of her trust and love, I knew one thing for sure—this was where I was supposed to be.

Two weeks later...

The room was quiet except for the soft sound of the central heating and ceiling fan. I was deep in sleep, my body curled into the warm cocoon of blankets, when something startled me awake. My heart jumped as I turned over, squinting through the dark to see Damier sitting upright in bed.

His breathing was ragged, his chest heaving as he gasped for air. Sweat poured down his face, glistening in the faint moonlight streaming through the curtains.

“Damier,” I said softly, my voice thick with sleep.

He didn’t respond, his eyes fixed on some invisible point in front of him.

“Baby,” I said again, reaching out to touch his arm.

He flinched slightly, snapping out of whatever trance he was in. His head turned toward me, and for a moment, he looked lost, vulnerable in a way I’d never seen before.

“I’m good,” he muttered, wiping his face with his hand.

“You’re not,” I said firmly, sitting up beside him. “What’s going on?”

He let out a long breath, his shoulders slumping. “I’ve been having nightmares,” he admitted. “I’ve been hiding them... even from myself. But tonight—” He paused, swallowing hard.

“Tonight, it was my twin,” he continued, his voice dropping lower. “He was choking me, his hands tight around my neck, and I couldn’t move. Donshay was in the background, crying, and I couldn’t get to him. I just... I felt trapped.”

The weight of his words hung heavy in the room.

“I don’t even feel sorry for him,” he said bitterly, shaking his head. “Whatever Damian’s going through, he deserves it. I don’t want to have these dreams, Imani. I don’t.”

I sat there for a moment, processing everything. I’d promised myself I wouldn’t push into his mental health unless he asked, but this? This was something he couldn’t just ignore.

“You don’t have to feel sorry for him,” I gently said. “But your mind is trying to tell you something. These nightmares... they’re not just going to stop on their own. You need to deal with them, baby.”

He glanced at me, his brow furrowing. “How?”

“Cognitive therapy,” I said. “I know you don’t want to take medication, but therapy can help. It’s time to start working through this, even if it’s uncomfortable.”

He sighed, rubbing the back of his neck. “You think it’ll work?”

“I know it will,” I said.

“Well, link me with one of your psychologist friends so I can start.”

“I’m going to refer you to my top earner at my office. She’s the best, and she specializes in what you’re going through.”

He nodded slowly, the tension in his body easing just a little. “Alright. I trust you. Set it up. But let her know she has to sign an NDA. You know the life I live.”

“Don’t worry. I got you.”

We sat there for a moment longer before I swung my legs over the side of the bed. “I’ll make some tea,” I said.

He nodded, heading to the bathroom to shower while I went downstairs, the warmth of the house wrapping around me like a blanket. I pulled out a tin of lavender and chamomile tea and boiled water, letting the soothing aroma fill the kitchen.

When he came downstairs, fresh from the shower and dressed in nothing but gray sweatpants, I couldn’t help but take a moment to admire him. His skin still glistened slightly, and his wavy hair was damp, but his face looked softer, calmer.

I handed him the mug, and he hesitated briefly, lifting a skeptical brow. “I’m not a tea drinker,” he muttered.

I giggled, shaking my head. “Boy, just drink it.”

He sighed but took a sip, his expression shifting slightly. “This is kinda alright,” he grudgingly admitted.

“See?” I teased, settling onto the couch beside him.

We sat there in the dark. The only sound was the faint noise of the pool cleaner outside. His arm rested on the back of the couch, and I leaned into him, feeling the steady rise and fall of his chest.

“We’re going to be okay,” I whispered, my hand resting on his leg.

He nodded, his lips brushing the top of my head. “Yeah, baby. We will be.”

The quiet settled around us as the tea and the moment worked their magic. Eventually, we both drifted off, tangled together on the couch.

When I woke up hours later, the early morning sun was filtering through the windows, but I didn’t feel rested. My heart ached as the reality of the evening to come hit me like a freight train.

It was time for Donta’s scheduled passing.

The weight of it crushed me, and as I glanced at Damier, still asleep beside me, I knew the hours ahead were going to be some of the hardest of my life.

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The evening air was heavy with grief as we gathered at my parents’ house. Everyone was there—Damier by my side, Mrs. Knight offering support to my mother, both of my grandmothers and even my uncle Leroy, my dad’s brother, who was there to keep him occupied. The house felt full, yet hollow, as if the weight of what was about to happen had sucked the life out of it.

Donta had been heavily medicated for days. He no longer knew who was around him or what was happening, but at least he wasn’t in pain. That small comfort was the only thing keeping me from completely breaking down.

Mrs. Knight had arranged for food to be catered, which was her way of ensuring everyone was taken care of. Platters of wings, mac and cheese, string greens, and desserts sat untouched on the dining table because no one had an appetite.

Except for me.

The weed I'd been smoking with Damier all day left me mentally numb but physically starving. I grabbed a plate, forcing myself to eat a few wings and some mac and cheese. It felt wrong to enjoy food on a day like this, but it was the only thing distracting me.

An hour later, my mother's voice broke through the soft conversation. "It's time," she said softly, her words slicing through the air like a blade.

My chest tightened as I stood, my legs feeling unsteady beneath me. The only people allowed into Donta's room were me, my parents, my grandmothers, and the home nurse. Everyone else stayed downstairs, their somber murmurs fading as we climbed the stairs to his room.

The room was dimly lit. Donta lay still in the bed, his body fragile, his chest rising and falling in slow, shallow breaths. My heart clenched as I approached him, my knees weak at the sight of my little brother.

The nurse handed my mother a small vial of pentobarbital, the medicine that would bring him peace. She connected it to the IV line already in place in Donta's arm, her movements steady but solemn.

My mother's hands trembled as she pushed the syringe's plunger slowly, delivering the dose that would ease him into eternal rest. Her voice wavered as she leaned close to him, whispering, "I love you, baby."

We stood there, holding our breaths as his chest rose and fell for the last time. The room grew impossibly still, time seeming to stop as his breathing faded into silence.

And then it hit me.

I crumbled into my parents' arms, the weight of my grief pulling me down as sobs

wracked my body. “He’s gone,” I choked out, the words slicing through me like a knife.

I climbed into the bed beside him, wrapping my arms around his lifeless body. I stayed there, tears streaming down my face, until the coroner arrived to take him.

I stumbled into the bathroom afterward, splashing cold water on my face as I tried to pull myself together. My reflection stared back at me, red-eyed and hollow.

When I emerged and went downstairs, Mrs. Knight was waiting in the kitchen. “He’s in the backyard,” she said softly, nodding toward the door.

I nodded, swallowing the lump in my throat as I made my way outside.

Damier stood under the big oak tree, a blunt in one hand and a glass of cognac in the other. He was blowing thick clouds of smoke into the night sky, his gaze fixed on the stars.

He looked up as I approached, his expression softening. “I had to step out,” he admitted. “When I heard you cry, I couldn’t... I needed air. Needed to clear my head.”

He passed me the blunt, and I took it, inhaling deeply as I leaned into him.

“It’s going to be hard without him,” I quietly said, my voice breaking.

“I know,” he replied, wrapping his arm around my shoulders.

“I’ve been thinking,” I said, exhaling slowly. “After the funeral, I’m going to take a year and a half off work. I need to focus on my mental health, on becoming a wife, and hopefully a mom. I’ll keep the practice open and let my psychologists handle

things, but I won't be seeing clients for a while."

He nodded, his voice low. "That's the best decision, baby. You need time to heal, to focus on you."

We finished the blunt in silence, the shared quiet feeling like a balm for my raw emotions.

When we went back inside, I sat with my parents to discuss the funeral arrangements. The conversation felt surreal, as if I were watching it happen from outside myself.

When it was time to leave, Damier and I walked to his car, the air cool against my skin. Once we were settled inside, he started the engine and glanced over at me.

"I want to head to your place tonight," he said, his voice steady.

I raised an eyebrow, surprised. "Really?"

He smirked, his hand resting on the gearshift. "Yeah. I've been thinking... I might take you up on your offer to make your place ours."

A small smile tugged at my lips, the tiniest spark of warmth breaking through my grief. "You mean that?"

He nodded, his eyes meeting mine. "Yeah, Imani. I mean it. I like being in your world."

As he pulled out of the driveway, I leaned back in my seat, the weight of the day still heavy but slightly lighter with him beside me. For the first time in hours, I felt a glimmer of hope.

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

It had been two weeks since Donta's funeral, and the weight of it still hung heavy in the air. The service had been beautiful—decked out in powder blue, his favorite color, with everyone dressed to match. It was a sad day, but I'd done everything I could to be there for Dream and her family. Since then, I'd been making sure she had what she needed, whether that was space, company, or just knowing I was a call away.

She'd officially stopped working, something I'd been pushing her to do. Now, her days were spent at home, curled up with books she hadn't had time to read or binge-watching shows she'd missed while being busy with clients. I could tell it was still hard for her, but she was holding up better than I expected.

I walked up to her door, holding Donshay in one arm and a diaper bag slung over the other. My mom had handed him over to me this morning with a knowing smirk, saying it was time for me to start getting used to fatherhood. It was his first day with me solo, and I was already wondering what I'd signed up for.

When Dream opened the door, her face lit up. "Hey, Daddy," she teased, reaching for the baby. I was glad she was fond of children and comfortable enough to reach for him.

I chuckled, stepping inside. "Hey. First day on the job, and I already have no idea what I'm doing," I admitted. "Ma changed him before we left, and I'm just praying he doesn't hit me with a number two."

She laughed, shaking her head as she took Donshay from my arms. "Well, you don't have to worry because I've got him. I need something to keep my mind off Donta

anyway.”

Her words hit me, but she smiled as she said it, her strength shining through the pain.

“I went to his grave this morning,” she added as we walked to the kitchen. “I put more flowers on it. Looks like a damn flower shop now.”

I smiled, grabbing a glass from the cabinet and pouring myself some water from the refrigerator.

“You seem like a natural already,” I said, watching as she gave Donshay his pacifier and settled him into her arms like a mother would.

“I used to take care of Donta like this, so it’s natural.” She looked down at him.

“I’m ready to change his name,” I said, leaning against the counter. “To Donta like I told you in Turks. But... if you want to save the name for your future unborn son, we don’t have to.”

She looked up at me, her eyes soft. “No,” she said, a small smile spreading across her face. “We can give Donshay Donta’s name. If we have a son, I’d want him to be your junior.”

Her words settled over me like a calm I hadn’t felt in a long time. “That’s perfect,” I said, my voice low.

I hesitated for a moment before saying what I was going to ask next, swirling the water in my glass.

“I know it’s too soon,” I started, meeting her gaze. “And I don’t want to force anything on you or change your world, even though we’re about to get married.

But... do you want to be listed as his mother? That way, whoever she is, she can't come back into his life and try to stir up anything. I can make anything happen with his birth certificate. It would be official."

Her eyes softened, and she looked down at Donshay, her hand lightly brushing over his tiny face. "I'd love that," she said. "I love everything that comes with being in your world, including him. I'm getting closer to forty years old than anything, and I want to start living like it. We can raise him as ours."

Hearing her say that did something to me. I had a child out of the blue, and I don't even know who the mother is, and she was willing to help me raise him. She deserved everything good that was going to her, and I wanted her to know that. I set my glass down and walked over to her, making her stand up with the baby still in her arms. I wrapped them both in a hug, holding her close.

"I'm so happy God brought you into my life," I murmured, my voice thick with emotion.

She smiled up at me, and I could see the warmth in her eyes.

"And I want to move into your house with you," I added. "We don't have to change a thing if you don't want to. I'll pay off the house, and you won't have to worry about a single bill."

Her smile grew, but before she could say anything, Donshay let out a small whine, squirming in her arms.

"Looks like our adult moments are going to come to an end," I said, smirking.

She laughed, bouncing him gently. "I guess so."

We moved to the living room, settling on the couch with Donshay between us, laying on his fleece cover. I'd arranged for my chef to cook us an early dinner, something simple but good. Dream had been cooking for me for the last week to keep her mind off things, but I wanted her to rest and not lift a finger. She deserved that.

The chef arrived shortly after, filling the house with the smell of garlic and spices, making us seafood pasta and garlic bread made from scratch. Dream fed Donshay a bottle while I listened to her talk about decorating one of her empty rooms for him.

"I'll take him back to my mom after dinner," I said, glancing at her.

"I'd say leave him with me, but I still need time. I want him to be comfortable here."

He nodded, his voice understanding. "Take all the time you need. I'll be ready when you are."

The moment was perfect, but as we sat there, a faint unease crept into the back of my mind. It was subtle, a feeling I couldn't quite shake like the air shifting before a storm.

I glanced at the sliding glass doors, the curtains swaying slightly from the AC. Outside, the world was quiet, but it felt too quiet and too peaceful—like something was lurking just out of sight.

Dream noticed my gaze and tilted her head. "You okay?"

I forced a smirk, leaning forward to kiss her temple. "Yeah, I'm good. Just tired, that's all."

But as I sat back, slightly lying on the couch, I couldn't ignore the nagging feeling that the peace we were holding onto was about to be tested. I didn't know when or

how, but I'd learned to trust my instincts.

