







# Beyond The Stars (The 8th Wonder #2)

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**Category:** Urban

**Description:** Qamar has always been the baby of the family, the one everyone looks out for, but that hasn't made his life any easier. With dreams of becoming a professional soccer player, he's a college student struggling with imposter syndrome and the weight of his family's expectations. If it were up to him, he'd skip college altogether and dive straight into the pros, but the pressure to succeed academically and athletically is relentless. He's made some questionable decisions along the way but his family still holds him to higher standards never letting him forget the oath of To The Moon.

In another universe is Siasia, the oldest of two, with a ten-year-old stepsister she's practically raised herself. Her mother is married to a man whose abusive nature and gambling addiction cast a dark shadow over their lives. Siasia dreams of becoming a renowned photographer, but for now, she dances at a club and takes on photography gigs to make ends meet and to provide for her sister.

When Qamar and Siasia's paths cross, they find solace in each other's company. Despite their vastly different backgrounds, they share a common struggle and a burning desire to achieve their dreams. As they grow closer, they begin to expose their deepest fears and vulnerabilities, discovering strength in their connection.

Qamar gets frustrated with his pursuit of taking his family to the top. They've already been there, planted a flag there so his journey doesn't feel as fulfilling. That is until Siasia reminds him that the universe doesn't end at the moon, it journeys beyond the stars.

Together, Qamar and Siasia navigate the challenges of their lives, leaning on each other for support and inspiration. *Beyond The Stars* is a heartfelt tale of love, resilience, and the pursuit of dreams against all odds.

*Beyond The Stars*- a young adult contemporary romance with a sports theme and centered around black characters

**Total Pages (Source):** 27

1

January 2030 (6 years after the end of To The Moon)

“I’m just asking when you coming home?” Janay whined through the phone.

Flipping over on his back, Qamar laid the phone on his bare chest with a sigh before hitting the speaker button. “I am at home,” he teased, knowing it would get under her skin. “This where I live.”

“I mean, technically, you just a rolling stone—be jumping from house to house but you know what I mean, Q,” Janay sassed. She loved Qamar but his childish antics were a lot to deal with, especially in her current predicament.

Before he could respond to her, three taps laid against his bedroom door were followed by tiny feet and giggles. They didn’t give him time to call out to them before his beautiful daughter, Esmeray barged in with his mama right behind her.

“Daddy, you woke?” her deep, adultlike voice asked as she stood with her tiny hand on her hip.

“Hey, Es, girl!” Janay greeted his baby girl joyously.

Too bad, Esmeray wasn’t a fan. Her wide eyes rolled to the sky. “Daddy?” She pushed out his name, letting Janay know she was only concerned with her daddy. “You want pancakes?”

Qamar laughed, the sound rich and warm. “Yea, baby,” he said, sitting up and swinging his legs over the side of the bed. He glanced at the phone, knowing he had to address Janay’s concerns sooner or later, but for now, he chose to focus on the simple, precious moments with his daughter.

Qamar’s mama, Stephanie, snickered at her grandbaby. “Girl, you are too much for me. Hey, Janay,” she called out to Qamar’s... well, she had no idea what Janay was to her son. All she knew was, the girl was carrying his second daughter.

Janay listened to the exchange; a soft smile formed on her lips despite her earlier frustration. She loved listening to Qamar with Esmeray and witnessing the tenderness and care he showed his daughter. It reminded her of why she fell for him in the first place, even if his wandering ways sometimes drove her crazy.

“Hey, Ms. Stephanie.” Janay tried her hardest to be liked by Qamar’s family. She wanted to be with him more than anything in the world, and the one way she could keep herself in his life was to merge their lives with the baby she carried and by being liked by his family.

Sitting up, Qamar reached out for his daughter who wasted no time jumping in her daddy’s bed. “Aye, Janay, I’m gone hit you back.”

“Okay but don’t forget to call me back.” She sounded desperate, and Stephanie hated that for her.

“Bet,” he barely got out before he ended the call. “Now, what you was saying?” He tickled Esmeray, causing her double over into a fit of laughter. “Speak up? You came in here wanting all the smoke, now you don’t have anything to say?”

“I—I can’t talk, Daddy! Ahh!” she yelled, trying her best to squirm out of his tickle attack. “Daddy!” Her tiny hands pushed against his chest.

“Daddy, what?” Qamar mocked her.

“Daddy, I can’t breathe.”

Stephanie snatched her grandbaby from Qamar’s hands. “That’s enough, Qamar!” she fussed. “My baby said she can’t breathe.” She cuddled Esmeray’s head while rocking her in her arms.

Qamar kissed his teeth. “If she can talk, she can breathe... you just be going for anything, Ma.”

“Boy, please.” Stephanie waved him away. “But before I forget, you need to create a boundary with Janay if you ain’t trying to be with her like that.”

“I don’t like Janay.” Esmeray scrunched her nose.

Qamar gave her a look that only her daddy could give her. “Watch your mouth, Es. Ms. Janay is grown.”

Her eyes misted. “Sorry,” she hummed as her head hung low.

He wasn’t going for her fake apology. Esmeray was the girl version of him when he was a child. She was just as nose-y and blunt. Qamar fully understood that but he wasn’t going to allow her to be disrespectful to adults. He didn’t have that guidance when he was growing up, so he was gonna make sure his daughter did. Stephanie had been absent, leaving him to be raised by his twin brother and sister. When his big brother, Lunar, died, Qamar really started to push the line of disrespect. Thankfully, he had two other older brothers from another mother but they were all kids raising kids. Now, everyone who had a hand in raising him were in better positions—financially, and mentally. So the torch had been passed to him. Qamar dreaded it daily. No one said it, but he knew they were so disappointed in him. He

fathered a daughter when he was only sixteen and now at twenty, he had another one on the way by a different woman. He knew he was the family fuck-up.

“How is Janay and the baby anyway?” Stephanie asked, pulling him from his own self-pity moment.

Qamar reached out for his baby girl. “They doing good. Working a nigga’s nerves but healthy and shit.”

“I bet they are working your nerves.” Stephanie grunted. She never tried to judge him too hard because she had her own flaws. Like her baby boy, she too was a teen mother. Unlike him, she didn’t have the support system he currently had or access to the wealth he had access to either. Since she had pretty much left him to her oldest to raise, she gave him a lot of leeway and always overlooked a lot of his bad choices.

“You cooked for Daddy?” Qamar ignored Stephanie to ask his daughter.

Esmeray nodded, her big hair flopping in her face. She looked exactly like Qamar but had her mother’s dark skin. Qamar never loved Esmeray’s mother, Malaysia. He liked her a lot but his heart didn’t hurt when they split. Their co-parenting journey hadn’t been an easy road because they were so young. Now, they were on the right side of things. Malaysia lived her own life, never butting into his. Her only concern was her daughter who she knew Qamar would take great care of.

“Yes, me and GG made breakfast but it’s cold because it’s almost lunch. What we eating for lunch?” Esmeray asked. Her tiny self was always hungry.

Qamar chuckled as he made his way down the grand staircase to the kitchen. Luna, his oldest sister was an award-winning singer/songwriter and married to one of the NFL’s best quarterbacks. It took much convincing but eventually, their mother agreed to allow her oldest to buy her a home that was way too big for her, but as luxurious as

her heart desired. When Qamar wasn't there, or at school, he was at another one of his siblings' homes since he had a room in all their homes. When he rounded the corner, he spotted his mother's husband, Griff. Griff and Stephanie got married five years ago. He treated his mother right and was a solid role model in their family. Qamar would always love and respect him because of that.

"Good morning," Griff greeted, plating up some food. His brown eyes gazed at Stephanie and he blew her a kiss. "This why you snuck out the bed?" He walked over to grip her ass and kiss her lips.

"Eww." Esmeray tooted her nose up.

Qamar tapped her. "What I told you about that? How is that your business?"

Once again, her eyes swelled with faux tears that still didn't faze her father.

Satisfied with loving on his wife, Griff shifted his attention back to Qamar. "How long you here for?"

Before he sat at the island, Qamar placed Esmeray on her feet where she ran to her Papa. He laughed at how mischievous yet dramatically emotional his daughter was.

"I'm leaving tonight. Got a cool little college party I want to check out before our practice on Monday."

"And how is school?"

His shoulders went up before dropping. "It's cool. I could be in the league by now but?—"

"But you gone get that damn degree, Qamar," Stephanie butted in. "You smart



enough to do both... got enough money to do both too.”

There it was. The pressure his family put on him. Being the baby was cool until it wasn't.

When it came to his soccer career, he'd been offered full ride scholarships to some of the country's top D1 schools. With all the money flowing in his family, he declined the full rides feeling they were better suited for the less fortunate and allowed his people to foot the bill. He had more than enough of his own money, between his family putting assets in his name and the NIL deals, Qamar was good on money. Everyone expected so much from him because for his most influential teenage years, his family had money. He got the mother none of them got and the privileges all of them contributed to. Qamar's projection in life was so damn high, it made his head spin.

Griff shook his head at his wife. He understood why they wanted their baby to succeed. At the same time, he knew how much anxiety that pressure caused Qamar. The boy was obviously struggling.

“I know, Ma. I'm going to finish.” Qamar licked his lips while holding his head down. “After I drop Es off, I might head back earlier.”

“Oh, here you go being all sensitive and shit.” Stephanie rolled her eyes. “You ain't gotta leave early, and I won't say anything else to you while you here. Lord forbid I have an opinion on something.”

“That's where Es get that dramatic shit from.” Qamar smirked.

Griff added his two cents. “She gets it from both of y'all. Shit, her mama too.”

Everyone laughed at that, including Esmeray, who was tucked in her Papa's big arms.

Stephanie hugged her baby boy. “I love you, Qamar.”

“I know, Ma. I love you too.” He kissed her cheek.

It was true. He loved his entire family. They meant the world to him. He only wished they would give him room to figure his own life out—do it his way, but maybe that was too much to ask, coming from a family of excellence.

His long legs stretched out so far, people had to walk around it to get to where they were going. Qamar couldn’t have cared less though. With his back slouched against the back of the leather couch, he kept his eyes trained on the brown skinned beauty who had commanded his and every man’s attention while her and her friends popped their asses to the raunchy music of some up-and-coming female rapper. The beer in his hands dangled between his legs. He was so laid back and chill. People around him thought he was cool beyond any reasonable doubt.

After spending a little more time with his daughter and mama, he dropped Es off and got on his flight back to Lynn Beach where his college was located and from the view in front of him, it was a good decision. Their family jet had him there in an hour and fifteen minutes.

“Bitch bad, huh?” Drake, his friend and teammate bumped his shoulder though his eyes were devouring the girl too.

Qamar clammed up when he called the girl out of her name. It was locker room talk but being raised by a woman, he wasn’t too fond of the term. As if he could read his friend’s mind, Drake put his hands up in surrender.

“My bad... I ain’t mean to call her a bitch. Know how you get, with your sensitive ass.”

A light laugh floated from his mouth. “You wouldn’t want a nigga calling your mama that would you?”

“Shit, I would fuckin’ agree.” Drake cackled loudly.

Once upon a time, Qamar might’ve felt the same ill feelings towards the woman that gave birth to him. Now, he loved Stephanie with his heart. She made mistakes just like the next person, and he decided to forgive her for them. It didn’t matter where they started but where they were, and Stephanie was in his corner backing him up a hundred percent.

With his light brown eyes still trained on ol’ girl with her friends, he shook his head. “You wild, nigga.”

Socially, Qamar liked to stay to himself. He kept his business to himself, that included his family. Since his family had made it big and afforded him an elite lifestyle, he learned to not trust anyone outside of them. It took him some time, but after being stabbed in the back one time too many, he caught on.

“Why won’t you go talk to her?” Drake asked. His eyes locked in on her round backside that hung out of the denim shorts she wore. It was cold as hell outside but based on her outfit, you’d think it was a hundred degrees.

Ol’ girl tried to balance it out by wearing pink leather boots that went to her thighs and a cropped green sweater that sat seductively under her full boobs. Any wrong movement and they’d spill out. Placing the beer to his lips, he gulped down all that was left. Finally, her eyes connected with his, filing him with a feeling of familiarity. His heart skipped a few beats before regulating back to normal when her gaze returned to her friends.

“Who is she?” Qamar asked, having never seen the girl around campus before.

Lynn Beach University was a huge campus so it wasn't out of the ordinary to not know everyone that attended. However, the parties were usually filled with the same set of people.

"She's a lady of the night." Drake leaned back in his seat, satisfied that he not only knew someone Qamar didn't but also because of what he knew.

"Huh?" Qamar was confused and didn't know if he could take his partner seriously.

Drake was always on joke time, and Qamar understood that. Unlike him, his young friend didn't have any children he had to grow up for. Drake also didn't have the childhood Qamar had. It kept their opinions on opposite sides at times, which caused them to bump heads from time to time.

"You gotta pay to play... I know that ain't your thing because hoes throw pussy at you daily but not that one. Her sexy ass asks for the money first. Ain't no leaving it on the dresser at the end."

Just as Drake was running ol'girl's credentials down, play by play, one of the school's star baseball players approached her. With a smile on her face, she shook her head no. That didn't seem to move the jock because he continued to push up on her.

Qamar was on his feet before he could stop himself. His movements prompted Drake to rise as well. It was known that you protect the star on the team at all times. Qamar was the top collegiate soccer player in the nation.

"Five thousand," Qamar whispered in her ear once he was close enough to do so. He didn't care about Brenden standing there still trying to shoot his shot. "Meet me on the top floor of the garage."

She nodded before he was gone.

Qamar moved through the party effortlessly with everyone parting as if he was some kind of god. To them, he was the only god on campus. The girls craved to be another one of his baby mamas while the men wanted to be him—the latter he was willing to relinquish.

“The fuck was that, Q?” Drake was right behind him with his hands in the air. “Where the fuck you going?”

“Go enjoy the party, Drake.”

A Cheshire grin spread across Drake’s dark skin. “Oh, you paid to play. My nigga!” He tried to dap Qamar up but was left hanging.

Qamar was never one to explain anything to anyone and the fact was... he had no idea why he did what he’d just done. He couldn’t give an explanation if he wanted to. Instead, he was on his way to the athlete’s parking garage.

## Page 2

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2

Ignoring Brenden, Siasia turned to her friend. "I'm out," she declared, not caring about her unwanted guest.

Ally smirked. "I bet you are." She reached in to hug her girl.

Ally and Siasia both worked at the club together. Where Ally was working to have extra money as a broke college kid, Siasia was working to pay for classes and to take care of herself. Their worlds were very different from one another but they loved each other more than anything. Ally was in college off scholarships and Siasia was barely in college. She had yet to go to school for consecutive semesters and at twenty, she was barely a freshman.

"Hmph." Champ, Ally's friend crossed her arms over her chest. "You know he has a girlfriend, right?"

"I didn't know it then, and I still don't know it. It's like you never said it," Siasia sneered.

She wasn't a fan of Ally's friend but tolerated her because she never wanted to make her girl have to choose between her friend groups. She couldn't promise that she didn't have an ass whooping waiting in the cut, for the one-time Champ really got beside herself.

Brenden's pale hand rested at the small of Siasia's back. "I'm paying double tonight," he announced, not caring about anyone hearing their private conversation.

Champ cackled.

Siasia's stomach bubbled.

Ally yanked her friend towards her. "Brenden, not tonight. I need her," she continued to pull Siasia as they found the nearest exit. When she felt Champ's presence, she grilled her. "I'll call you later."

"What did I do?" Champ whined with her hands in the air. "You always picking her side."

"Because she's not childish enough to make me do it, like you are. Now, I will call you later."

Siasia didn't gloat nor did she feel like she had won. Brenden's words knocked her back to reality. There was no shame in her—okay, well, maybe just a little shame. But still, she usually held her head high. The issue tonight was, she hoped to be just a college girl; not her usual hoe-self. Brenden reminded her that there was no difference between the two. Siasia was both—a parttime college student and a prostitute. The party was in a college student turned party promoter's top floor apartment. Their descent down the stairs was silent as the music in the background faded out. Every few steps, they passed other students. When they made it to the parking lot, Ally held Siasia's hands.

"I love you... every version of you. Okay?"

Siasia nodded. "And I love you too. Thank you for never judging."

A short breath escaped Ally's lips. "Girl, please. I would never do that. I know the real you. The you the world doesn't deserve. And the same people so quick to judge you, really want to be you. Now, I don't know what Qamar's fine ass said to you but

get up there. I have a good feeling about this one, girl.”

“Well un-feel it. That nigga trying to get the same thing Brenden’s white ass was just trying to get. The only difference is this nigga upped the wage.” Siasia pursed her lips.

“All the more reason for you to carry ‘yo ass to wherever he told you to be.” Ally reached in for a hug. “I love you though and be safe.”

“I will, friend.”

“Oh and let me know when you get to him and when you get home.”

“Okay.” Siasia unlocked the door to her car, using the key.

The key fob needed a new battery but it was too expensive for her to replace it at the moment. With the amount of money Qamar was about to give her, she would be able to replace it and get the four new tires she needed. It took her car a few tries for the motor to turn over but after a few prayers, it cranked up. Her old Toyota Camry had seen better days but she was going to drive it until it caught fire. The radio didn’t work and she didn’t have a fancy screen on the dashboard like the new cars had. Still, Siasia was thankful for her reliable transportation.

Lynn Beach University had been voted one of the best campuses in the country because of its lush green lawn and street-lined palm trees. Lynn Beach was a college town that had a large tourist population. The surrounding large cities also added to the city’s economy, so for many reasons it was the perfect beach town for singles, college kids, and families alike. It was home for her. Born and raised, Siasia dreamed of traveling to other places and once the opportunity presented itself, she wouldn’t hesitate to explore the world beyond Lynn Beach.