And my instincts were telling me that danger was on the way.

For now, though, I let myself enjoy the moment—the smell of dinner in the air, the sound of Dream's soft laughter, and the sight of Donshay cradled in her arms. Because whatever was coming, I'd face it head-on.

I always do.

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

The air in my apartment was thick with smoke, the faint scent of stale weed clinging to the walls. I sat on the couch, my legs tucked under me, the half-empty bottle of water in my hand doing nothing to wash away the bitter taste of the Percocet I'd popped thirty minutes ago. My head was swimming, and I wasn't sure if it was from the pills or the mess I'd gotten myself into with Lamari. Probably both.

I leaned back, staring at the ceiling, my mind spinning. How did I end up here? Dream used to look at me like I was her ride-or-die, the one who had her back no matter what. Now, I was plotting to lure her into the worst kind of betrayal.

But what choice did I have?

I couldn't shake the sound of Lamari's voice from my head. The conversation I overheard between him and one of his boys had been playing on a loop, each word sinking deeper into my chest.

"She ain't even gotta know the real reason," he'd said, laughing darkly. "I lost my job, my nigga. That's why I need this ransom money. That Damier nigga got billions. Four million ain't shit to him to get his bitch back."

Four million dollars.

That's what this was about. His greed, his desperation, his way of solving a problem he didn't even let me in on until now. And I was stuck, chained to this plan because I'd let myself get pulled too far under his influence.

I grabbed my phone off the coffee table, scrolling aimlessly, trying to distract myself

from the pit in my stomach. But just as I started to feel like I could breathe, Lamari's name lit up my screen.

"What," I answered, trying to sound calm.

"Don't what me. You still good for tomorrow?" His voice was sharp, no room for excuses.

I hesitated. "Yeah, but?—"

"No buts, Zaraa," he cut me off. "We've gone over this. Tell her you wanna make things right. Say you cut me off. Tell her you're picking her up and taking her to dinner so y'all can talk it out."

I nodded, even though he couldn't see me, my grip tightened on the phone.

"What if she says no?"

"She won't. Her brother just died, so she is vulnerable. I watched that nigga Damier catch a flight out of Van Ness airport, so she isn't guarded. I know she fought you, but I know her. She is gullible and doesn't have a friend. Put on your best voice and get her out of the house. Cry if you have to."

"Okay, and then what?" I rolled my eyes.

"Once you're on the road, tell her you gotta stop in North Hollywood to grab some weed," he continued, his tone cold. "That's when you bring her to my brother's spot. Soon as she's out of the car in front of the house, I'll take over."

I swallowed hard, my chest tightening. "Lamari, I don't know?—"

“Don’t start with me,” he snapped. “You’ve already dragged your feet enough. You’re in this now, Z. There’s no backing out.”

I stayed silent, my head pounding.

“You do this, and you’re set,” he added, his tone softening but still laced with manipulation. “A million dollars, Zaraa. That’s all yours. Don’t fuck this up.”

Before I could respond, he hung up.

I sat there, the silence in the room pressing down on me. My hands trembled as I set the phone down, my mind racing.

This will be the last time, I told myself, trying to convince the growing pit of guilt in my stomach. One last time being grimy, and I’ll be out. No more Lamari, no more bullshit. Just me, rebuilding my life.

But no matter how hard I tried to believe it, Dream’s face kept flashing in my mind—the way she used to trust me, the way she smiled when she thought we were good.

I grabbed another Percocet from the bottle on the table and swallowed it dry, hoping to numb the ache in my chest. Tomorrow, I’d do what I needed to do. After that, I’d disappear.

At least, that’s what I told myself.

The weight of what I was about to do crushed me, but I knew there was no turning back now. Whatever came next, I’d have to face it. And for better or worse, I was determined to see this through—no matter how much it destroyed me.

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

The soft light of the late afternoon spilled into the room as I sat on the cushioned rocking chair in Donshay's—now Donta's—room at the Knight Estate. Mrs. Knight sat beside me on the chaise lounge, her usual poised and elegant self, while Hocus's wife, Chanel, leaned against the crib, bouncing her six-month-old daughter on her hip.

“You know,” Chanel said, her voice warm, “being a mom looks good on you.”

I glanced at Donta, who was nestled in my arms, his tiny fingers curling around my necklace as he drifted off to sleep. “Thank you,” I said softly, the words wrapping around me like a hug.

“I’m falling in love with him already,” I admitted, brushing a finger across Donta’s cheek. “But I know I’m not his mom. I just... I hope he doesn’t hold that against me when he grows up.”

Mrs. Knight smiled, her expression kind and thoughtful. “Children don’t judge love by blood, Dream,” she said. “They judge it by presence, care, and consistency. If you show up for him—and I know you will—he’ll grow to see you as the mother you’ve chosen to be.”

Her words settled something in me, but they also carried weight. I glanced down at Donta, his soft breaths steady against my chest. I was all in, even if the path ahead wasn’t entirely clear.

As the conversation shifted, my phone started ringing from the side table. I reached over and glanced at the screen. Zaraa.

Curiosity stirred in my chest, but I hesitated. I wasn't ready to hear her excuses or whatever half-baked apology she had prepared. Not yet.

I'll call her back later , I thought, silencing the call and turning my attention back to Chanel and Mrs. Knight. They were now the important people in my life.

We talked a little longer before Donta's tiny yawns let me know he was ready for bed. After tucking him into the crib, I stood and stretched, feeling the day catch up with me.

Chanel and I walked out together, the crisp evening air brushing against our skin. She was easy to talk to—relatable in a way most women weren't. Being married to a man like Hocus meant she understood things that other women couldn't.

"I like talking to you," I said as I helped her buckle her baby into the car seat of her Porsche truck. "There's so much I can't share with most people."

She smiled, her hand resting on the doorframe. "Same here. And for what it's worth, you're doing great. But marrying a man like Damier? It takes patience, trust, and a lot of understanding. Just remember, you're building something with him—not against him."

I nodded, her words sinking in. "Thanks, Chanel. That means a lot."

We hugged, and I made my way to the sleek new two-seater Mercedes that Damier had surprised me with a few days ago. As I slid into the leather seat, I couldn't help but think about how much he'd been opening up when it came to spending money on me.

He'd already paid off the house, and even though he'd said I didn't need to change anything, he'd deposited money into an account for renovations if I wanted them. I

loved how generous he was, but more than that, I loved him .

As I drove, my thoughts drifted to the future. I realized I wouldn't be able to keep the two-seater once I started taking care of Donta full-time—and especially not when we had our own kids. I couldn't believe I was even thinking like that, but it felt right.

My phone buzzed on the console, pulling me out of my thoughts. I glanced at the screen and remembered Zaraa's earlier call. For a moment, I debated ignoring it again, but something made me answer.

“Hello?”

“Hey,” Zaraa said, her voice softer than usual. “I'm glad you picked up. I've been wanting to talk to you.”

I stayed quiet, waiting for her to continue.

“Look,” she said, a hint of emotion creeping into her tone. “I messed up. I know I did. I cut things off with Lamari—I swear. I just want to make things right with you, Dream. Can we have dinner? My treat.”

Her words caught me off guard. She sounded sincere, almost desperate. Against my better judgment, I found myself agreeing. “Alright, bitch, just because I want to see where yo' head is at, and I want you to know where I stand with all this shit,” I said.

“I'ma pick you up in an hour. We'll go somewhere nice.”

“Okay,” I said hesitantly, the knot in my stomach loosening just a little.

When I got home, Zaraa's black BMW was already parked in front of my house. No matter how low her income was, she always kept a fly car. I grabbed my purse and

slid into the passenger seat, noting how calm she seemed.

As soon as Zaraa pulled out of my driveway, the silence in the car became unbearable. My jaw tightened as I stared out the window, the passing streetlights casting fleeting shadows across my face. I wasn't going to pretend everything was okay, and the words were bubbling up before I could stop them.

"You were wrong as hell for sleeping with Lamari and coming at me the way you did about it. Now, you want to make up," I said, my tone sharp, cutting through the tension. "And then you were even wronger for being jealous of me being with Damier for real. You could've come to me, Zaraa, about how you felt. If you needed money, I would've given it to you. You didn't have to betray me for it."

She flinched at my words, her hands gripping the steering wheel tighter. "I know," she whispered, her voice cracking.

"Do you?" I snapped, turning to face her. "Because it doesn't feel like it. You had no problem sneaking around with him, no problem lying to my face. And for what? A couple of dollars and a man who ain't worth shit?"

Tears welled in her eyes, and she sniffled, her voice trembling as she replied. "Imani, I know I messed up. I know I hurt you, and I hate myself for it. I was stupid. I let Lamari get in my head, and I made the worst decision of my life."

I folded my arms, watching her carefully. Her tears were real enough, but something in the way she was breaking down didn't sit right with me. It felt... forced, like she was playing a role she thought I wanted to see. After years of studying people, I knew when somebody was off.

"Zaraa," I said, my tone softening just slightly. "If you really mean that, then prove it. Words aren't enough. You can't just cry and think it'll fix everything."

“I know,” she choked out, wiping her face with the sleeve of her hoodie. “I just... I want to move forward. I want to fix things between us.”

Her voice cracked again, and I sighed, turning back to the window. Despite her tears, there was something hollow in the way she was talking, like the pieces weren’t quite adding up. But I ignored the nagging feeling in my gut.

“Before dinner,” she said, sniffing and trying to pull herself together, “I was thinking we could go to North Hollywood to grab some weed. My plug’s house isn’t far, and it won’t take long.”

Her tone had shifted, and the quick subject change made me glance at her out of the corner of my eye. It felt off, but I brushed it aside. This was Zaraa—weed and a quick detour were just part of her routine.

“Alright,” I said flatly, still keeping my guard up.

We drove in silence again, the uneasy feeling in my chest refusing to fade. But I pushed it down, telling myself I was just being paranoid. After all, this was Zaraa.

When we pulled up to a small house on a dimly lit street, my stomach tightened. The place didn’t feel right—too quiet, too isolated in the valley.

“We’re just grabbing it and going?” I asked, glancing at her.

“Yeah, won’t take a minute,” she said, her smile not quite reaching her eyes.

I reluctantly stepped out of the car, my instincts screaming at me to leave. But before I could act, the sound of footsteps behind me made my heart race.

Turning, I saw two men approaching—one of them was Lamari.

“Imani,” he said, his voice dripping with fake charm. “Long time no see.”

Panic surged through me as I realized what was happening. My fingers tightened around the small canister of mace in my purse.

“What is this, Zaraa?” I demanded, my voice trembling as I turned to her.

She looked away, her guilt plastered across her face.

Lamari grabbed my arm, his grip rough and unrelenting. “You’re coming with us,” he said coldly.

My instincts kicked in. I yanked my arm free and pulled out the mace, spraying it directly into his face. Lamari let out a guttural scream, stumbling backward as he clawed at his burning eyes.

“Zaraa, what the fuck,” he bellowed, his voice raw with pain.

I didn’t waste another second. I turned and ran as my Balenciaga tennis shoes moved as fast as they could go.

“Grab that bitch!” Lamari shouted, his voice echoing behind me.

I made it only a few steps before one of his friends caught up to me, his hands gripping my arms like a vise. I thrashed and screamed, my voice raw as I cursed at Zaraa.

“Zaraa, you lame ass bitch!” I shouted, my voice breaking with anger and betrayal. “You scandalous ho! You set me up!”

Through the haze of my panic, I saw her walking Lamari toward the yard, her

expression a mix of guilt and fear. She didn't look back at me as she helped him rinse his eyes at the water hose.

The men forced me to the ground, tying a shirt tightly around my mouth to muffle my screams. Tears burned in my eyes as I struggled against them, my heart pounding with terror.

"Let's go," one of them muttered, dragging me toward the house.

I kicked and fought, but it was no use. The door slammed shut behind me, the sound sealing my fate. Damier had flown to Paris for business, so there was no way he could save me. But I hoped like hell he would get triggered by my absence and try to find me.

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The room was dark and smelled of damp wood and sweat. My head pounded from the chaos that had just unfolded. They'd taken my phone, and one of Lamari's men had walked out with it earlier, locking the door from the outside. I silently prayed that they hadn't tampered with it. My location was on, and Damier and I had been sharing locations since the day he insisted on it for "safety."

Please, God, let him find me, I thought, the knot in my stomach tightening as I sat on the cold floor.

The sound of heavy footsteps echoed down the hall, and my chest tightened. The door creaked open, and there he was—Lamari, his face twisted in fury. His eyes were still red and swollen from the mace, but that didn't stop the smirk from spreading across his face.

"You got me fucked up," he sneered, stepping closer.

Before I could respond, his hand came down hard across my face, the force sending me crashing into the wall. Pain shot through my cheek, but anger quickly replaced it.

“You bitch ass nigga!” I snapped, scrambling to my feet despite the ache in my body.

I launched myself at him, swinging wildly, but he caught my arms easily and shoved me back onto the bed. “You don’t know when to quit, do you?” he growled, grabbing a length of rope from the floor.

“You’re a bitch,” I spat, thrashing against his grip as he tied my wrists to the bedposts with the rope that had been lying on the floor. “You can’t handle a real man like my nigga, so you have to sneak around like a little bitch!”

His face darkened, and for a moment, I thought he might hit me again. Instead, he leaned in close, his breath hot and sour against my face. “You think you’re that girl, huh?” he hissed. “You think you’re untouchable because you’ve got some billionaire nigga in your corner? Let me tell you something—he’s about to pay a fortune to get your ass back, and when he does, I’ll be set for life.”

“You’re disgusting,” I snapped, my voice filled with venom. “Damier’s going to bury you.”

That was all it took to set him off. His hands shot to my neck, squeezing hard enough to make my vision blur.

“Keep talking,” he taunted, his grip tightening with every word. “I want you to remember exactly how powerless you are when I take every penny from your nigga.”

I gasped for air, my vision narrowing as the room spun around me. My hands jerked against the ropes, but it was useless. His laughter rang in my ears as the pressure grew unbearable.

“Don’t worry,” he sneered. “You’ll wake up just in time to see your boyfriend’s money hit my account.”

The world went black, his voice fading into the void as I passed out.

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

The morning sun in Paris was sharp against the runway, but I wasn't paying attention to the light or the view. My mind was in Los Angeles, where it was the middle of the night. Dream hadn't answered my texts or calls, which wasn't completely out of character. Sometimes, her phone would die, or she'd fall asleep without charging it. Still, something about this felt different.

Hocus and I were boarding the jet, heading back to LA after handling some business in Europe. My phone buzzed as I stepped onto the plane, the notification lighting up with a number I didn't recognize. The area code was from LA.

King ? I thought. He was supposed to be in New York handling business, but sometimes he called from burner phones when he didn't want to leave a trail.

I answered, pressing the phone to my ear. "What's good?"

There was a pause, then a voice I didn't recognize. Deep, cold, and calculated. "You've got something I want, and I've got something you want."

I stopped in my tracks, the weight of his words hitting me like a punch to the chest.

"What the fuck are you talking about?" I growled, my voice low.

"Your prized possession," the man said, his tone mocking. "Imani Dream Jaxton. If you want her back, you're going to give me four million dollars in cash. I'll text you the address where to drop off the money, and then you can have your bitch back."

My heart pounded as my free hand curled into a fist. "Put her on the phone. I swear

on my soul who ever you are, you're?—”

“Relax,” the man cut me off, his voice calm. “She’s fine. For now. Pay up, and you can have her back untouched.”

“Who the fuck are you? Who set you up to do this? Tell me, nigga,” I demanded, my tone sharp.

But the line went dead.

I stood there for a moment, my hand gripping the phone so tight I thought it might shatter. My chest was heaving as rage burned through me.

“What’s going on, bro?” Hocus asked, his voice tense.

“Somebody’s got Dream,” I said through clenched teeth. “Four million dollars is what they’re asking for. You think that could be Felix?”

Hocus’s jaw tightened, his nostrils flaring. “Got Dream? What the fuck? Nah, that don’t sound like Felix. Four million? This is someone else desperate for money.”

“You think Damian had plans before we snatched his ass up?” I asked, pacing to the back of the plane.

“Hell no, nobody would do that for him,” Hocus confidently said.

“The nigga on the phone didn’t say his name, and his voice didn’t click to me. Didn’t give me a location yet either. Just hung up.”

“We are going to find out for sure. Try the number again.”

I tried calling the number back, but it went straight to voicemail. My thumb hovered over the screen as I fought the urge to throw the phone across the cabin.

The jet roared to life as we took off, but my mind was on fire. I pulled up Dream's location, praying it would give me the information I needed. The GPS pinged her in North Hollywood, but that didn't mean she was still there.

I called King, pacing up and down the aisle as the miles between me and LA dragged on.

"They took her," I said the moment he picked up.

"Who?" he asked, his tone sharp.

"Dream," I said, my voice raw. "Somebody called and said they have her. They're asking for four million in cash."

King cursed under his breath. "Alright. I'll wait for you on the runway when I land before you. We'll figure this shit out fast."

I nodded, gripping the back of the seat as the plane hit cruising altitude. "I'm heading to her last location as soon as we land. North Hollywood."

"Don't do shit without me," King warned.

"Just be ready," I said before ending the call.

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The flight felt like an eternity, every minute stretching out like hours. I couldn't even sit down, and I had drunk half of a bottle of cognac. Somebody had the love of my

life, and I didn't know what kind of condition she was in or what they were doing to her. The shit felt like a nightmare because my duty was to protect my lady.

By the time we touched down in LA, I was already out of my seat, ready to move. King was waiting on the runway with a black SUV, his face grim.

“Let’s go,” he said as I slid into the passenger seat.

We sped off toward North Hollywood, the tension in the car thick enough to cut. My face frowned as I stared at the GPS, the blinking dot of Dream’s location feeling both too close and too far.

When we pulled up, the street was dimly lit, the house small and run-down in a nice neighborhood. My stomach turned when I spotted something out the window. I stepped out of the truck, my Prada boots crunching against the gravel as I approached it.

It was Dream’s new iPhone 16 with the picture of us in Turks as the case, smashed to pieces.

I stared at it for a moment, my rage boiling over. “This is her phone,” I muttered, my voice low.

Hocus and King exchanged a look, but I was already moving. We kicked the door in, the sound echoing through the quiet street.

Inside, the house was dark, the smell of stale weed and sweat filling the air. In the living room, a woman was passed out on the couch, her body limp like she was in a drug coma.

I stepped over to her, pulling my gun from my waistband and pressing it against her

temple.

“Wake up,” I growled.

Her eyes fluttered open, and for a moment, she looked confused. Then, her face twisted in recognition.

“Damier?” she asked, confused.

And I knew her too. After Dream told me about Zaraa’s betrayal, something told me to put a face to the name. I’d looked her up on social media, and now here she was, lying in front of me, at the center of all this bullshit.

“Yeah, you know exactly who I am, Zaraa. Where’s Dream? With yo’ hatin’ ass,” I demanded, my voice cold.

“I don’t know,” she stammered, her voice shaky. “I swear, I don’t know! We got high, and I must’ve passed out. I don’t know if she left or what.”

I stared at her, my grip tightening on the gun. “You’re lying,” I said, my voice deadly. “Dream doesn’t do drugs, and we both know that.”

King and Hocus checked the rest of the house, their footsteps heavy as they returned to the room.

“Nobody else here,” King said, his tone sharp.

“Last chance,” I said, my finger brushing the trigger. “Where is Dream, and who has her? Give me a fuckin’ name.”

Zaraa’s eyes darted around the room, her lips trembling. “I don’t know! Lamari has

her!”

The gunshot from my revolver rang out after she gave me what I needed, the bullet hitting her square in the head.

I stood there for a moment, my chest heaving, as the room fell silent. I had to take her out. After letting Kita live, I was never making that mistake again.

“She knew more than a name, but I wasn’t about to keep her around to find out. I know who that nigga is. We will find him,” I muttered, turning to King.

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

I woke up with a sharp pain in my neck and wrists, my head pounding like a drum, and my bladder full. The air was cold, damp, and reeked of mildew. It took me a moment to remember what had happened—the car ride with Zaraa, Lamari’s voice, the slap that sent me into the wall, and then his hands around my neck, squeezing until everything went black.

I blinked, trying to focus on my surroundings. The room was different from before. This one was smaller, darker, and more suffocating. The walls were bare and stained, and the only light came from a dim, flickering bulb hanging from the ceiling. My hands were tied behind me, my wrists burning from the rough rope. My ankles were bound, too, leaving me slumped in an old wooden chair.

They moved me while I was out , I realized, my chest tightening.

I bit back the panic clawing its way up my throat. I couldn’t afford to break down. Not here. Not now.

I closed my eyes for a moment, forcing myself to breathe deeply. My body ached, but I pushed through the pain, twisting my wrists against the ropes. It was useless for now, but I had to keep trying.

Voices drifted in from outside the room, muffled but angry. I tilted my head, straining to hear.

“She better be worth it,” one of them said, his tone irritated. “Four million dollars ain’t no pocket change, man. He ain’t gon’ cough that up easy.”

“Man, pipe down,” another voice snapped. “That nigga got bread. He’ll pay up. I’m about to call him about the drop.”

I swallowed hard, their words confirming what Lamari had said. This wasn’t just about me—it was about the ransom. My stomach churned as I thought about Damier, about how furious he’d be when he found out what was happening.

He’s going to come for me, I told myself. I just have to hold on until he does.

But as much as I believed that, I knew I couldn’t just sit here waiting to be rescued.

The sound of heavy footsteps outside the door made my stomach drop. The door creaked open, and Lamari stepped inside, his swollen red eyes glaring at me with a mix of fury and smug satisfaction.

“Well, well,” he sneered, closing the door behind him. “Look who’s awake.”

I stared at him, my jaw clenched. “What the fuck do you think you’re doing?”

“Getting paid,” he said, his tone flippant. “You’re about to make me rich, Imani. That boyfriend of yours is going to cough up the dough real quick when he realizes what’s at stake.”

“You’re delusional,” I spat. “You think Damier’s just going to hand over money and let you walk away? You’re a fool, Lamari.”

His expression twisted, the smug grin dropping. He stepped closer, his presence suffocating.

“You think I care what he’ll do?” he hissed. “You think I’m scared of him? He’s just a nigga with money, Imani. He’s not better than me. He’s just lucky. That’s all he

is—lucky.”

I glared at him, refusing to back down. “You’ll never be like him, Lamari. That’s why you’re here, desperate for his scraps.”

The words hit their mark, and I saw the rage flare in his eyes. He grabbed my chin roughly, forcing me to look at him.

“You think he’s a king, huh?” he snarled. “You think he’s some kind of savior? Newsflash, Imani—he’s not. And I’m going to show you why he’s not better than me.”

He leaned in closer, his intentions clear. He was ready to take advantage of me, and my stomach turned with disgust as he placed his hands on my breasts. I thrashed against the ropes, my heart racing as I tried to pull away.

“Get off me!” I screamed as he started kissing my neck and twisting my head.

His grip tightened, and he smirked. “What’s wrong, Imani? He can fuck you, but I can’t? I had you first.”

Without thinking, I lunged forward, sinking my teeth into his wrist as hard as I could. He let out a roar of pain, jerking back and clutching his arm.

“You bitch!” he bellowed, raising his hand and slapping me so hard that my head snapped to the side. Pain exploded across my cheek, but I stayed upright, glaring at him with every ounce of defiance I could muster.

He stepped back, shaking his head, his chest heaving with rage. “You’re not even worth it,” he muttered, his voice low and venomous. “I’m going to get my money, and then you’ll see who’s really in control.”

He stormed out, slamming the door behind him.

As the room fell silent again, my body shook with adrenaline and anger. My cheek throbbed, and my wrists burned, but I wasn't going to let him win.

I glanced around the room, my eyes landing on the jagged edge of the broken cot. I had to stay focused and figure out a way to get free. I had to pee so bad. I cried because I had to let it out on myself.

Lamari's words echoed in my head, but I clung to one thought.

Damier's going to find me. And when he does, it's over for you, Lamari.

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

The bass of the music thumped through the walls of my office at the club, but I barely noticed it. My focus was locked on the phone in my hand, waiting for any kind of lead from Lil Ken. The place was packed with people celebrating the relaunch, but tonight wasn't about business or celebrations—it was about finding Dream.

Lil Ken sat across from me, dressed in an all-black Nike tech sweatsuit, his matte black MacBook open on the desk in front of him. He looked better—his lupus flare-up had calmed—but his usual laid-back vibe was gone. He was here to work, not party.

“Thanks for pulling up,” I said as he started typing away.

Ken nodded, not looking up. “Ain't no way I was sitting this one out. How you holding up?”

“Barely.” I leaned against the desk, the gun at my side feeling heavier than usual.

Ken nodded. “Before we get into what you brought me here for, I checked out the tape. It was an old woman who dropped the baby off. I put in for the ancestry test, though. Shouldn't take too long to find the baby's family. But I am working on finding out who the woman is.”

“Good,” I said, my voice clipped. “But right now, it's all about Dream.”

Ken nodded again, his fingers flying across the keys. “Got a name?”

“Lamari,” I said, sliding him the number that had called me earlier.

Ken started running his programs, but before he could finish, my phone buzzed. I glanced at the screen—a new number.

I answered, pressing the phone to my ear. “What?”

“Thought I wasn’t going to call back so you can get your bitch back, did you?” His tone was cocky, but I could hear the edge of uncertainty beneath it.

I smirked, my heart pounding as anger boiled in my chest. “Oh, I knew your broke ass was gon’ call back. Took me a second, but I know who you are now, Bitch Boy Lamari.”

The line went quiet for a moment, and I could picture him freezing on the other end. But then he recovered, sticking to his script.

“Yeah, it’s me. So what?” he said, his voice hardening. “You know what this is. Four million dollars in cash, and you can have her back.”

Ken was already whispering beside me, “Keep him talking. I need at least a minute to trace it.”