Rounding the last corner of the parking garage, she finally made it to the top. Qamar stepped out of his Corvette looking good as hell. Siasia chewed her lip as she parked, leaving a parking space between their cars. Hesitantly, she exited the car.

“I thought you was going to leave me hanging.” Qamar smiled; his light brown eyes twinkled under the stars.

Her long legs carried her to him. Standing at five feet, five inches without heels, she stood almost eye level to him in her four-inch, thigh high boots. “I don’t play when it comes to my money.” Siasia held out her hand. “Money first.”

Qamar’s head fell back. “Oh, you don’t play about that paper, huh?” He went to the trunk of his car where he kept a bookbag filled with five thousand dollars. It was his just-in-case money.

Siasia watched his every movement, always on alert due to her profession. When he returned with the crisp blue faces, she relaxed. “Thank you.”

“You thought I didn’t have it?” His thick brows rose in anticipation.

“I mean I knew you were good for it but assumed you would want to Cash App it to me or something.”

“You take Cash App?” Qamar asked.

“Hell no.” She laughed with him joining her.

Silence surrounded them, before his deep voice pulled her eyes to his. “Come chill with me,” he suggested.

“Where?”

“Anywhere. Where you want to go?”

Her eyes went from his retro Jordans to his crisp fade that tapered into freshly retwisted locs. His features were novelesque—his strong jawline that made his beard look perfect with beautiful golden-brown irises housed by sexy ass, downturned almond eyes. A dangly diamond moon earring hung from his ear, looking like it cost more than everything she ever bought or owned in her life. The softness in his eyes eased her wandering mind, telling of a story that she was safe with him.

Feeling like the least she could do was give him the night of his life for the amount of money he paid, Siasia agreed, “I’ll go wherever you take me.”

“My girl.” He smiled, showing off his perfect teeth. “What’s your name, anyway?”

“Siasia.”

“I like that. It’s unique.”

“So is Qamar.” Her eyes sparkled with a flirty laughter. “What does it mean?”

“It’s Arabic for moonlight,” he explained before pulling the passenger door open. “Get in.”

“Don’t be bossing me around.” Siasia rolled her neck playfully.

The car sat so low, she had to lean down to get into it. The leather was as soft as cotton and the seat warmers aided in the cozy vibe. Shimmying, she contained her squeal of being in such an expensive car. Leaning across the middle console, she pushed the door open for him, causing a shocked expression to cross his face.

Qamar couldn’t contain his own glee. No girl had ever done something so small, yet

so meaningful for him. The gesture felt enormous and warmed his pecan-colored skin, showing his flushed cheeks. Needing to shake himself out of the weird fog he found himself in, he licked his lips—something he did often to cool his body down. It was his personal little quirk.

“You got the seat warmed for me like you knew I would take a ride with you,” Siasia teased. “Your car is nice, though.”

“I like yours too.”

“Oh, you trying to be funny?”

He grinned. “Nah! I’m dead ass. I like the simple shit.” He laughed, placing his hand on his stomach.

“But you’re driving a hundred-thousand-dollar car on a college campus... yea, you’re real humble.”

He studied her, wanting to ask what she called the hairstyle she sported. It looked like a wrap but had cute and colorful hairpins around it. It was so eclectic and paired well with her round face and fresh style.

“Damn.” He palmed his chest. “You judging?”

Before she could respond, the sound of her phone ringing cut off her reply. Her eyes bucked when she noticed her little sister’s name flash across the screen.

“Noodle?” Siasia answered, pushing the car door open. Her stomach clenched before she knew what the issue was. A few seconds passed before she said, “I’m on the way. Go to your hiding spot, Noodle.”

“Everything okay?” Qamar’s asked concerned.

Siasia didn’t respond. She pushed the money he’d just given her into his lap. “I have to go.”

“Nah, that’s for you, mama.”

“To fuck you... I can’t fuck you tonight, Qamar.”

Hearing her confess to what Drake told him she was, cut his heart. Lightly, Qamar gripped her arm. “That ain’t what it was for. Take the money and drive safe, Siasia.”

Her slanted eyes seared into his, searching for a flaw. Her heart galloped in her chest when she didn’t find one. “I don’t take handouts, Qamar.”

“Good because I don’t hand shit out.”

That brought a smile to her disheveled face. Nodding, she exited his car, praying her car cranked up on the first try. Relief filled her when it didn’t show out in front of company.

Siasia tapped the horn when she pulled off, speeding to get home to her little sister.

Pulling up to her trailer, she heard loud voices and cries. It was the norm for her but it hadn’t hardened her heart to the point of being unfazed. Siasia still prayed for a better life for her mother, no matter how strained their relationship had become. She killed the engine, tucked the money in her glove compartment, and got out. The closer she got to the stained front door, the louder her mother’s cries became. That wasn’t her concern at the moment though. Noodle, her little sister, whose blood couldn’t make them any thicker was all she was worried about at the moment.

“I need that money for the light bill, Stacy!” Siasia’s mama, Cynthia, yelled before her voice became muffled.

Peering into the small kitchen, Siasia shook her head at Stacy’s hand around Cynthia’s neck. It took everything in her to not clock him upside the head with something. The last time she did it, her mother got so pissed at her. After that, Siasia made sure she kept her hands to herself. Directing her focus to her left, she walked towards the room she shared with Noodle. They had outgrown the two-bedroom trailer the second they stepped foot inside. Then, when Stacy brought Noodle home, it got even more cramped. At ten years old, Siasia took one look at Noodle and realized she loved her as if her mother birthed her herself.

Cynthia met Stacy when Siasia was about seven years old. In the beginning, he was the sweetest and Siasia looked forward to having a father figure in her life. Two years later, the abuse started. Then, Stacy declared he wanted a baby of his own so when Cynthia couldn’t get pregnant, he came home one day with his newborn daughter in his arms, claiming her mother didn’t want her. And like the good southern wife, Cynthia was, she took his oops baby in without question. Her decision fueled by her PCOS and age, making her body struggle to carry a baby of her own for her man. Now, Siasia was twenty; ten years older than Noodle and everything she did, she did it with her little shadow in mind. The plan was to become one of the best photographers in the world and give her little sister the life she deserved.

“Noodle?” Siasia called out into the dark room. She noticed a tiny light under the closet door where they would often go to pretend that life was better than it actually was. It was their wardrobe that took them to Narnia.

“It’s me, Noodle,” Siasia announced as she opened the closet door that was barely hanging on.

Noodle’s bright, innocent eyes peered up from Siasia’s laptop. “Hey.” She smiled as

if there wasn't a live action wrestling match going on in her kitchen.

Squatting to the floor, Siasia crossed her legs before pulling Noodle into her side. "Hey, my girl. You okay?"

"Not really." Noodle twisted her lips as if Siasia had said the weirdest shit. "But these photos always calm me down and help drown out their bullshit."

"Noodle!" Siasia snickered. She didn't agree with her ten-year-old sister cussing but who was she to stop it? Their lives were anything but politically correct.

"He gambled all our money and wants Mama to give him the light bill money to pay off Sleeze," Noodle filled her big sister in, even though Siasia had already kind of figured it out.

Siasia sighed, her chest deflating. She was tired of their living situation and wished her mother could woman up and leave Stacy but that was too much, right? Cynthia came from a generation where having a flawed man was better than having no man at all. Siasia would never understand it. It was the main reason she didn't date. She fucked, got paid, then ducked.

"I can give him the money," Siasia confessed, thinking about the money from Qamar.

"No!" Noodle snapped. "You need that to buy a new camera and get new tires."

"The one I have, has been working just fine. It won't hurt to hold onto it a little longer. It's either that or be without lights."

Noodle nodded, knowing her big sister—who was also her protector—was right. Their lives weren't set up in the way to be able to move things around one month to get something you really wanted. Their parents moved shit around every month

which meant everything was always on a disconnect notice. Their parents' room door slammed, which was the universal sign that their fight was over. If memory served Siasia correct, Cynthia was in the room trying to see how damaged her face was, and Stacy was in the living room sitting on the couch with a beer in his hand.

"Stay here, Noodle," Siasia directed before getting up from the floor.

With her head held high, she marched into the living room.

"Hey, Siasia, I didn't see you come in." Stacy smiled like he wasn't just whooping on her mama.

It was their family's weird dynamic. Stacy loved Siasia but she couldn't love him back knowing he kept her mama with permanent black eyes. In the beginning, she loved him so much. Now, it felt like she was betraying her mother even though Cynthia had long ago betrayed her by staying.

"How much is it?" Siasia asked with no time for all the small talk. The more she looked at him the more she wanted to pay someone to off his abusive ass. Stacy sat up in the worn pleather recliner chair that had been dubbed his from the time he bought it.

"What you talking about, baby girl?" he feigned dumb.

Her eyes cut to the sky before she put them back on him. One thing Siasia was going to do was look people in the eyes. Her mama used to joke that she could walk the biggest bitch down with her eyes alone. "How much you owe Sleeze?"

"Don't worry about that, baby girl. I got the money."

"So, our lights gone get cut off again?"

“I let you talk to me sideways but that shit is about to stop today, Siasia. I am your father.” He stood up, his height towering over her.

Stacy was a tall man. He stood at six feet, seven inches. Before the monster in him was revealed, she thought he could’ve been a model. She had so many images of him from over the years when he would model for her to practice posing. Now, she saw nothing but the ugly parts of him.

“How much is it?” she asked again. “I have some money so everything can get handled. I will handle it, Stacy.”

“I used to love when you called me daddy. You know I love you like you’re mine, right?” Stacy’s wet eyes almost made her believe him but flashes of his fist print on her mother’s face tarnished any good feelings she once had for him.

Seeing she wasn’t for his bullshit, he confessed, “Three grand.” Shame washed over his face.

Siasia turned to the front door to retrieve the money. When she came back in the house, she slammed the money on the worn plywood coffee table in the middle of their matchbox living room. “This should be enough to keep your hands off my mama for the next week.”

There was no thank you or head nod from Stacy. She was used to the encounter. Anytime she made money it was often handed over to Stacy to help pay his debts that he always seemed to have or pay bills. There was hardly ever any money left over for her to enjoy. The whole dynamics in the house was weird because Stacy was a good dad to Noodle. Noodle loved him so much. They often spent time together just the two of them. For that, Siasia never made a big fuss about footing the bill for everything when there was two able bodied adults in the house. When it came to making sure Noodle was happy and healthy, she kept a lot close to her chest.



## Page 3

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3

“ B ut you at the party making fuckin’ kissy faces with some bitch that ain’t me!” In typical Janay fashion, her voice was raised right along with her tiny arms. When it came to giving Qamar a hard time, she was the leader of the pack. So much so that he always expected her to find an issue with something he did.

Like last night. She didn’t like the idea of her fake friends running to tell her that her baby daddy was on some girl that none of them really knew. The claims and calls created more speculation about their lack of a relationship and Janay was tired of defending it.

“I ain’t here to fuss with you. You said you have an appointment so let’s get going.” Qamar slipped his feet into a pair of designer sneakers that were more comfortable than they looked. He could’ve dressed down but he’d been taught to always show up dressed to impress.

Even back when his big sister, Luna, couldn’t afford to buy him and his sister, Solar, the newest sneakers, she always made sure they wore clean clothes and their shoes weren’t busted. Luna was so selfless that she went without while always making sure her siblings had everything they needed and sometimes wanted. Some things stuck with him. Anything Luna taught him, he held close to the chest.

“Nigga, whatever. You think having a conversation is considered an argument.” Janay snaked her neck. “Thanks for reminding me that you are still a fuckin’ child.”

Small things like that got under his skin. Janay knew it, too. It was the low she hit

when she felt like Qamar wasn't engaging with her in the way she wanted. It was the constant reminder that he was having a baby with someone who he felt nothing deep for. Someone he barely knew and often didn't even like.

Qamar knew he was just as much to blame for his situation as Janay. However, sometimes he felt it was more of his fault than hers. He had already brought a baby home at sixteen. Now, he was doing it again. No matter how much he wanted to fuss or be mad about it, he had to admit, he'd made his bed and now he had to lay in it. That came with biting his tongue so much, there was an indent at the tip of his tongue from his teeth digging into it.

Qamar's downturned cognac brown eyes dragged across the room until they got to her. "You ready?"

Her lips smacked in exhaustion. Janay wanted him to say more. It was the only way she knew she meant something to him. Under his gaze, she often felt unseen. It wasn't always like that. Or maybe it was. They were never really an item but shortly after meeting, she found herself pregnant. The time it took to get to know someone was bypassed because they were about to be someone's parents.

College was supposed to be filled with everything but pregnancy. Too bad she couldn't rewrite their history. If she could, she would always end up carrying his child but maybe, she'd give them some time to get to know each other—give him time to love her fully. Pouting, Janay stomped past him as he stepped to the side for her to walk out first. He could only shake his head when his eyes connected to her plump backside. His baby gave Janay the extra ass she always wanted.

In the beginning, she was a petite thing. Short, small waist, and ass but her breasts were big and full. Her light skin was always moisturized and smelled divine. She was pretty. Simply put. Long locs that hung down her back was a feature that drew him to her. Too bad, the surface wasn't an indication to what she had inside. Inside, Janay

was just the average girl from an upper middle-class family that thought her shit didn't stink because she had light skin and a good skincare routine.

Now, she was mean, moody, and thicker than a king-sized candy bar.

Janay twisted her body with every step she took. She knew Qamar had his eyes on her, and she never missed an opportunity to remind him on what he'd been missing. Lately, their interactions only consisted of her begging him for his time and him only showing up when it was about their unborn daughter. Qamar also took great care of her, and his sister paid for her college tuition. To most that was a win but to Janay, she didn't feel like a winner.

"Stop trying to do too much," Qamar fussed as his hand rested on the small of her back and he helped her ease into his low sports car.

There was once a time when Janay loved riding shotgun in his car but with a huge belly, sitting low was a feat. "Thank you," she mumbled, still in her feelings.

Qamar chuckled to himself as he reached over her to buckle her seat belt. During the walk over to his driver's side, he remembered his night with Siasia. The way she reached over to open his door played on his mind like his favorite movie. Since that night, he hadn't seen her in the physical. In his mind, she was there every night.

Before he pulled off, he faced Janay. "Look, I ain't trying to argue with you every time we see each other. I know you pregnant and don't like the way it looks when I'm in another girl's face. I'll be mindful."

"The way it looks?" Janay's eyes bucked at his wording. "I don't like the way it feels. I'm carrying your baby, and we should be trying to make our relationship work."

Frustratedly, he ran his hand down her face, tugging on his beard. "I can't change the

situation we're in but I ain't pressed for pretending we're something we ain't. I'll always have love for you but I ain't in love with you, Janay."

"Why won't you just try, though?" Janay's voice cracked. Even without the pregnancy hormones, she was a bag of water.

Instead of explaining himself for the what felt like millionth time, Qamar turned the music up and headed to the doctor's appointment. The whole ride over, Janay huffed and puffed while scrolling on her phone. She often vented to her mother who wasn't the biggest fan of Qamar. Renata, Janay's mother, didn't care about the wealth of Qamar or his promising professional soccer career. She was pissed that her daughter would be a single mother. She wasn't trying to hear Janay say they could be a family. Renata knew Qamar wasn't in love with her baby. He was already a father to one. That was all she needed to know.

Qamar pulled into the overpriced OB's office with one thing on his mind. He didn't want Janay to hate him, and he tried his best to treat her right. His sisters and mama would have his head if they found out he was being a dog.

"On some real shit, Janay, I'm sorry and I will try to be more mindful of your feelings."

"Sorry for what, Qamar?" Janay looked up from her phone.

"For not loving you the way you need." Pushing his door open, he turned before he got out. "I'll always treat you with respect because you're my daughter's mother."

His panty wetting smile, forced her lips to curl and her heart to ache. "Thank you," Janay pushed out, trying to hold back her second set of tears for the day. She understood what he said but all she heard was, I will treat you the same way I treat my other baby mama—you're not special . And that reality hurt way more than him

smiling in the next bitch's face. At this point, Janay was only a player on the team. She wasn't a star nor the coach's favorite. If she wanted to be the franchise player, she was going to have to practice harder and show him why she was the best because being a baby mama was beneath her.

"Two parties in a row? Janay must be nagging you hard?" Drake jested to Qamar as they sat at a table in the corner of a local strip club.

It was Qamar's first time there and it didn't take much convincing for his friend to get him there. After Janay's doctor appointment, he spent a few days with her in between his classes and practice. Since he was a father, his family paid for him to have his own apartment not far from campus. Technically, he was supposed to stay on campus but with money and his star power, his coach made an exception for him.

"Man, you have no idea." Qamar chortled.

"Two kids, two mamas. I don't want to be you on my worst day."

Qamar cut his eyes at Drake. "And I don't want to be your Keith Sweat ass either. Always begging for the pussy."

"But you was paying for the pussy," Drake shot back, quick on his toes. The two of them died laughing. They were both high and feeling good after a long day of practice.

"Y'all want a picture?" the voice quieted Qamar's laughter.

Siasia knew what she was doing. From the moment they walked in, she was plotting how she was going to get next to him. Dressed like one of the dancers, she left little to the imagination. Shaped like a coke bottle, Siasia was what you called sexy. Her name had to be in the example part of the dictionary under sex appeal.

Qamar straightened his back. “Sia,” he hummed, licking his lips at her nipples pebbling.

Siasia wanted to cover herself, knowing her arousal of him was on full display. “Do you want a picture?”