I clenched my jaw, forcing myself to keep my cool. “Four million?” I said, letting out a low chuckle. “That’s what you think she’s worth? Seems low.”

“She’s worth more to you than anyone else,” he shot back. “You’re lucky I’m keeping it this simple.”

My grip on the phone tightened, my free hand curling into a fist. “Let me talk to her,” I demanded, my tone calm but sharp.

“No,” he said flatly. “Not until I have the money.”

“Stop being scared and send the address for the drop-off,” I said, my voice dropping.

The line went silent for a beat, and then Lamari muttered something under his breath.

“I’ll send it. But rushing me won’t make me move faster,” he warned before hanging up.

I exhaled sharply, lowering the phone as Ken cursed under his breath.

“Fuck,” Ken said. “I got his drop, but the app’s acting up. I need more time to get the location, but it’ll kick in eventually.”

I slammed my fist on the desk, pacing the room. “How much time?”

“I don’t know,” Ken admitted. “Could be minutes, could be longer. I’ll let you know the second it pings.”

I didn’t have the patience to wait. Grabbing my gun, I turned to Ken. “Keep working on it. I’m hitting the streets.”

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I signaled for King and Hocus to follow me.

King’s black Cadillac SUV cut through the quiet streets of Compton like a knife. The car was built for this—untraceable, bulletproof, and intimidating.

I sat in the backseat, my gun resting on my lap, my thoughts spiraling. Dream didn’t deserve this. Her innocence, her sweetness—it was everything I loved about her, and now it was being violated by a man who couldn’t even hold her down.

The thought of Lamari's hands on her, the sick shit he might be doing, made my stomach twist. My anger burned hotter with every passing second. If something happened to her, I'd take out Lamari and anyone tied to him.

I stared out the window, my jaw tight. I might end up in jail for murdering Lamari's whole family.

We pulled up to the first address, which was the one on his driver's license—a run-down house with a flickering porch light. The yard was a mess, and the screen door looked like it hadn't been replaced since the '90s.

King didn't hesitate. He kicked the door in, the sound echoing through the quiet street.

Inside, an old man and woman sat on the couch, their faces pale with fear. They looked like they'd been dragged out of sleep, their thin frames trembling as they stared at us.

"Where's Lamari?" I demanded, stepping inside, my gun raised.

The old woman shook her head, tears spilling down her cheeks. "We don't know!" she cried. "We haven't seen him in months!"

"Lying ain't gonna help you," I said coldly, my eyes darting around the room.

The old man shifted slightly, his hand reaching for something beside the couch. My instincts kicked in.

"Don't do it," I warned, but he didn't listen.

The moment I saw the glint of a gun, I pulled the trigger. The old man slumped back

against the couch, the weapon falling from his hand.

The woman let out a wail, but I didn't flinch. Her cries grated on my nerves, and I made a decision I didn't want to make. I couldn't leave loose ends. With one swift move, I raised the gun again and pulled the trigger.

The silence that followed was deafening.

King and Hocus rushed in from the back of the house. King took one look at the scene and shook his head.

"Damn," he muttered. "They done released the beast."

I didn't respond, my jaw tight as I moved past them. "Nothing in the back?"

"Nothing," Hocus confirmed, his tone grim.

"We keep moving," I said, my voice flat.

The night dragged on as we hit every address Ken had dug up, each one leading to another dead end and a dead body. My patience was wearing thin, the weight in my chest growing heavier with every second Dream was gone.

My phone buzzed at 4:00 AM on the dot, and I snatched it up. Ken's name lit up the screen.

"I got it," he said, his voice sharp. "The phone's pinging in Compton. Sending you the address now."

"Good," I said, my voice steady. "We're already in the city."

As the address popped up on my screen, my grip tightened on the phone. My blood boiled, my resolve hardening.

Lamari's time is up faster than he ever saw it coming.

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

The room was cold, dark, and suffocating. I had lost all sense of time. My tears had dried hours ago, leaving my face raw and my throat sore. I didn't know if it had been one day or two since they dragged me here, but it felt like an eternity.

My body ached from being bound and tossed around, my stomach growling as I thought of how long it had been since I'd eaten. Every second in this place chipped away at my strength, but the one thing that remained was my will to survive.

I sat naked, curled up on the bare mattress, shivering. The thin blanket they gave me offered little comfort, and the shame from earlier lingered like a weight I couldn't shake. Lamari had stormed in hours ago, furious after discovering I'd urinated myself. He forced me to shower, his presence looming as I peeled my soiled clothes off and stepped into the freezing water. As soon as I stepped out, he took complete control of me. And ever since that moment, he had been taking advantage of me.

I clenched my fists, my nails digging into my palms as the memory replayed. His twisted attempts to assert power over me only fueled the fire of hatred burning inside me. I hated him. I hated what he'd done, and I wanted him dead.

I closed my eyes, letting the anger sit with me, focusing on the one thought that kept me going—he would pay for this.

I had no idea how long I'd been sitting there when I heard the door creak open. Lamari stepped in, his expression smug, the kind of look that made my skin crawl.

"Still acting scared, huh?" he said, leaning against the doorframe.

I didn't respond. I couldn't even bring myself to look at him. My body tensed as he approached, but I forced myself to stay still. Fighting him had only made things worse before.

"You already know what time it is. I'm going to have my way with you before I make this nigga come get you. Remember, you were mine first."

Lamari dropped his jeans to the floor and put on a condom. He had been putting one on every time, thinking he was covering up evidence. I closed my eyes as he started hovering himself over me, retreating to the only safe place I had left—my mind. I pictured myself somewhere far from here, somewhere warm and full of light, somewhere with Damier.

As Lamari was taking advantage of me, the sound of muffled shouts and gunshots shattered the silence. My eyes flew open, and for a moment, Lamari froze.

"What the fuck?" he muttered, his head snapping toward the door. He jumped up quickly and put back on his pants.

The shouting grew louder and more distinct. My heart skipped when I heard his voice. Damier.

Lamari panicked, pacing the small room as he tried to figure out his next move. He ran to the window, but the iron bars outside sealed his fate.

"Shit," he cursed under his breath, frantically looking around. "I don't have my gun on me either. How did this nigga find me?"

I stayed silent, my eyes fixed on him as my heart pounded in my chest. Relief mixed with adrenaline, but I didn't dare move or make a sound. I didn't want to give him any reason to lash out before Damier got to me.

The door rattled violently, and I flinched as Lamari spun around, his face red with fear.

A moment later, the door burst open.

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

The door burst open under the force of my boot, slamming against the wall. My revolver was already drawn, and the first thing I saw was Dream—naked, trembling, and curled on a filthy mattress with a small cover barely concealing her. My heart dropped to the floor, rage exploding in my chest like a bomb.

She looked helpless like she'd been fighting for her life. Her eyes were red and locked on mine, and for a moment, I wanted to drop everything and rush to her. But then I saw him.

Lamari stood by the far wall, frozen like the coward he was.

All I saw was red.

“You really are a dumb ass nigga,” I growled, my voice low and deadly as I stalked toward him.

Lamari panicked, his hands fumbling as he tried to charge at me, but he wasn't ready. I was bigger, stronger, and angrier than he could ever imagine. I caught him by the collar mid-step, slamming him into the wall with enough force to make the drywall crack.

The revolver was in my other hand, and I shoved it into his throat so hard he gagged.

“You thought you could extort me?” I hissed, my face inches from his. “You thought you could touch what's mine and walk away alive?”

“I-I'm sorry,” he stammered, his voice strangled against the pressure of the barrel.

His apology only pissed me off more.

“Sorry?” I said, my voice rising. “You’re a bitch. You should’ve stayed in your fucking lane.”

He whimpered, his body trembling as he tried to squirm out of my grasp. His fear only fueled my fury.

I pressed the gun harder into his neck, the anger boiling over.

His mouth opened to beg again, but before he could get another word out, I pulled the trigger.

The gunshot echoed in the small room, and his body instantly went limp. Blood splattered the wall behind him and on my hands, as he crumpled to the floor.

As soon as Lamari’s body hit the ground, Dream stood up quickly, the blanket still clutched to the front of her body. Her legs wobbled, and she ran to me, frantic and crying.

“Baby,” she sobbed, her voice breaking as she buried her face in my chest.

I holstered my gun and pulled her close, wrapping her in my arms. “I got you,” I murmured, my voice steady even though my heart felt like it was shattering.

I took off my hoodie, sliding it over her trembling frame. “Put this on,” I said softly.

She nodded, slipping it on as her tears soaked into the fabric. Once she was covered, I scooped her up in my arms. Her head rested against my chest, and she clung to me like I was the only thing keeping her from falling apart. Dead bodies were laid out as King, Hocus, and I ran out of the house.

King's SUV was parked right outside, the engine still running. I climbed into the backseat with Dream, holding her close as King got behind the wheel.

She broke down completely in my lap, her sobs muffled against my chest. My arms tightened around her as I pressed my lips to the top of her head.

"It's over," I whispered, even though my mind was still racing. "You're safe now."

The ride to my mother's estate felt like forever, even though it wasn't far. I couldn't stop thinking about how helpless she'd looked when I burst into that room, how close I came to losing her.

When we pulled up, my mother was already at the door, her expression a mix of relief and worry.

Dream clung to me tighter as I tried to set her down. "You're good with my mom, and you know that," I reminded her. "She's going to take care of you. I'll be right here."

Dream's tear-streaked face tilted up to look at me, her lip trembling. "Don't leave me," she whispered.

"I'm not leaving. I'm going to go talk to my uncle," I said firmly. "But let her help you. The family doctor is upstairs waiting."

Reluctantly, she let go, and my mother wrapped an arm around her, leading her inside.

Once she was out of sight, I headed to my father's old study with King and Hocus. The weight of everything started to settle in, but there was no relief—just exhaustion and anger.

“We found her,” Hocus said, pouring himself a drink. “That’s what matters.”

King nodded, sinking into the leather armchair. “That’s the hardest I’ve worked in years, nephew. But you stood on business. Proud of you for that.”

I leaned against the desk, my head bowed. “I feel like I failed her dad,” I admitted. “I promised Mr. Jaxton I’d keep her safe and look what happened. Now I have to tell him what happened.”

King glanced at me, his expression unreadable. “You did what you had to do to get her back. But think hard about whether you’re going to tell her father. Some shit is better left unsaid. She is alive and well. I’m sure she doesn’t want her parents to know that. I know Mr. Jaxton was in the game, but he is in a different space now. Talk to ya fiancée about not telling him.”

I nodded, but his words lingered in my mind.

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After they left, I headed to one of the shower rooms. The hot water and soap washed away the blood, but it didn’t ease the knot in my chest. By the time I got dressed, I still didn’t feel like myself.

I walked upstairs to find Dream, pushing open the door to her room. The doctor was just finishing up and packing her bag as Dream lay in bed looking more peaceful than she had when I found her.

The moment she saw me, she jumped out of bed and threw her arms around me, her sobs returning.

I held her tightly, letting her cry into my chest. She pulled back slightly, her eyes red

and puffy. “I was so scared,” she whispered. “But I knew you’d find me.”

I kissed her forehead, my hand cupping her face. “Tell me everything,” I said.

Through tears, she told me everything Lamari had done, her voice shaking as she relived it. My anger fueled as I listened, my blood boiling all over again.

My mother stood frozen near the door, mortified, while the doctor looked equally disturbed. Our doctor had been in our family for decades and knew not to speak a word about anything she heard, but I asked my mother and the doctor to step out for a moment.

Before leaving, my mother gave Dream a knowing look and said, “Make sure you tell him.”

The door closed behind them, and I turned back to Dream, confused. “What did she mean by that?”

Dream hesitated, her hands fidgeting. “The doctor... she said even though Lamari called himself using condoms, I should still be tested in a couple of weeks, but she gave me a pregnancy test.”

My chest tightened as I stared at her, waiting. Hearing he had touched her in ways that violated her made me want to go back and kill him again. He deserved a slow death, like Damian.

“It’s positive,” she said softly.

A small smile tugged at the corner of my mouth. Hearing her say the test was positive made me feel good for a moment.

“You serious?”

She nodded, tears welling up again. “Yes... But I don’t want to stay in California while pregnant. Not after what happened. I need to leave, Damier. I want to go to Thailand—to a beach house with Donta and stay there until the baby comes. I need it for my sanity.”

I didn’t even hesitate. “Whatever makes you happy, baby. I’ll make it happen.”

She shook her head. “You don’t have to come. I know you have business here?—”

“I’m not letting you go alone,” I interrupted, my voice firm. “If I have to, I will travel back and forth. It’s temporary, right?”

Her lip trembled as she nodded, her hand resting on my chest. “Yes. It’s temporary... You protected me, Damier. You found me, and that means everything. Me and the baby will be fine if you can’t stay.”

I kissed her deeply, holding her close.

When I noticed her bare hand, I stopped kissing her and frowned. “Where’s your ring?”

“I left it in my car at the house before I met Zaraa. She was already jealous, so I didn’t want to make her feel more of a way. I guess she was going to be jealous either way. But I’m glad I thought to take it off because one of those niggas would have stolen it. They took my necklace and diamond earrings,” she said.

“So, she was involved. I’m glad I popped her ass then,” I said darkly.

She nodded. “Yes. And she deserved whatever you did to her.”

I held her tighter, knowing I'd do whatever it took to keep her safe from now on. As the doctor returned with Tylenol and my mother's chef brought up a smothered steak and loaded potatoes meal for Dream, I sat beside her, feeling a strange sense of relief.

I'd found her, and now she was carrying my child. And no matter what, I'd make sure nothing and no one ever touched her again.

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

I stood in the bathroom of the Knight Estate, leaning over the marble sink as I stared into the mirror. The soft light illuminated the faint bruise on my cheek, a dull reminder of Lamari's hand slapping me hard. I gently traced the mark with my fingers, my heart racing as the memories from the past two days flooded back.

It had only been seven hours since I'd been freed, but I felt like I hadn't taken a full breath since. My reflection stared back at me—tired, hollow, with eyes still swollen from crying. Tears welled up again as I thought about everything I'd endured, but they weren't just tears of pain.

I pressed a hand against my stomach, the smallest flicker of joy breaking through the sadness.

“My baby,” I whispered, my voice trembling.

The thought of being pregnant for the first time made me smile, even as my heart felt heavy. But what happened to me—the shame, the fear—I wondered if it would make Damier see me differently when he fully realized what had been done to me.

Would he look at me like I was broken?

A sob broke from my lips as I tried to shake the thought. He'd promised me he would protect me, and he did. But I couldn't stop the ache in my chest at the idea of him seeing me as less than I was before.

I closed my eyes, taking a deep breath as my hand lingered on my stomach.

“You have no idea how much you’re already loved. I’m going to do everything I can to protect you. I promise I’ll make sure nothing like this ever touches you.”

I paused, biting my lip as I let my emotions settle. “I hope you’re a boy,” I said softly, smiling through my tears. “With ginger hair like mine. Your uncle, Donta, would’ve loved you, and you have a brother. He’s named after your uncle, who passed away. You have a beautiful family waiting to meet you. You are royalty.”

The words felt surreal as they left my mouth, but they also gave me something to hold onto. Something to fight for.

I straightened, wiping my face with a towel before glancing at my reflection again. “I need to see my psychologist before we leave for Thailand,” I whispered to myself. “Hell, I’ll need her for this whole pregnancy.”

I thought about it for a moment, a faint smile tugging at my lips. I have money now. I can just fly her out to me.

I turned toward the shower, knowing I wasn’t done trying to wash the past few days off me. It was my third shower, but I couldn’t stop. The memory of Lamari’s hands on me clung to my skin, and no matter how much soap I used, I still felt it.

The hot water poured over me, scalding but comforting, as I scrubbed every inch of my body. My mind wandered to the baby again, the tiny life inside me that was already giving me hope.

When I stepped out, I wrapped myself in a towel, carefully drying off before lotioning my skin. The faint scent of lavender lingered as I brushed my teeth, trying to focus on the little routines that made me feel like myself again.

I slipped into one of Damier’s oversized Tom Ford t-shirts and climbed back into

bed. He was sleeping peacefully, his chest rising and falling steadily. I watched him for a moment, remembering the night he woke me up from a nightmare not so long ago. Now, I was the one carrying the weight of restless nights.

Curling under him, damn near wanting to be in his skin, I pressed my face against his chest, his warmth grounding me in a way nothing else could. His arm instinctively wrapped around me, even in his sleep.

For the first time since I'd been taken, I let out a shaky breath and closed my eyes, praying for just a few hours of peace.

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

It was midafternoon, and I was still in bed, listening to news and sports highlights on TV, half asleep. I was laid up at my mom's still, Dream curled against me, her breathing soft and even. She was finally getting some much-needed sleep, and she looked peaceful.

It had been two days since I got her back, and I hadn't left her side. I wasn't going to. She needed to heal, and I needed to make sure she felt safe.

My phone buzzed on the nightstand, the vibration low but enough to pull me out of my half-asleep state. I reached for it, squinting at the screen. It was a call from my great-uncle, Lucian.

I didn't get up. I stayed where I was, one arm still draped around Dream as I answered.

"What's good, Unc?"

Lucian's voice came through the line, low and raspy but clear as day.

"What's good? I'll tell you what's good," he said, his tone sharp. "Let me tell you something about loyalty, boy. It ain't just a word. It's action. It's respect. It's knowing your place and sticking to it."

I sighed, already knowing this was going to be one of those calls. "You calling to lecture me, or is there a point to this?"

"The point," he said slowly, "is that loyalty cuts both ways. And when it doesn't?"

That's when you have to remind people where they stand."

I frowned, sitting up slightly but careful not to wake Dream. "What's this about?"

Lucian's tone shifted, a little colder now. "Felix. That son of a bitch is mad we cut ties and thought he could outmaneuver us. Got a call from my Mexico team—they sent me something you need to hear."

I sat up fully now, my blood already starting to boil. "What did he do?"

Lucian didn't answer immediately. Instead, I heard the crackle of a recording through the phone. Felix's voice came through, clear and full of venom.

"Burn it all down—the Knight Estate, their warehouses, every fucking thing they have. I'll make them feel the betrayal. They think they can cut me out? I'll make them pay for it."

My jaw clenched as I listened, my fists curling tightly. "Cut that shit off, Unc," I growled.

Lucian stopped the recording. "You hear that? That's what happens when you let a snake slither around too long. He was planning to ambush us, boy. Burn it all to the ground. King told me you told him to stand down. Why?"

"It was bad timing, but I will handle it," I quickly said, my voice cold.

Lucian let out a low chuckle, the kind that made the average man shiver. "No, you won't. Because I already did."

I froze, letting his words sink in.

“You’re still learning, Damier, and that is okay,” he said, his voice calm but firm. “I’m still very much in this game, even without lifting a finger. Felix made his choice, and I made mine. My Mexico team fed him to the pigs.”

I exhaled sharply, shaking my head. Lucian never played around.

A notification buzzed on my phone, and I glanced down. It was a text from Lucian. I opened it, and my lips curved into a small, dark smirk. It was a picture—proof of what he’d done. Felix’s fate was unmistakable. My uncle had really thrown Felix in a pig pen and let them eat him alive.

“You see that?” Lucian rasped. “That’s how you send a message.”

I shook my head again, still smirking. “You’re treacherous, Unc. I swear, I got this dark side from you more than my pops.”

“Damn right,” he said, his tone unapologetic. “Listen to me, Damier. The beef with Felix was bigger than you. You don’t need to lift a finger on this one. Sit back, focus on the family business, and keep bringing in the billions. You’ve done enough for now.”

I nodded, even though he couldn’t see me. “I hear you.”

“King told me about what you did to get your fiancée back,” he added. “You stood on business. I respect that. But next time? Use your foot soldiers. You’ve earned the right to let them handle it.”

I exhaled, appreciating his words even if they came wrapped in a lecture. “I got it. Good lookin’, Unc.”

Lucian’s voice softened slightly. “You’ve done good, boy. Now, take care of that

woman and start building your legacy with your children. Dismissed.”

The call ended, and I set the phone back on the nightstand.

Dream stirred beside me, her soft voice breaking the silence. “Is everything okay?”

“Yeah,” I said, leaning back against the headboard. “Just my great-uncle giving me his usual lecture about life.”

She nodded, stretching slightly before swinging her legs over the side of the bed. “I need to pee,” she said softly. “And take that antibiotic the doctor gave me, but I need to eat something.”

As she stood, I watched her carefully, noticing how much stronger she seemed, even in these small moments.

“I was thinking,” I said, breaking the silence. “It’s probably time for us to head back to your crib... I mean our crib. Get you and Donta ready for Thailand. Mia’s meeting us tomorrow to handle all the arrangements, and y’all can look for the house you want.”

She paused, her back to me. “That’s fine,” she said, her voice quiet. But then she sighed deeply and turned back around, sitting on the edge of the bed.

Tears welled in her eyes as she looked at me, her lip trembling. “Damier,” she whispered. “Do you realize I was raped twice by Lamari?”

Her words hit me like a freight train.

She continued, her voice breaking. “I’m angry. I’m so angry. I hate him for what he did to me. And I hate that I just laid there and let it happen because I didn’t have a

choice.”

I sat up, my chest tightening as I reached for her hand.

“I didn’t enjoy it,” she said quickly, her tears falling freely. “But I feel ruined. I feel like you’re going to look at me differently. Like I’m broken.”

I pulled her closer, my voice steady, even as anger burned beneath the surface. I wanted to go back and kill Lamari again. “Dream, I don’t look at you like that. You’re not broken. You’re strong. You did what you had to do to survive, and that doesn’t make you any less.”

Her sobs grew quieter as she leaned into me, her forehead resting against my chest.

“I feel so... ashamed, like you will never have sex with me again,” she whispered.

I tilted her chin up so she could see the sincerity in my eyes. “Don’t say that,” I said firmly. “I don’t feel any different about you. When you’re ready to be intimate again, I’ll be here. But right now, I just want to make sure you’re okay.”

She nodded, her tears slowing. “Thank you,” she whispered.

I kissed her forehead, holding her close. “You’re mine, Imani. Nothing’s going to change that.”

For the first time in days, I saw a faint smile break through her pain. And for the first time, I felt like we could both start to heal.

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

The late afternoon sun poured through the sliding door behind me in my dining room, casting soft orange hues across the smooth surface of the glass table. I cradled Donta in my arms, his little teddy bear pajamas warm and soft against my skin. He was already dozing off, his tiny fingers gripping the edge of my shirt as I gently rocked him.

In front of me, Mia's hot pink MacBook glowed with images of a breathtaking beach house in Thailand. The villa looked like something straight out of a dream—sprawling and luxurious, with white walls and open spaces that let in the ocean breeze.

The house sat directly on the beach, its infinity pool stretching out toward the turquoise waters. Floor-to-ceiling glass windows gave panoramic views of the shoreline, and the interior was a perfect mix of modern and tropical design—neutral tones, natural wood finishes, and elegant furniture. The kitchen looked like it belonged on a cooking show, with marble counters and state-of-the-art appliances. Upstairs, the master bedroom had a wraparound balcony with a seating area overlooking the ocean, perfect for peaceful mornings or quiet nights.

It was beautiful, almost too perfect.

“So, what do you think?” Mia asked, her voice breaking my thoughts.

“It's stunning,” I said, adjusting Donta in my arms as I continued to scroll through the photos of the area.

Mia and I hadn't spoken much since the days of the reality show, but she was easy to

talk to. It made sense, considering how close she was to Damier. She understood him better than most people did, and I respected that about her.

As I stared at the screen, I hesitated before speaking again. “Can I ask you something?”

“Of course,” Mia said, her tone warm.

“Do you think...” I trailed off, my voice lowering. “Do you think Damier feels some kind of way about me wanting to go to Thailand? I mean, taking Donta, who isn’t biologically mine, and just... leaving like this?”

Mia tilted her head, her expression thoughtful. “No, I don’t think so. And if he did, he’d tell you. You know that about him.”

“I guess,” I said softly. “I just feel like I’m overstepping or being selfish. Yes, we are engaged, but have I earned this right? Am I asking for something too big?”

Mia shook her head. “Don’t look at it like that. You’re not just his fiancée—you’re his peace. He gets that. And trust me, he wouldn’t let you do this if he didn’t want you to.”

I sighed, her words giving me a little reassurance. “You’re right. I guess I’m just overthinking.”

“You are,” Mia said with a small smile. “But that’s okay. You’ve been through a lot. Give yourself some grace. Besides, you will only be gone for a few months. I would love to spend my pregnancy on a beach if I was pregnant.”

The sound of the sliding glass door opening pulled both our attention. Damier stepped in, his tall frame taking up the space, comforting me. He was dressed casually, his

usual effortless style—black joggers and a fitted t-shirt that hugged his body perfectly.

“Sorry to interrupt,” he said, his deep voice cutting through the quiet. “I was out front talking to Hocus, and then I remembered something.”

He reached into his pocket, grabbing something I couldn’t see.

“What’s that?” I asked, curious.

He smirked as he approached me, sliding into the chair beside mine. “Your engagement ring,” he said simply, holding up the delicate diamond band I’d left in my car.

My heart skipped as he gently took my hand, sliding the ring back onto my finger like he was proposing all over again. He kissed my hand softly, his lips brushing against my skin in a way that sent warmth through my chest.

“You didn’t have to do that,” I said, smiling as I looked at the ring.

“I wanted to,” he replied, his voice low but firm.

Mia grinned, watching us with a knowing look. “You two are so cute. Dream, you’re definitely his soulmate. It’s obvious.”

I blushed, glancing at her before turning back to Damier. “You hear that?” I teased.

He chuckled, leaning back in his chair. “I’ve been knowing that,” he said, his voice full of confidence.

Mia closed her laptop and gathered her things. “I’ll get the paperwork finalized for

the villa, and I'll meet you in a couple of days to go over the final details. You two are in good hands."

"Thanks, Mia," I said sincerely.

"Anytime," she replied, giving me a small wave as she headed out.