“Since when photographers started taking pictures dressed like that?” Qamar inquired.

“When bitches learned to hustle,” she challenged him with her eyes, daring him to say the wrong thing. “Do you want a picture? It’s almost time for my set.”

“Hell yea.” Drake stood, ready to pose. He was higher than he should’ve been and couldn’t tell the question was directed at Qamar and Qamar only.

Stretching his hand out to stop his partner, Qamar stood instead. Sexily, he bit into his lip while circling around Siasia. The sound of him growling once his eyes were on her backside caused bumps to pierce her glistening skin. Her body shivered when his face was at the crook of her neck and his arms were around her juicy body.

“I want a selfie.” Qamar’s voice made her pussy juice up.

Siasia knew the thin material on her cheaply made thong wouldn’t stand a chance at the tsunami he created between her legs. “Professionals don’t take selfies.” She smirked, stretching her arm out to get the perfect angle of the two of them.

Her camera snapped a few times, with him going between having a straight face to burying his face further into her neck to him sealing it with a kiss on her cheek. Siasia’s skin flushed with heat.

Clearing her throat, she created distance between them. “These are on the house since

I owe you. I'm up next." Her vanilla scent lingered as she walked away after passing him his photos.

"She needs to be in jail for all that wagon she's dragging." Drake whistled, hypnotized by the shake of her ass.

Qamar popped him upside the head. "Chill nigga."

"So you calling dibs?"

He smirked. That was a clear indication that he was indeed calling dibs. It was their bro code. If you didn't want to share or wanted to take things further with a girl, you had to let it be known from jump. That way, your boy wouldn't be inappropriate.

Drake shook his head. "As if you don't already have enough on your plate."

Qamar couldn't agree more. However, Siasia seemed worth the headache he was sure he was going to endure by pursuing her. She felt comfortable. Familiar. She reminded him of home and that feeling he only felt when he was tucked tightly between his family.

Slow music started to play as the DJ hyped up the next line up of dancers. The lights in the club were low. As the smoke from the many blunts in rotation mixed into the air, it gave off a hazy look.

Jhene Aiko's soft voice filled the club as Siasia's twisted and turned her body to the sway of the music. "It's whatever you want. I want to please you more. Whatever turns you on, just let me know." Siasia's lips moved to the lyrics. It was an oldie but a goodie. Not many new artist were making music that resonated like the 2020s.

Qamar's eyes found hers like two magnets. She was so confident and sure of herself.

He saw through it though. Her eyes held a look that reminded him of his big sister. The way Luna's smile never met her eyes on the days when she was overworked and too damn young to be carrying him and everyone else around. Siasia's slanted eyes told a story most would miss. Not Qamar, though. His feet had a mind of their own as he found himself in front of the stage, watching her with intensity.

His light brown eyes were intimidating but Siasia would never let anyone fuck up her money. Moving away from him, she twirled her body in front of an older guy who liked the show and tossed her a few dollars. She bent over to hold onto her ankles, making her ass clap together, gaining her more money from another man who liked the performance as well.

Siasia didn't make a ton of money working in the club but dancing coupled with her wonky photography business and her side ventures was enough to often pay for a semester in school and help with stuff around the house. Anything extra, she used to thrift and take care of Noodle with. It wasn't the ideal life of a twenty-year-old, still it was better than nothing, and she wouldn't trade it for anything in the world.

She wrapped up her performance as the song faded out, signaling another dancer to make her way up there. Before she could exit the stage, Qamar's hands were back on her damp skin like she was his.

"Come fuck with me." He glared into her eyes, bypassing everything that sat at the surface.

"Okay, let me go change and pay out. Give me like thirty minutes." Siasia didn't need much convincing. Plus, he'd already paid for her time the other night and she was fair even in her line of business.

Rushing to the back, she had never been more ready to spend time with a boy. If she searched her memory rolodex, she'd find she had never been so eager. The newness



of it all gave her anxiety ridden butterflies. In the back, Siasia grabbed her bag from the corner of the room that held her sweat suit. The club she worked in wasn't fancy and didn't have lockers like the clubs she saw on TV. Good thing no one had sticky fingers and pretty much stayed to themselves. The door was pushed open as she counted out her payout for the night. The club took twenty percent of all her earnings which included anything she made taking pictures.

"So, you 'bout to leave with Qamar again?" Ally sat on the bench across from her. "That nigga is fine as hell. I will give him that."

"But?" Siasia waited for her friend to tell her all the reasons he wasn't worth a damn.

Sighing, Ally's shoulders slouched. She wanted the best for her friend and believed she could achieve happiness. Where the issues and caution came in was when Siasia thought happiness came unrealistically. Qamar was out of her friend's league. He came from a well-to-do family and seemed to only fuck with girls from similar backgrounds. Siasia didn't fit that aesthetic. "Just be careful. That nigga got a baby and one on the way."

"What that got to do with me, though?"

"Um, you keep running every time he calls."

Siasia cocked her head to the side. "You mean I'm treating him like a paying customer?"

"When was the last time you had a paying customer? Since he showed you some interest, you've slacked off with that."

"Bitch it's been a few days. Can I let my pussy breath?" Siasia couldn't believe what her friend was accusing her of.

Did she think about Qamar every minute of every day since she'd left him in that parking garage? Yes, but Ally didn't know that because she'd kept it to herself. Saying it out loud made her feel stupid, and her life was stupid enough; she didn't need to add anymore.

Siasia wasn't a ditzy little girl dreaming of fairytales and being saved by some rich man. It was quite the opposite because she knew a girl like her would never ride off into the sunset with a boy like Qamar. That didn't mean she shouldn't have her fun, though.

"I know you're only looking out for me and I appreciate that, but I was doing this long before I even knew you. I got this, Ally."

"If you say so. Just know I will tell you I told you so when the time comes," Ally said lackadaisically.

"That time will never come. I'm willing to bet on that." Siasia handed a neat pile of money to her. "Can you take this to Brian? I need to go change so I can meet Qamar outside."

"I guess." Ally rolled her eyes. "I can't wait to hear all about your night. I want every damn detail."

Siasia snickered. "Bitch, bye."

Ally laughed as she stood to walk out the dressing room door. She'd heard all about Qamar and how his charm slid the panties off anything walking. She knew it wouldn't take all that for Siasia since she was always on a mission.

Siasia shook her head while watching her friend leave the room. Ally meant well but often came off a little too judgmental for her. Still, she wouldn't hold it against her

because if she was being honest, she did have a sliver of hope that Qamar could be more than a customer. There was something about him that made her mind explore endless possibilities. Then, there was him being a father to multiple kids.

Get out your head, she thought.

Siasia believed she needed to shake out of the doomful pit Ally had her in. He was just a boy and she was a girl. The attraction was clear but that was where it all started and ended. She'd never overthought situations before so there was no reason for her to start. She was a bad bitch, and bad bitches got approached by men all the time—no need to make it more than what it was.

Once Siasia was freshened up and she was out of her work outfit, she slipped into her sweatsuit, grabbed her things, and made her way out the club. As she passed some of her regulars, she spoke and smiled but didn't stop to chat. She was on a mission to see Qamar.

“You gone already?” Brian asked, standing at the door talking to one of his bouncers.

Siasia nodded. “Mhm. Ally gave that to you?”

“You know she did. That girl is loyal to the soil. Oh yea, one of my partners was looking for a photographer to shoot his girl's headshots for real estate. I gave him your number. Hope that's cool.”

“You know it is. I appreciate that, Brian.” Siasia gave him a side hug.

Brian wasn't your typical sleazy club owner. He was kind and respectful. He never tripped on them not working nor did he require them to do anything they weren't comfortable doing. She appreciated him for that.

He hugged her back. “It ain’t nothing. Be safe, tonight.”

Her head bounced in acknowledgment.

Siasia slowed her stride and her heart skipped a beat as she spotted Qamar leaning against his car, a striking figure reminiscent of that unforgettable first night they met. This time, his locs were gathered into a messy bun, giving him a carefree charm that only amplified his allure. His eyes were low and red, hinting at a night spent in deep thought or perhaps a little too much fun. He was dressed down in designer sweats that hugged his frame just right, exuding an effortless sex appeal that screamed big dick and long money.

As she approached, the diamond chain around his neck caught the light, sparkling like it was made from the stars themselves—definitely worth more than every car in the parking lot combined. When he smiled, revealing his diamond bottom grill, Siasia felt a rush of heat flood her cheeks. She pushed her tongue into her cheek, trying to suppress the wave of desire that threatened to overwhelm her. As she got closer, he smiled, showing off his diamond bottom grill. Siasia pushed her tongue into her cheek to calm herself from getting turned on.

“How you look even better in sweatpants?” Qamar flirted without having to try hard. Charming the ladies came easy to him. Probably because he was raised by girls and the men in his life were real life lover boys. They stayed on him when it came to having respect for women.

“Don’t try to gas me up,” she shot back, though her blush betrayed her.

Before she could process what was happening, Qamar swept her into his arms, his warmth enveloping her like a soft blanket.

“You always smell so good,” he murmured in her ear, swaying them gently, and

Siasia couldn't help but close her eyes, savoring the moment. It felt so warm, safe, and calming—everything she didn't want to get used to.

Clearing her throat, she reminded him he was crossing a line. “What, you don't like physical touch?” His thick brows arched in playful inquiry, and she shrugged, trying to play it cool.

“Not really.” She shrugged. “Where we going?”

“You drove?” Qamar asked just as his phone chimed with a message. It was from Janay telling him she was staying at her mom's house for the next few weeks since she was so close to her due date. Her mama missed her and wanted to be close just in case she had the baby. But in that moment, all that mattered was the heat of Qamar's body against hers and the spark that ignited between them.

“I always drive,” she replied, rubbing her arms in hopes of warming up. The night air was cool with occasional gusts of wind. Although Lynn Beach didn't get snow, to the locals it got cold enough to need a jacket and boots.

Qamar replied to Janay before looking up from his phone. “You trying to come chill with me at my place?”

“Um, I don't know if I feel like being in some jock's shared apartment with a bunch of nosey ass boys.”

“I live by myself, Siasia.” Qamar laughed.

The way he said her name—no one would ever be able to make her heart skip a beat just from saying the name she'd heard all of her life. Only Qamar. She could already tell he was one of one. “Yea, I'll follow you.”

“Cool.” Qamar stepped to her. “Where you parked? I can drive you to your car.”

“I can walk. It’s just in the back.”

“Get in the car. I’m taking you round there. Plus, I gotta make sure you don’t disappear on me.”

“Oh lord.” Her head rolled dramatically. “I guess.” She faked annoyed.

“Girl stop acting like you don’t like me,” Qamar teased her as he pulled the passenger door open for her to get in. “You gone love it here.”

“I’m here for a good time, not a long time.”

An amused expression quirked up the sides of his mouth but he continued his stride to his side of the car. Like the last time, she’d leaned over to push the door open for him. “You here for as long as I say you are. Put your seatbelt on.”

“This is nice,” Siasia said in a casual tone, hoping to not sound too impressed.

The high-rise he resided in went beyond what she thought he lived in and her expectations were high. He casually drove around in a hundred-thousand-dollar car, so she knew his living arrangements had to be top tier. However, the home she'd just stepped foot in went beyond that. The building was techy and gave a Silicon Valley vibe. It was right on the coast of a private beach that she'd only seen in passing. She was in awe. The sound of his shoes coming off, alerted her to do the same.

“It don't feel like home though.”

Facing him, her eyes swept his face. There was a curl of his lips yet the barely there smile didn't reach his eyes. “Why?” Her head tilted.

Qamar's socked feet padded to the kitchen. “You want something to drink?”

“What you got?” She followed behind him, making sure to take in the scene before her. His kitchen and living room were bigger than her whole trailer. It smelled like sweet wood—a scent her nose was loving.

“Shit, everything.”

She peeked around him to get a look into the refrigerator. “You wasn't lying, huh?” she joked, seeing Qamar indeed had everything. “I'll take a beer.”

“You don’t look like a beer drinker,” he assessed.

“What I look like then?”

“Too pretty to drink beer. You look like you would order a lemon drop or some other girly shit like that.”

“I ain’t never even had that, so I know I don’t look like the kind of girl that would order it. What is it, anyway?” Her tight eyes showed how eager she was to learn—how eager she was to fit into his world. But what she didn’t know was that Qamar had already noticed her eagerness and was silently rooting for her to find her place in his world. He handed her a beer with a gentle smile, hoping to make her feel more at ease.

“It’s just a fancy cocktail,” he said, referring to the lemon drop. “But if you like beer, then beer it is.”

Siasia took the beer, feeling a bit more comfortable. She appreciated his effort to make her feel welcomed, even if she still felt a bit out of place. “Thanks,” she said, taking a sip. “I guess I’ll have to try that lemon drop someday.”

“I’ll make sure I take you somewhere fancy so you can order all the lemon drops you want.” He sipped his own beer, keeping his eyes on her.

Siasia choked at his words, driving herself into a coughing fit. He rushed around the island to pat her on the back. Her coughs turned into embarrassed laughter and her hands covered her heated face.

“I can’t believe that just happened.”

Qamar chuckled with her while removing her hands from her face. “Don’t be shame.”



He forced her to look at him.

“It’s hard not to.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re you and I’m me.”

Without permission, Qamar was in her face standing before her with his forehead pressed into hers. “I’m me and you’re you. We both just people put on this earth to figure shit out.”

“Like what?” Siasia stuttered at the same time her heart skipped a beat.

“I ain’t figured that part out yet. Come on.” Qamar’s fingers interlocked with hers as he damn near dragged her to another location in his house.

Like the star struck fool she felt she was, she didn’t ask any questions the further they got down the hall. One room they passed, she peeked in and noticed it was full of girly things: pink walls, Barbie dolls, and a little vanity. Her thoughts went to the warning Ally gave about him having kids. She didn’t care then and didn’t care now because time with him was temporary.

“You cool with being in here?” Qamar asked, pulling her from her own thoughts.

Her eyes swiveled around the room. It had to be his room. It smelled like him and some of his things were thrown around. There was also a scent of a woman but she wasn’t going to mention that.

Siasia took a deep breath, trying to calm her nerves. She walked over to the bed and sat down, feeling the plush comforter beneath her. “I like your room,” she said softly,

her eyes scanning the space. "It's cozy."

Qamar sat down next to her, their shoulders brushing. "Thanks. It's my sanctuary, I guess. A place to unwind."

She looked at him, her eyes searching his face while still thinking about what he said earlier. "Do you really think we're just people trying to figure things out?"

He turned to face her; his expression serious. "Yeah, I do. Life's complicated, and we all have our own battles. But it's moments like this, with people who make us feel something, that make it worth it."

Siasia felt a warmth spread through her chest at his words. She reached out and took his hand, squeezing it gently. "I think I'm starting to get that."

Qamar smiled, a genuine smile that reached his eyes this time. "Good. Now, let's just enjoy the moment."

They sat there in comfortable silence. The sounds of the ocean waves crashed in the distance. For the first time in a long time, Siasia felt like she was exactly where she was supposed to be. Feeling just as comfortable around her, Qamar got a little more comfortable by removing the sweater he had on. It was cold outside but toasty in his crib. Next, his jeans hit the floor leaving nothing but black boxer shorts.

Siasia gulped at the outline of his dick. To distract herself and not feel like a pervert, she pulled her hoodie over her head. Underneath she had on a plain white sports bra that looked beautiful against her brown skin. She opted to leave her sweatpants on but removed her socks. Slowly, she climbed into his bed that sat up high.

Qamar appeared again with a pair of ball shorts on. "I saw you looking."

“Whatever.” She blushed, knowing she’d been caught. “I see you put that little shit up.”

“Little? Stop playing with me before I skip all the bases and have your ass on all fours taking some of the best dick you ever had... the best you’ll ever have,” he doubled down.

She pushed her hands through her long box braids. She’d installed them two days ago and was happy she did. Siasia learned how to do a lot of things herself because money had always been tight. Even now, she made enough money to spread it over the bills in the house, get gas for her car, and groceries for the house. Throughout the years she’d learned to do everything: hair, nails, toes, and lashes.

“You good?” Qamar asked, reaching into his nightstand to retrieve a cigar and some weed.

“Why you ask me that?” She watched his movement.

“You’re face scrunched up. I think you do that when something is wrong.”

“How you know?”

“You did it the other night when you got that call.” He used his long nails to cut the cigar down the middle.

“You are such a creep. What else you noticed?” Siasia crossed her legs, sitting in the middle of his bed.

Taking the crushed marijuana, he sprinkled it into the empty cigar. He sealed it with his spit and used his lips to keep it tight. “You’re like a kitten ready to explore your new surroundings. Be careful though. Curiosity killed the cat.” Fire illuminated his

face in the dimly lit space like some kind of omen.

Siasia shivered.

His brown lips wrapped around the blunt, inhaling the smoke before letting it free. “You smoke?” he asked, passing it back to her.

“Yea,” she said, reaching for it and placing it at her lips. Like the pro she was, she mimicked him: sucking in the smoke before swallowing and letting it fill the air.

Like a proud father, he smiled. “Oh yea, my curious little kitty ain’t so innocent.”

“You thought I was?” She snorted before pointing at her chest. “Me? The same girl you saw being propositioned for sex?” Siasia passed the blunt back to him.

Qamar was taken aback by her bluntness. “Since we on that, you don’t do that anymore.”

“It’s the reason I’m here, Qamar.” Her neck jutted forward. “You paid me to be here.”

“Nah, I paid you to be done for that night. Now, I’m telling you to be done forever,” he said, blowing out smoke. “Just chill on that.”