As the door closed behind her, Damier turned to me, his expression soft but serious. "You know I can't stay in Thailand the whole time," he said. "But I'll be there a few times a month, as much as I can. And I'm going to have security watching over you and Donta the entire time. You'll be safe. I got you."

I nodded, already knowing this was the best arrangement we could make. "I'm okay with that," I said softly. "As long as you're okay with it."

He reached for my hand again, his thumb brushing over the ring on my finger. "Whatever makes you happy, Imani. That's all I care about."

Damn, I loved this man. I felt like happiness was within reach again for us.

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

One month later

The room was dark, and all I could hear was Dream's soft moans and the waves crashing outside her Thailand home. Dream was on the bed looking like she was praying to Allah while I was parked under her like a mechanic, licking her clit at five in the morning. I had an early flight because I had a lot of business to take care of. I had been laid under her for three weeks, knowing I had shit to do. But I just couldn't let her go. She was pregnant and caring for my child in a foreign place, so I had to make sure they were completely safe and good.

Dream started rocking her hips as I slid my tongue into her opening, tongue fucking her. I could taste her juices, and they were sending me to another world. After everything I went through these last couple of years, finding Dream was my biggest blessing, along with my kids, that I thought I would never have.

"Mmm, you got my dick hard as fuck. Slide down and ride me, babe," I uttered as I gripped her soft ass cheeks.

She moved down, leaving a trail of her juices on my chest until she slid down on me. I started sucking her hard nipples as she rode me slow, just the way I liked. We had gotten our intimate moments back on track a couple of weeks ago, and I couldn't get enough of her. If she wasn't already pregnant, I would do it again. We started kissing passionately. Her moaning in my mouth caused me to make her pick up the pace. I helped her bounce up and down, her moans getting louder.

"Oh, baby, you feel so good," she cooed softly.

“That’s right. Cum all on my dick,” I uttered, causing her to start moving like a porn star.

She started grinding on my pelvis, and the next thing I knew, she was cumming. I couldn’t hold back anymore. I rolled her over in missionary and started pounding her. After two marriages and a slew of women, Dream was the only one who got a moan out of me. Our sex was always passionate, and I didn’t want the flame to go out.

I was reaching my peak as Donta started crying on the video monitor next to the bed. Lil Man woke up every morning before 6:00 AM, but it wasn’t hard for me and Dream because we were already early birds. I kissed Dream deeply as I came, but I knew I couldn’t enjoy what we had just done. I wanted to get my boy and get ready for my flight, which was in the next two hours.

I stood up from bed and brushed a strand of Dream’s ginger hair from her face before I kissed her lips one last time. “Lay down for a while. I’ll get him and his breakfast bottle.”

She smiled. “Thank you,” she mumbled, “but I’m going to get up anyway.”

I shook my head, smirking as she slowly pushed herself out of bed and headed to the bathroom for a shower. I slid out of bed myself, pulling on a pair of gray sweatpants before heading to Donta’s room.

The moment I stepped into his room, his cries got louder. He was lying in his crib, squirming around, his face scrunched up in frustration.

“Stop crying, lil’ man,” I said, walking over and picking him up. “We don’t do all of that.”

His cries turned into soft whimpers as I slipped the clear blue pacifier into his mouth.

“See? You good,” I said, cradling him in one arm while I reached for the changing table with the other.

After laying him down, I grabbed a fresh diaper and started the process. It didn’t take long for me to realize I was about to put it on backward.

“Shit,” I muttered under my breath, flipping it around. “I gotta do better, man. Don’t tell Dream.”

Donta kicked his tiny legs, his face calmer now as I finished fastening the diaper. “There we go,” I said, lifting him back into my arms. “Fresh and clean, just like you like it.”

With Donta cradled in my right arm, I headed to one of the other bathrooms to brush my teeth. As I stood in front of the mirror, holding him close, I caught a glimpse of the two of us together.

The resemblance was undeniable—his eyes no longer reminded me of Damian; they now reminded me of mine. The shape of his lips was like mine, even his facial expressions. But as I stared, a thought crept into my mind. What about his mother?

I wanted to see her in him, too, but I didn’t even know what I was looking for. That’s why I had to get back to Cali. Lil Ken had the answers I needed, and I couldn’t keep putting this off just because my mother wanted me to leave it alone.

Knowing Donta was mine and no one had come forward was enough to keep me from moving fast, but I had questions. Questions I needed answers to.

By the time I got to the kitchen, Donta was staring up at me, his little fingers tugging at my Cuban necklace. I grabbed his formula powder and a bottle, but in my rush, I ended up spilling half of it on the counter.

“Damn,” I muttered, cleaning it up as Donta watched me like I didn’t know what I was doing.

That’s when I noticed the machine on the counter—a baby milk maker that looked just like a Keurig. I chuckled, shaking my head. “Your mama’s too fancy for me,” I said to him, placing the bottle under the spout and hitting the button.

The machine whirred, and within seconds, the bottle was ready. “I finally got your food,” I said, grabbing it and heading to the living room.

I settled onto the couch, feeding Donta while watching sports highlights on the big screen mounted to the wall. His tiny hands gripped the bottle with me as he drank, his eyes flickering between me and the TV.

For an hour, it was just me and him. I showed him pictures of the family, pointing out faces and telling him stories like I’d been doing since we got to Thailand. He didn’t understand a word of it, but it didn’t matter. This was our time, and I was starting to cherish it.

Dream walked in quietly, her wet curls falling over her shoulders. She had on a simple tank top and leggings, her skin glowing from the shower. She smiled when she saw us, her eyes soft.

“Look at my boys bonding,” she said, sitting next to me.

I grinned, handing her the empty bottle. “I’ve been thinking,” I said. “When I come back and forth, I want to be more hands-on with him. I want to care for him more and be a visible father. And when the baby comes, I want to make sure I’m doing my part for both of them.”

She rested her hand on my arm, her smile growing. “You’re already doing an

amazing job, Damier. I can see it. And I know you're going to be just as incredible with our baby."

Her words hit me harder than I expected, and I leaned over to kiss her forehead.

"I'll make us some breakfast," she said, standing up and stretching. "You can't fly out on an empty stomach."

I nodded, watching her head to the kitchen, the scent of coffee and fresh ingredients soon filling the air.

By the time breakfast was over, I was in the friendly skies, headed back to California and the chaos waiting for me.

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The wheels of the plane touched down in LA a day later, and the moment I stepped off, I dialed Lil Ken. I was fully rested and ready to tie loose ends. Being jet-lagged wasn't stopping shit.

"What you got for me?" I asked as my driver took me to my downtown office.

Ken didn't waste any time. "The baby's mother is Raelee John. She goes by Karisma, though," he said.

I frowned, the name hitting me like a slap. Karisma. The escort Mia had hooked me up with when I was going through my divorce with Arika. She'd been around for a few months before the reality show, but I had no romantic attraction to her. She just pleased me, and that was that.

"We used condoms," I muttered, shaking my head. "But I know I had some drunk

nights...”

“Probably one of those,” Ken said. “But it gets deeper. You’ll want to hear this in person. I’m forwarding her file to your email. All the important shit will be listed so you can find her.”

By the time I got to the office, Hocus was waiting. I told him everything, gave him her name and addresses, and told him to bring her to me.

“Do you want violence?” Hocus asked, his tone heavy.

“I don’t know yet,” I admitted. “Just bring her here.”

Two hours later, when the door opened, it wasn’t Karisma who walked in. It was an older, frail woman with sadness written all over her face.

“What is this?” I asked, narrowing my eyes at Hocus.

Hocus stepped aside while looking at the woman, his voice low. “Tell him.”

“Who are you?” I asked, my voice low as well.

“I’m Raelee’s mother, but you probably know her as Karisma,” she said softly, her voice trembling as she met my gaze.

I frowned at her words, but I kept my expression steady. “Where’s Karisma?”

She hesitated, her fingers twisting the strap of her purse. “She’s... she’s gone,” she said finally, her voice breaking. “She’s dead.”

The weight of her words hit me, but I didn’t let it show. “Dead?” I repeated, my tone

flat. “How?”

Tears welled in her eyes, but she wiped them quickly. “She died two weeks after giving birth to your son,” she said quietly.

I leaned forward, my jaw tightening. “Explain,” I demanded.

She swallowed hard, her voice trembling as she began. “She... she had a home birth. It wasn’t her choice. Her pimp forced her to. He wanted her to have the baby as part of a plan to extort you. That’s why she got pregnant in the first place.”

My hands curled into fists on the desk. “What plan?” I growled.

Her eyes darted to the floor as she continued. “He made her get off birth control... she poked a hole in the condom while she was ovulating. He told her to make sure she got pregnant by you. The baby was supposed to be their payday. But after she had him, she got scared. She didn’t want to go through with it anymore.”

“And?” I pressed, my voice cold.

“She tried to back out,” she said, her voice barely above a whisper. “He found out and... he killed her. He beat her to death.”

The room went silent except for the sound of her shaky breathing. I leaned back in my chair, grinding my back teeth as I processed what she was saying. “And you knew all of this?” I asked, my voice deadly calm. “You knew what they were planning, and you didn’t stop it?”

She nodded weakly, tears streaming down her face. “I was scared,” she admitted. “He’s dangerous, and I heard you are too. I didn’t know what to do. So, I... I took the baby to your girlfriend’s practice. I thought it was the safest place for him. I thought

she would give him to you, and you'd take care of him."

I stared at her, my mind racing. "You thought dropping him off at a clinic was the best you could do?" I asked, my voice sharp. "You didn't think to come to me directly? Or take him yourself?"

"I couldn't," she said quickly. "I have cancer. I'm dying. I can't take care of a baby. And I couldn't come to you. I didn't want to get involved with... with your family. I know about the Knight Family. I've been in LA all my life. I didn't want to be caught in the crossfire."

I let out a slow breath, my anger boiling just beneath the surface. "So, you knew exactly who I was, and you thought leaving him at my fiancée's business would fix everything?"

She nodded again, her voice breaking. "I didn't know what else to do. I didn't want him to fall into the wrong hands."

I stared at her for a long moment, my hands gripping the edge of the desk. I didn't want to spazz out on this old lady. She was already dying.

"What's the pimp's name?" I asked, my voice ice cold.

She froze, her lips trembling. "What?" she whispered.

"You heard me, lady," I said, leaning forward. "What's his name? And where is he? You said you know about my family, then you know you better start talking."

Her hands shook as she clutched her purse tighter. "His name is Rodrick, but they call him Rod," she said reluctantly. "He... he hangs out on Crenshaw Blvd with some Crips. That's all I know."

I leaned back, my jaw tightening as I absorbed the information.

She blinked, looking scared. “I just... I just want to see Donshay. To be his grandmother before I go.”

I let out a cold laugh, shaking my head. “That’s not happening, and his name isn’t Donshay anymore,” I said flatly. “You made your decision the second you left him. You don’t get to see him. You don’t get to claim him now.”

Her face crumpled, and she opened her mouth to protest, but I cut her off. “You left him there because you didn’t want to deal with the consequences,” I said, my voice deadly. “And now you want to play grandmother? That’s not how this works. He’s mine now. He’s safe, and that’s all you need to know.”

Her sobs filled the room, but I didn’t flinch. I turned to Hocus, my tone calm but firm. “Take her back to wherever she came from.”

Hocus stepped forward, placing a heavy hand on her shoulder as she cried harder. “Please,” she begged. “I didn’t have a choice?—”

“You had a choice,” I said coldly. “And you made it. Now live with it.”

She was gone a moment later, the door closing behind her with a heavy thud.

I sat back in my chair, the silence in the room thunderous. My mind spinning. Karisma was dead. The baby was mine. And this nigga Rod?

He was next.

I grabbed my phone and dialed my young nigga Marcus’ number. He was from over that way and was itching to take somebody out for some cash. When he answered,

my voice was sharp. “Get your team ready, my nigga,” I said boldly. “I need you to find a pimp nigga named Rod or Rodrick that be in your hood, and I want you to demolish him. He tried to extort me with a baby by his bitch, so now he gotta pay for that. When you done, I got fifty grand for you and a few jobs to keep the money flowing in.”

“Bet. I know exactly who that nigga is, and he owes me money. I’ll have that done by the end of the week, boss.”

“Good lookin’. Meet me at my club when you do.” I hung up and stared out the window at the downtown LA skyline.

Lucian’s words echoed in my mind. Use your foot soldiers.

This time, I would, and he would still feel me. But the body I had to catch next, I had to do it on my own because it was personal...

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

The house was silent in the dead of night, but my mind was anything but still. I sat in my study at my estate, the dim glow of the desk lamp casting long shadows against the walls lined with framed memories and degrees. I had built an empire, raised a dynasty, and ensured that my bloodline remained strong. But tonight, my focus was on unfinished business—Kita and the child she carried.

I swirled the dark liquor in my glass, letting the warmth settle in my chest as I stared out into the night. Everything I had done had been for the sake of this family. Even when my choices were wrong, even when they cost me pieces of my soul, even when I started going to take Damian food and water and then suddenly quit.

And this... this was no different.

I got up and left my office. I then walked down the hidden corridor, the marble floors echoing beneath my Prada heels. The door to the room was guarded, as it had been for months. When I stepped inside, the air was thick with desperation and pain.

Kita was drenched in sweat, her face contorted in agony as she gripped the sheets beneath her. The sterile scent of antiseptic filled the room. Our family's midwife kneeled at the end of the bed, calmly instructing her through the labor. The nanny stood by, ready to take the baby as soon as he arrived.

The moment Kita saw me, she gasped through the pain, her eyes wild with terror and pleading.

"Please, Mrs. Knight," she sobbed. "Let me live. I've changed. I'm not the same person. I just want to be a mother. Please."

I stood by, my posture straight, my expression unreadable. The only sound was the midwife's steady encouragement and Kita's heavy breathing. I let her beg. Let her break apart in front of me.

When I finally spoke, my voice was deliberate. "You think because I cared for you while you were pregnant and you're carrying my blood absolves you of your betrayal? You think I've forgotten what you did to my son? You betrayed him in the worst way."

Tears streamed down her face, but I didn't move. "I was on drugs, and I wasn't thinking clearly then. I just want to live for my baby."

"You're not begging for your life, Kita," I said smoothly. "You're begging for forgiveness. And forgiveness is something I do not give lightly."

She cried harder, another contraction ripping through her body. She screamed, her hands trembling as she pushed. The midwife worked swiftly, and within moments, a sharp cry pierced the air.

Another baby boy.

After the midwife cut his cord, she held him up, his little arms flailing, his voice strong. But before Kita could reach for him, the nanny stepped forward, wrapping him in a soft white blanket and taking him away so he could get cleaned up and fed. She quickly left the room with the baby.

"No... no, please," Kita gasped, her body still shaking. "Please let me hold him. Just for a second. Please, Mrs. Knight. He's mine!"

I took slow steps forward, standing beside the bed, looking down at her with icy detachment.

“He’s not yours,” I said simply. “He’s mine now. You were a vessel, nothing more. You lost the right to be his mother the moment you betrayed this family.”

Kita let out a strangled sob, her entire body racked with grief, but I remained unmoved.

The door opened, and the sound of slow, steady footsteps filled the room. Kita’s breathing hitched.

Damier.

His presence was commanding as he stepped inside, dressed in an all-black sweatsuit with his hoodie over his head, his face unreadable. His eyes flickered to Kita, then to me. I nodded once.

My job here was done.

I turned on my heel and left the room with the midwife, closing the door behind me.

I stood outside in the dimly lit hallway, listening.

Kita’s voice cracked as she pleaded. “Damier, please! I can change! I can be better! Please don’t do this! I want to be a mother!”

No words were spoken from Damier. Two gunshots rang out, loud and final.

Silence followed.

The door opened again, and Damier stepped out, his face blank. He met my gaze and nodded once before walking down the hall that led to the back garage.

I exhaled softly, the weight of it settling into my bones.

I walked back into the room, where the nurse I hired now held the baby, making sure he was healthy. The cries of the child filled the space, but to me, they were a reminder—he was all that remained of Damian.

I stepped closer, reaching out to take my grandson into my arms. He was small but strong. His tiny fingers curled around mine, his dark eyes staring up at me like every other Knight man. They always came out of their mother alert and ready for the world. I traced a gentle finger over his soft cheek.

“You’re all that’s left of your father,” I whispered, my voice softer than it had been all night. “I’ll make sure you grow up wiser, better than he was. You’ll carry your father’s name, but I pray you never carry his darkness.”

The nanny stepped forward. “What should we do now, ma’am?”

I straightened, my cold demeanor returning. “Keep him in his nursery. Make sure he has everything he needs. From this moment on, he is my responsibility. I’ll be back in a few. I need a moment to think.”

I walked down the halls of the estate, back to my study, where my glass of liquor waited. Sitting down, I swirled the amber liquid once more before taking a slow sip.

The weight of the night pressed against me.

Losing Damian. Gaining a grandson. Making brutal choices that kept this family intact.

I had done what needed to be done, and I would continue to do so, even in my retirement.

Rising from my seat forty minutes later, I walked back to the nursery where my grandson lay sleeping peacefully in a blue onesie, beanie, and socks. I stood there for a long time, watching over him.

“I am going to name you Darius Damian Knight. I always said if I had another boy after your father and uncle, I would name him that,” I said lowly.

He was a part of the future boys of the Knight family, and I would be there for them, even after death.

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

I was now seven months pregnant, and I was finally feeling good—better than I had in years, actually. My first five months, I was sick, but I trooped it out. The nausea was finally long gone, my energy was decent, and I was glowing in every way. Well, glowing and growing. I'd gained close to fifty pounds, and sometimes I felt like I was carrying twins. But it was just one baby, a boy, who kicked around like he was training for the Olympics.

As planned, I had been flying Jackie, my psychologist, out three times a month. The sessions worked tremendously, pulling me out of the dark space I'd been in and helping me find peace. It wasn't cheap, but it was worth every penny. Damier insisted on covering the fees, but I refused. He'd already done so much for me, for us, and I felt like this was something I needed to handle on my own.

Even he had started therapy with my top psychologist, as I recommended, promising to stick with it until the baby was born. He was getting better—mentally focused, more grounded—but at his core, he was still the man I fell in love with. His dark side was still there, the part of him that protected me fiercely and loved me deeply. And truthfully, I didn't want him to change. He was who he was, and I wouldn't trade him for anything.

My circle was small, but I loved it that way. Aside from my therapist, Chanel, my mom, and Mrs. Knight would fly out regularly to visit. It was just enough family and familiarity to keep me grounded. I didn't need a lot of friends in my new, more private life, and I didn't miss the chaos of my old one.

The house was alive with laughter and chatter. Everyone had flown in to celebrate our birthdays—mine and Damier's—since they were in the same week, just before

Thanksgiving. It was a big deal for both of us, and with me being big pregnant, the family had all come to my villa for a week of exclusive family time.

I was upstairs in the bedroom, sleeping peacefully. The pregnancy weight had me drained most of the time, and the sound of the waves outside the house always lulled me into a deep sleep.

The door creaked open, and I heard my mom's soft voice. "Baby girl, wake up. Come eat something."

I blinked, rubbing my eyes as I sat up slowly. "What time is it?"

"Time for you to get up and enjoy your family," she said with a smile.

I stretched, my back aching slightly. "Alright, I'm coming," I mumbled as I slid out of bed.

I slipped into a cute, soft blue Chanel sweatsuit, complete with matching slides, and tied my hair up into a messy bun.

I walked through the house and found everyone in the backyard. When I stepped outside, the sight took my breath away. The sun was setting, painting the sky in brilliant oranges and pinks, while the small palm tree in the yard sparkled with royal blue lights. Underneath the tree, there were wrapped gifts in elegant paper, their bows glistening in the fading sunlight.

I froze, realizing what was happening. "What... is this?" I asked, looking around at the smiling faces of my family.

Chanel stepped forward, grinning. "Surprise! Baby shower for baby Dami!"

My hands flew to my mouth, tears welling up as I looked at everyone. “You guys didn’t have to do this!”

Mrs. Knight stepped forward, her usual composed demeanor softened by a warm smile. “Of course we did, darling. Every Knight baby deserves to be celebrated, and so does his mama.”

We all gathered around as I started opening the gifts. Everything was designer—Gucci onesies, Burberry blankets, Dior baby shoes. It was overwhelming to see how much love and thought everyone had put into this moment.

Mrs. Knight rolled over her gift, a cute Fendi stroller. “Something stylish for your stylish little one,” she said, winking.

“Thank you so much,” I said, my voice thick with emotion.

Then, it was Damier’s turn. He walked over, holding a wrapped box and a soft smile on his face. “This one’s from me,” he said.

I unwrapped it carefully, and when I saw what was inside, the tears started falling instantly. It was a fleece blanket covered in pictures of me and my brother Donta.

“I want our kids to know about their uncle,” he said softly. “So, I’ll always make sure they have things to remind them of him.”

I broke down, clutching the blanket to my chest. My parents came over to hug me, their eyes wet with tears as well. “This is so thoughtful,” my mom said.

“I’m going to use this at the hospital,” I announced, still crying.

But Damier wasn’t done. He handed me another envelope, and when I opened it, my

breath caught. It was Donta's official birth certificate, listing me as his mother and making his name officially Donta Jaxton Knight.

I couldn't hold it together. All the women were crying now, and even the men were patting Damier on the back, nodding in approval.

After the gifts were opened, the baby shower turned into an early birthday celebration. The chef brought out a massive cake that said Happy Birthday Dream and Damier , and the table was packed with party food and drinks.

I ate and danced with Damier for a while, even though my feet were killing me. He was drunk and laughing, enjoying every second of his 37th birthday.

"You made it," I said, smiling up at him.

"Damn right I did," he said, pulling me close.

Chanel and Hocus had brought their children, so they were eventually sent inside with baby Donta in the care of Damier's seventeen-year-old sister, Dashae, who had fallen in love with her nephew. That left the adults to let loose.

I had to sit down after a while, my back and feet protesting. Damier joined me, still sipping on his cognac as we watched everyone else enjoy themselves.

He turned to me, his voice low. "You ready to go back to Cali?"

I nodded, smiling. "Yeah. Especially since the plan is to have the baby there."

"Good," he said, leaning back in his chair. "The renovations at the house are done, and the kids' rooms are just the way you wanted them. I am going to hire Danielle to add the finishing touches since she is dying for a real job in her profession. We can

just make this place a rental home and vacation spot for us.”

Danielle was Damier’s little sister as well, but she was the oldest. I met her and all his sisters for the first time on this trip, and they were a joy to be around. Danielle was in school for interior architecture, so I didn’t mind her finishing the job.

My heart warmed at his words, and I leaned into him, grateful for everything he had done to make this pregnancy as easy as possible.

That night, after everyone had gone to bed, we showered together, the water washing away the day. We ended the night tangled in each other’s arms, making love slowly and passionately, thankful for how far we’d come and excited for what was still to come.

Two months later

The room was dimly lit, candles flickering softly around the living room of our home. We were back in Cali, and Dream was in labor. The air was warm, filled with the steady rhythm of Dream's breaths. The birthing pool took up most of the space, its clear sides reflecting the soft glow of the candles. This wasn't some hospital birth with machines and fluorescent lights—this was personal, intimate, the way she wanted it.

My mother stood near the door, her usual poised demeanor softened with pride and anticipation. On the opposite side, Mrs. Jaxton hovered close, her hands clasped nervously but a small, encouraging smile on her face.

Baby Donta was upstairs, sleeping soundly in his crib under the watchful eye of Danae. I made sure he was out of the way, but in my mind, I pictured him meeting his little brother for the first time, a moment that would forever stay etched in my memory.

I was in the pool with Dream, sitting behind her in swim shorts as she leaned back against me, her body trembling with the effort of bringing our son into the world. My arms wrapped around her, holding her steady as the midwife encouraged her through another contraction.

“Breathe, baby,” I whispered into her ear, my lips brushing her temple. “You doin’ good.”

Her head tilted back against my chest, her ginger curls damp with sweat. She gritted

her teeth, letting out a low, guttural sound as another wave of pain washed over her. “I can’t... I can’t do this,” she whispered, her voice breaking.

“Yes, you can,” I said firmly, tightening my hold on her. “You’ve got this. Just focus on me.”

The photographer moved quietly around the room, snapping shots of the raw, emotional moments as Dream gripped my hands, her nails digging into my skin with every push. I didn’t flinch—I wanted to feel it with her, every moment, every ounce of her strength.

Minutes felt like hours, but finally, the midwife’s voice broke through the tension.

“One more push, Dream,” she said gently but firmly. “You’re almost there.”

Dream let out a cry, her body surging forward as she gave everything she had left. I held her tighter, whispering words of encouragement as I watched the midwife reach down.

And then, just like that, the room filled with the sound of our son’s first cries when she brought him from underwater and cleaned his lungs.

“He’s here!” the midwife announced, lifting the tiny, wriggling baby into the air before gently placing him on Dream’s chest.

My breath caught as I stared down at him. He had a head full of ginger hair, just like his mama, but his face... his face was mine. It was like looking at a smaller version of myself from the moment I was born.

Dream let out a soft sob, her hands trembling as she cradled him against her. “Oh, my God,” she whispered, her tears mixing with her sweat. “He’s perfect.”

I kissed her damp forehead, my own eyes stinging with unshed tears. “He is,” I said, my voice low and thick with emotion.

My mom and Mrs. Jaxton both let out soft cries of their own, their hands covering their mouths as they watched the scene unfold.

After I cut the umbilical cord, the midwife handed me a towel, and I carefully wrapped our son in it before holding him close. He was so small, his tiny fingers curling instinctively around my thumb. I’d been through a lot in my life, seen shit most people couldn’t imagine, but this moment... this was pure.

“Look at you,” I murmured, my voice barely above a whisper. “My little man. You have no idea what you mean to your family.”

Dream leaned against the side of the pool, her eyes on me and the baby as the photographer snapped a photo. “He has your face,” she said with a tired smile. “But that hair... that’s all me. I prayed for that.”