“That’s not how this works. I’m not a pretty little woman. I ain’t looking to be saved.”

“That’s when you need the most saving.”

Qamar watched her gulp her words.

Feeling exposed, she crossed her arms, hoping to cover the parts of her he couldn't visibly see but seemed to think he did. The way his eyes pierced her skin made her feel naked and judged. Siasia hated being under the scrutiny of others because no one knew her story. They didn't know she was the oldest child but had somehow transformed into the mother to two grown people who should've been parenting her, not the other way around.

"I ain't judging you though."

"It fuckin' feels like it. Why am I here?" Siasia swept her hand around the room. "What you want from me?"

"You here because you want to be here, and I apologize if I offended you. That ain't what I'm trying to do." The bed dipped from him pressing his hands into the mattress to lean down to her face. "Scoot over."

His face was so close to hers, she wanted to kiss him. Instead of feeding into her own desires, she moved over, giving him space to rest his back on the extra tall headboard and stretch his long legs out on the bed.

"You go to Lynn Beach?"

"Sometimes." Siasia shrugged. "When I can afford to, I sign up for a semester."

He nodded with his hand caressing his beard that glistened and looked well groomed. "What's your major?"

"Photography." She smiled with pride. "I want to be a world renown photographer. Ain't enough Black ones that know how to shoot Black skin. I want to change that, you know?" Her face lit up when she talked about her dreams.

“I know exactly what you mean. I might have to get you to shoot me.” He passed the weed back to her.

“I’m sure you have photographers beating down your doors... I’m sure you’ve been photographed by some of the best in the industry. Your family is fuckin’ famous.”

“Nah, I ain’t been shot by the best... you ain’t did it yet.”

She blushed, shying away from his intense gaze. Qamar was intimidating the way he made eye contact and spoke to you directly. Under his gaze you felt big and small.

“What’s your major?”

“Honestly, I don’t really have one. If I had shit my way, I would already be in the league but my people want me to graduate and shit,” he confessed.

“I wish my people wanted to see me graduate. That’s a beautiful thing.”

“It ain’t though. It’s like I can’t have my own identity.”

Her shoulders dropped with a sigh. “I’ll take that over having to save everyone.”

“I would rather have to save a muthafucka than to have all the pressure to be perfect.” His sigh matched hers.

They were different but the same in the way of feeling like the world was resting on their shoulders.

Qamar hated how people thought the money made his life perfect—sadness proof. That was the furthest from the truth. Beneath the glimmering surface of wealth and fame, he felt like a prisoner in a gilded cage, each bar forged from expectations and

scrutiny. He loved the opportunities his famous family afforded him, yet the weight of their legacy pressed down on him like a heavy shroud, suffocating his spirit. Every misstep was magnified and scrutinized under the harsh glare of public opinion, turning minor mistakes into catastrophic events that left him gasping for air amidst the thick fog of shame and judgment.

At just twenty, all he craved was the simple freedom to live like a regular young adult, to make mistakes without the world watching and waiting to pounce. Yes, he was a father now, which came with its own set of responsibilities that anchored him to reality, but that didn't extinguish the flickering flame of desire for a taste of that carefree life he once knew. Qamar longed for moments where he could let go, where laughter didn't come with an asterisk of obligation, and where he could simply be himself—unfiltered and unashamed. The world outside beckoned with promises of adventure, and he yearned to break free, if only for a fleeting moment, to reclaim the essence of who he was before the world decided who he should be.

The mood had thickened. Siasia wanted to loosen it so she lightened the mood by asking, "If you could pick one song that reflected where you are or where you want to be what would it be?"

Without hesitating, Qamar grabbed his phone. After a few seconds, SiR's West Coast, melodic voice crooned out of the speaker. "Baby, I'm just trying to let my hair down," he sung as best he could. Music was in his DNA from his sister which meant older acts like SiR were in heavy rotation for him. His music pallet was diverse.

Siasia pulled her braids to the top of her head, creating a messy makeshift bun. She was floating and needed to lay back to stop her head from spinning. "What you know about that?" Her voice came out sluggish.

"You feeling good, huh," Qamar stated without question. He could tell by the look in her eyes and the silly smile on her lips that didn't want to leave.

Instead of responding, she only smiled with a slight nod of her head.

Adjusting his legs, he placed her head on his legs. He'd been wanting her to get closer since they stepped in his room. Her skin looked soft and he wanted to see if it was.

"Your turn. One song to describe who you are and how you feel." He passed her his phone to find a song.

Siasia didn't flinch when his rough hand glided down her exposed belly, causing it to drop like she was on a roller coaster. Sucking in the air from her stomach gave Qamar the perfect spot to slide his hand down her sweatpants.

The heat radiated from the warmth between her thighs. "Play the song, Siasia."

Her hands shook and the thumping of her heart grew louder. Searching for the perfect song, she almost skipped over it when she felt his hand on her bare mound. Subtly, she spread her legs, granting him permission.

"Oo," she whined when his middle finger made small slow circles over her growing clit.

Jhene Aiko's Nobody played right as his finger dipped into her pussy, hitting the right spot on contact.

"This pussy warm and wet, just like I like it." Qamar gave her direct eye contact.

"Been dealing with this venomous rage. Since I was under the age. I've been under the influence of pain. And I never needed nobody," Siasia sung with her eyes closed.

Qamar heard her loud and clear but if he had it his way, she'd need him. He wanted



to be needed and needed to be wanted. He was a complex soul. So much so, he felt no one really knew him. He had different faces that he put on around different people, hoping they'd never see the cracks in the masks he wore. He was only free with his daughter. Esmeray understood her daddy. She carried his secrets, protecting them at a young age.

“Come here.” He removed his hand.

Panting, she looked at him like he was crazy. She was right there on the edge of bliss and he had the nerve to stop. Her perfectly arched brows crinkled.

“Come here, girl.” Qamar laughed while guiding her to where he wanted her to be. Her hands reached to pull out his aching dick. “Nah. Just come here... you ain't getting no dick tonight.”

“Why?” she whined. If he was going to rile her up but not put out the fire, what was the point? “I'm so horny.”

“I know,” he said in a hushed tone, turning her around so that her back was facing him while her leg hooked around his thigh like a backwards J.

Siasia chewed on her lip when his hand was back inside her soaking wet panties. “Yes,” she moaned when his long finger was back inside of her, stroking her insides like a skilled pianist.

With his free arm, he pulled her further into him. “I want to make you feel so good. Am I doing my job?”

She nodded.

“Mhm.” His teeth sunk into her neck. “Words, Siasia. That's how this works. How

will I take you to sexual bliss if I don't learn your body? How will I learn your body if you ain't talking to me?"

"Yes! Yes, it feels so good."

Kissing the spot where his teeth left an imprint, he entered another finger, creating more juice. "This pussy ready for me to claim it—own it. You want to be mine?" He was full of lust and energized off Siasia feeling like home. She felt like Luna, feisty like Solar, and unloved like Stephanie.

Just when she was about to nod her head again, Qamar stopped her. "What I tell you 'bout that?"

"Oh, fuck! Yes, Qamar, I want to be yours." Her voice shook.

"I know, Mama. Show me what this pussy can do," he directed.

His pace picked up, and she couldn't take it. The moment was so intense Siasia started seeing stars. His fingers were Cha Cha sliding in and out of her mixed with his sexy ass voice and cocky demeanor; she was losing her mind. She was coming completely undone.

"Take these fuckin' clothes off and get on all fours." Another demand came from him but unlike the first one, she didn't give him any push back. As quickly as she could, she pushed her pants and panties down before getting back on the bed on all fours. The arch in her back was perfect.

Qamar admired her blemish free brown skin. His eyes outlined her perfect apple shaped ass. His warm and pleasant hum of approval warmed her blood. Seconds felt like minutes. Her anticipation sped up her already racing heart and made her sensitive to his touch. Siasia damn near jumped out of her skin when his hands rubbed both of

her ass cheeks.

Licking his lips, Qamar enjoyed the view of her fat pussy glistening from her own essence. His mouth watered the closer he got. Unable to contain himself, he spread her lower lips apart diving in, tongue first.

“Fuck!” Siasia screamed, shocked at him eating her pussy. That wasn’t on her bingo card for the year but she’d never complain about the pleasant surprise. Rocking her body, she fed him and made sure he scraped the plate.

Qamar swiped his thick tongue over her swollen bud before he sucked on it. To heighten her pleasure, he had two fingers back inside of her. Moving in and out, he pulled cream from her center.

“Yea, I’m retiring you, baby,” he mumbled.

“Okay.” She regretted the words as soon as she spoke them. “Qamar, you’re making me feel so good. My ears are hot.”

He snickered at her rambling.

“Oh God, I—I,” she continued with her incoherent babbling. Siasia didn’t know what she wanted to say nor could she understand the bliss his mouth and fingers brought her.

“Cum,” was his only request.