I chuckled softly, nodding. “Yeah, he’s already stealing the best of both of us.”

The midwife helped Dream out of the pool while I still held the baby in the pool, rocking him gently as he squirmed in my arms. Dream was wrapped in a plush robe, her legs shaky as she sat on the nearby couch so her mother could help her dry off and get on a pair of underwear.

The midwife took the baby from me and dried him off so she could put on his clothes. I got out and dried off before sitting beside her. Once the midwife gave Dream the baby, I saw the love in her eyes. The photographer caught another shot—Dream cradling him with a tearful smile, her hair falling over her shoulders like a halo.

My mother stepped forward, her voice soft but full of pride. “What’s his name?”

Dream and I exchanged a look, and then she smiled. “Damier Roman Knight Jr.,” she said, her voice steady.

The room seemed to pause for a moment, everyone taking in the weight of his name. Mrs. Knight’s eyes glistened with tears as she nodded, her hand resting lightly on my shoulder. “Your father would’ve been so proud.”

The rest of the evening blurred into a quiet haze of love and relief. As Dream breastfed the baby for the first time, I couldn’t take my eyes off them. This was my family, my world, and I’d do anything to protect it.

Later, after the baby was settled in the bassinet and Dream was resting, I stepped outside for a smoke break, the cool night air washing over me. The moon hung low over the horizon, casting a silver glow on the backyard.

I thought about everything it took to get here—the sacrifices, the pain, the bloodshed. And I felt like it was worth it.

Heading back inside after I finished my blunt, I showered and climbed into bed beside Dream, pulling her close as she stirred slightly in her sleep. Our son slept peacefully in the bassinet beside us, his soft breaths filling the quiet room.

This was the life I’d fought for, and I wasn’t going to let anything take it away.

Four months later

I stood in the bridal suite, staring at my reflection in the full-length mirror. My custom gown hugged my body perfectly, the lace detailing trailing down my arms and onto the long train behind me. I still had a lot of baby weight that the gym just wasn't slimming down for me, and I didn't want cosmetic surgery, so I got the best body shaper money could buy. My ginger curls were swept over one shoulder, shimmering under the light.

The door opened quietly, and my mother stepped in, holding baby Donta in her arms. He was dressed in a miniature black suit with a gold bow tie, his tiny feet kicking softly as she adjusted him on her hip.

"You're breathtaking," my mom said, her voice thick with emotion.

I turned toward her, my heart swelling as I looked at Donta. His chubby cheeks and bright eyes made my heart ache with love. "Thank you," I whispered, smoothing my dress nervously.

Behind her, Mrs. Knight entered, carrying baby Damier Jr. in her arms. He was wrapped in a soft white blanket, his tiny head resting peacefully against her shoulder. She walked over to me, her usual sharp demeanor softened by pride.

"Are you ready, my dear?" she asked, her voice warm yet commanding.

I nodded, my hands trembling slightly. "I think so."

They left the room, leaving me with Danielle, who would be helping me with the train of my dress.

“You look good, sis-in-law, and I am happy for y'all.” Danielle smiled and then started picking up the bottom of my dress for me.

“Thank you, sis-in-law. I really appreciate that.”

The warm California sun was shining over one of Damier’s Calabasas estates, and the soft breeze carried the scent of roses and jasmine from all the flowers I had at my wedding. The sprawling private property was decorated in white and gold, with flowers and glowing lanterns lining the path to the altar. It was like a scene out of a fairytale, perfectly tailored to our style—elegant, intimate, and extravagant in all the right ways.

Our wedding song started softly as I stepped out of the house, my father appearing at my side. He took my arm, steadying me as I took a deep breath.

The aisle was framed by rows of family and close friends, all dressed elegantly to match the setting of white, black, and gold. Their faces lit up as I appeared, but I barely noticed them. My eyes were locked on Damier.

He stood at the altar, wearing a custom black tuxedo with gold accents. His posture was relaxed, but his eyes held an intensity that made my stomach flip.

Mrs. Knight sat near the front, holding baby Damier Jr. in her lap. My mom was beside her, cradling Donta, who had settled into her arms with a pacifier in his mouth. She also had her other grandson, Darius, in front of her in a stroller, but he was covered. Our mothers looked so proud, their smiles warm and encouraging.

By the time I reached the altar, my heart was pounding. My father kissed my cheek,

handing me over to the man who had completely changed my life.

“You’re flawless,” Damier whispered as he took my hand, his eyes scanning me from head to toe.

“And you’re overdressed with all them Cubans around your neck,” I teased back, my lips curving into a smile.

After the preacher prayed over us, we started exchanging vows that were raw, heartfelt, and deeply personal.

I went first because Damier clearly looked nervous. We agreed at the wedding rehearsal that he would go first, but I knew that wasn’t happening. As bold as he was, my man was shy. I looked at him and smiled.

“I never thought I’d find someone who could love me the way you do. Someone who sees every piece of me—the good, the bad, and the broken—and still chooses me every day. You walked into my life when I didn’t even know I needed saving, and you didn’t just pull me out of a bad space—you stood with me, fought for me, and gave me the strength to keep going. You are my protector, my safe place. With you, I’ve learned what it means to love without limits, to trust without fear, and to dream without boundaries. Today, I promise to stand by you, to love you fiercely, and to build a life with you that reflects the strength and beauty of everything we’ve survived. You’re my everything, Damier—forever.”

Damier smirked as he wiped tears from my eyes with his handkerchief.

“I like that, baby. Forever.” He then took a piece of paper from his top pocket and started reading.

“Imani, you are everything I didn’t know I needed. When my world was in chaos,

you were my calm. When I couldn't trust anyone, you gave me a reason to believe. You've seen the darkest parts of me, the parts I tried to hide, and instead of running, you stood with me. You've given me a reason to change, to fight, and to be better—not just for you but for us. I vow to always protect you, to keep you safe, and to love you with everything I have. I promise to give you the life you deserve and to never let anything or anyone come between us. You're my peace, my partner, and my home. Today, I give you all of me, forever.”

We exchanged rings, and my wedding band matched the engagement, but it was bigger. Damier's band was gold and filled with diamonds.

When the officiant pronounced us husband and wife, the applause erupted, but I barely heard it. All I could hear was my heart racing as Damier leaned down to kiss me.

“You're mine,” he whispered against my lips.

“And you're mine,” I replied, tears spilling down my cheeks.

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The reception was beautiful chaos inside the ballroom of the house. Cameras from the hottest streaming app in LA, Demon TV, captured every moment, from the toasts to the emotional first dance. For the first time, we allowed the world to see our family—our two boys who had changed everything for us.

Baby Donta was a star in his tiny suit, his bright eyes watching everything around him with fascination. My mom passed him to Mrs. Knight, who balanced him and Damier Jr. effortlessly as they both cooed in her lap for a picture.

The cameras captured footage of our family moments, including a pre-recorded

segment of us from pictures back when we did the show, us on vacation, and now us playing with the boys at home, showing the love and care that defined our lives.

When it was time for our statement, Damier's arm wrapped around my waist as we faced the cameras together.

“Since the world wanted another show, this was the best I could do for them. This is our first and last time sharing our lives publicly,” he said firmly, his voice steady and commanding. “We’re happy, we’re blessed, and our love is real. That’s all you need to know.”

I added, “We wanted to share this moment to show that no matter what people think we’ve been through, love conquers all. But after today, we’re reclaiming our privacy. Our family is sacred, and we’re keeping it that way.”

The cameras clicked off, and I exhaled deeply, feeling lighter. This was the closure we needed—the final time we’d let the world in.

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Later that evening, the celebration became quieter. The boys had been put to bed, and the guests had started to filter out. I sat on the edge of the bed in our room, peeling off my heels as the weight of the day finally caught up with me.

Damier walked in, still in his tux but with the bow tie undone. He looked at me for a moment before crossing the room and kneeling in front of me.

“You good?” he asked, his voice low.

I nodded, smiling softly. “I’m more than good.”

He leaned forward, pressing a kiss to my knee before resting his hands on my thighs. “You made me the happiest man alive today,” he said.

“And you made me the happiest woman,” I replied, leaning down to kiss him. He suddenly started pulling up my dress. I had taken off the train of my dress, so it was just a midi dress. I giggled as his kisses on my thighs tickled me.

“Wait, you don’t want me to take a shower first? We been outside and dancing all day.”

He looked up at me, his eyes red and glistening from all the weed and liquor he indulged in at the reception.

He laughed. “Please, I know this pussy always clean.” He slid my thong down and started pleasing me with his tongue and French kissing my lower lips. Damier pleased me and then stood up to start taking off his suit. I stood to take off my dress, but he stopped me.

“Nah, you look good in that muthafuckas. Keep it on.” He pulled me close. Before I knew it, Damier had me bent over the end of the bed, and I was moaning his name.

“Damn, this married pussy feels good.” He smacked my ass and then gripped it tightly as he slowly slid in and out of me but digging deep.

We stayed up late, starting our honeymoon early with more drinks and lovemaking.

The next morning, we were on a private jet heading to Bora Bora for our real honeymoon.

For the first time in my life, everything felt complete.

Damier

One month later

The house was quiet when I left at four in the morning. Dream and the kids were asleep upstairs, the room filled with the kind of peace I couldn't afford right now. There was no part of me that wanted to leave, but I had to.

The call had come in early, waking me before the sun came up. Damian is gone.

The SUV ride to the dungeon felt like it stretched on forever. King sat silently in the driver's seat, his hands gripping the wheel as we drove through the city. No music. No talking. Just the sound of the engine and the weight of what waited for me.

By the time we pulled up to the house, the knot in my stomach had twisted so tight it felt like it was suffocating me. This wasn't just about handling business. This was my blood. My twin.

I walked through the cold house until we got to the basement. The door creaked open when I unlocked it, the dim light spilling into the room where his body lay. The air was heavy with the stench of decay the moment I stepped inside. I slipped on the hazmat mask one of my men handed me, but it barely helped. The dungeon wasn't a place meant for anyone to survive, and Damian had been there for too long. I had heard from the men watching the house that he begged until the end for one of them to let him out, but they knew better than to feel sorry for him.

I stood there for a moment, just staring. He was unrecognizable. Sucked up and

skeletal, his body twisted in a way that made it clear the end hadn't been peaceful. The chains were still around his wrists, but there was no strength left in them. No fight.

I swallowed hard as I stepped closer. This wasn't the Damian I grew up with, the brother I used to race bikes with down the block or trade secrets with when we were kids.

This was what greed and betrayal had turned him into.

"You should've chosen different, twin," I murmured, my voice low, the words barely audible under the hum of the mask.

The smell was unbearable, but I forced myself to stay. I needed to see this. I needed to feel it. It was a lesson to me to always stay loyal to my family.

After a while, I turned to the men standing behind me. "Get it done. He will be cremated, so you know where to take him," I said, my voice cold.

They nodded, moving in to handle the cleanup while I stepped outside, ripping the mask off as the fresh air hit me. I leaned against the wall of the warehouse, closing my eyes for a moment.

I didn't feel relieved. I didn't feel satisfied. I just felt... empty.

By the time I got back to the Knight Estate, the sun was already up. My mother was waiting in her study, her face calm, but her eyes searching mine the moment I walked in.

"It's done," I said simply, sitting down across from her.

Her shoulders sagged slightly, the only sign that she was carrying any emotion at all.

“Okay,” she softly said.

I nodded, staring at the floor for a moment before looking back at her. “What do you want me to tell the girls?”

She hesitated, her hands folded neatly in her lap. “Tell them he passed naturally, but I will be there with you to tell them. They don’t need to know the details, and for them, we will have a small ceremony since he will be cremated.”

I nodded again, standing. “We’ll handle it.”

“Damier,” she said, stopping me as I reached the door.

I turned back to her, her eyes meeting mine.

“You did what you had to do,” she said, her voice steady but tinged with sadness. “Don’t carry it with you.”

I didn’t respond. I just nodded and walked out, the weight of her words following me as I headed outside so King could take me back home.

Thirty minutes later, King pulled up to the curb outside my house, the engine idling as I sat there for a moment, staring at the door.

“You alright, nephew?” King asked, his tone low but steady.

I nodded, letting out a slow breath. “Yeah. I’m fucked up a little, but I’m good.”

“You gon’ be alright,” he said.

I stepped out, the cool morning air brushing against my skin as I walked up to the house.

When I stepped into the room, the sight of them eased some of the tension in my chest. Dream was awake, holding the baby and humming softly as she rocked him. Donta was sitting in front of her in a bouncy chair, holding his own bottle, looking like he was getting ready to fall back asleep.

She looked up when she saw me, her expression softening. “I was just about to text you. Everything okay? You left suddenly.”

I nodded, sitting down beside her and leaning my head back against the couch. “Yeah,” I said, my voice low. “Everything’s good.”

She didn’t press, and for that, I was grateful.

As I reached out to run a hand over the baby’s soft ginger curls, I felt something shift inside me. Damian was gone. That chapter of my life was finally closed.

And now, it was time to move forward with the family I created.

The End