As if he owned her body, she came undone. The unraveling of her needed to be criminal with the way she was screaming. Her juices leaked out of her like runaway slaves escaping to freedom. When he didn’t stop until she was empty, her body fell flat. If she was a thumb sucker, she’d have it popped in her mouth like a baby ready

to go to sleep.

“Stay right there,” Qamar demanded.

He went into his bathroom to get a warm towel to clean her up. His dick was begging to be inside of her, but he refrained. Siasia wasn't ready for all that. His only goal that night was to make her feel good.

Siasia rolled over with her eyes closed and legs cocked in the air, giving him access to clean her like the sleepy baby she was. If she wanted to keep her eyes open, she couldn't. Fully cleaned, she crawled under the covers and was asleep before she knew it.

Qamar snorted at the sight of her. Although he wasn't as tired, he got in the bed behind her. Pulling her into him, he tucked his head between her and his pillow to get a little sleep since he had an early morning practice.

The sound of Qamar moving around in his room jolted Siasia from her peaceful sleep. Like a bat out of hell, she jumped up with wide eyes and confused. “What time is it?” she asked, looking around for her phone.

“Six in the morning. I got practice but you can stay sleep until I get back,” Qamar casually tossed out, hoping she would stay.

Quick on her feet, she searched for anything that belonged to her. With her phone in her hands, she groaned when she tried to dial out. Her phone was off, and she didn’t know if she would have the funds to pay it.

“Um, WI-FI password or let me use your phone.” Her small hand waited in the air. To speed up the process, she tapped her foot on the warm floor.

Qamar’s eyes bounced in question but nothing came out his mouth. He only passed her the phone.

Siasia typed away on his phone which confused him more. She couldn’t have been dialing a number unless it was out of the country, which he hoped wasn’t the case. Maybe she was texting someone. He had no clue. All he knew was time was ticking and he had practice.

“Noodle.” Siasia’s chest relaxed when she placed the phone to her ear. “I know and I’m on my way. No, I won’t do it again. But why you ain’t ready for school?” A few seconds went by before Siasia gritted her teeth. “Okay. I’m on my way. Love you,

Noodle.” Handing his phone back to him, she barely thanked him before she was gathering her things.

“You got a kid?” Qamar blurted. “Ain’t no issue if you do,” he hurried to add.

Siasia smiled coyly. “Might as well be mine but no... a little sister. I gotta go. Thank you for...” Her eyes veered to the bed before a wide smile split her face. “Thank you for last night.”

“Last night was just the beginning. Let me get your number.” Qamar tried to hand the phone back to her but she declined with a shake of her head.

“Ain’t no need for me to give you my number. It’ll be off in the morning because sometimes I have money to pay it and sometimes I don’t.” Siasia’s shoulders flinched an unashamed shrug. Saying her phone would be off felt better than admitting it was already off.

Going to his nightstand, he was ready to pay for her life. “How much is it?”

“I can’t take your money, Qamar. Plus, I’m not a charity case.”

“No, you’re a woman I’m fuckin’ on,” he shot back without care. He’d been taught by the men in his life to provide and although he was only a young adult still in college, he had funds. His people had set up properties and he even had writing credits on a few of his sister’s songs. Qamar was well off, and he hadn’t even made it to the pros. Then he would really be rolling in the dough.

Shifting her weight from one leg to the other she looked him upside his head. “Are you, though? Again, thank you for last night but I gotta go. Noodle ain’t never slept without me. Good luck at practice.” She rushed to walk out of the room, hoping he didn’t try to stop her.

“Siasia!” Qamar called after her while he stood in his room’s door and she dashed down the hall. “Next time, bring Noodle.”

“Ain’t no next time, baby.” She blew him one last kiss and jetted out the door like Cinderella leaving the ball.

That was what her night with Qamar felt like. Like a Black fairytale written by Shonda Rhimes herself. Her heart fluttered with visions of him between her legs and holding her all night. She couldn’t pinpoint if it was his bed or his arms that granted her the best sleep of her life. There was once a time when she thought sleeping in her mama’s bed was the best place to fall asleep. Now, she knew it was wherever Qamar was. Too bad she would never experience it again. He had a lot going on and so did she. Their worlds wouldn’t mesh well, and she would rather walk away now than to have to fight tooth and nail for a place in his life later.

The beautiful world she slept in last night disappeared the closer she got to her trailer park home. The entrance was run down with weeds covering the makeshift sign that needed to be replaced two decades ago. Cats ran through the streets rummaging through people’s trash that sat bare on the curbs or by their front doors. It was a mess, and the people were no better. They often allowed their yards to be overgrown and walked over the trash daily instead of picking it up. Maybe they didn’t care or maybe it was because they were tired from the twelve to sixteen hours shift they slaved over just to pay their bills. The residents were so overworked that the community they could’ve built didn’t exist. No one looked out for anyone and everyone pretty much minded their business. Sometimes the school-aged kids would form friendships and play with one another outside.

Every day she pulled up, she hated it more and more but it was home and what she could afford. At least that was what she told herself. With the money she made at the club and occasional doing something strange for some change, she probably could afford something better for her and Noodle if she put going to school completely out

of her head.

Siasia wasn't ready to give up on school just yet. She knew she could be a self-taught photographer but school would teach her more and create connections she could use in the future.

"Your phone cut off?" Cynthia asked as soon as Siasia pushed the rickety door open.

Kissing her teeth, she side eyed her mama. "When you called it what it say?"

"That I carried a smart mouth ass daughter for ten months just for her to treat me any kind of way."

"Stop with the drama. Why you didn't get Noodle up for school?" Siasia asked, grabbing a cup. She turned the faucet on, allowing it to run for a while before she dipped the cup under the stream to drink.

Cynthia's strip lashes fluttered. "Um, 'cause I'm used to you doing it. How was I supposed to know you wasn't in the room? You ain't never stayed out all night. What was that about?" Suspiciously, she eyed her pride and joy. "Got a little glow and shit to your skin too."

Smacking her hand away, Siasia laughed. "Cynthia, please."

"Cynthia? Oh, yea you smelling your funky self." Cynthia pulled a cigarette and lighter from her bra.

"Sisi, I was worried about you." Noodle came from the room with wild hair and her night clothes still clinging to her body. "I don't like sleeping without you." She buried her face into Siasia's stomach. "Is that cologne?" She sniffed hard.



“Oh my God! Why are y’all like this and why you up but couldn’t get her ready for school?” Siasia cut her slanted eyes at her mother, who was equally as pretty. At least some of it lingered. With the way Stacy kept his fists on her body and in her face, some of it had faded. However, the foundation was still there telling a story about her being one of the prettiest girls from her small town in Alabama; a place Siasia hadn’t been to in over fifteen years.

She had no connection to her mother’s side of her family and even if she did, they couldn’t save her. Cynthia had instilled keeping their business in their home along ago. And no matter how much her mother pissed her off, she loved her with every fiber of her being.

Noodle fanned the cigarette smoke from her face. “Where you was anyway?” Her hands rested on her boney hips with squinted eyes.

“I’m grown, Noodle.” Siasia waved her off. “You, on the other hand, need to go take a shower because I know you didn’t do it last night and get ready for school.”

“Can we stop and get breakfast this morning?”

“Uh.” Siasia knew she needed to spend her money wisely since she wanted to purchase a new lens for her upcoming photoshoot but she was willing to make something shake for her baby sister. “Yea but we on a budget.”

“Okay!” Noodle jumped up and down before racing off to the one bathroom they all shared.

Slowly, Siasia turned to her mother. “Where Stacy at?”

“At the tracks like he always is.”

“With what money, Mama?”

“Oh, don’t start your shit, Si.”

“Why won’t you just leave him? I cannot understand what makes you stay. He’s gone all day, and it’s the perfect time for you to pack up Noodle and leave,” Siasia suggested, mapping out a full plan.

Cynthia stood from her seat. “And go where, Siasia?! Look at me, what man is gonna want me after I done let this man beat on me for the last damn near twenty years?”

“Fuck these niggas! You thinking about getting another man when your pic-a-nigga meter is clearly flawed. First my ain’t shit daddy and now Noodle’s ain’t shit daddy. Work on yourself.” Siasia shook her mother, trying to shake some sense into her.

Tears brimmed Cynthia’s eyes; she hated that her daughter looked at her like a failure. It was a shame that her daughter had turned into the mother. “I know I don’t make you proud but I do love you. And I know you don’t understand it now but one day you will. One day, you will love a man so much that you lose all your God given sense.”

Turning up her nose, Siasia shook her head. “If that’s all love is, I don’t want it.” She went to leave the small kitchen and living room area. “And I paid the rent as well as all the bills in here. You’re welcome.”

It only took a few steps before she was in the room she shared with Noodle. It was clean but slightly disorganized because the space was small and they had a lot of things without enough storage space. Siasia kept it as clean as she could, making sure to stay on Noodle about cleaning up her mess as well. ‘Yanking the closet door open, Siasia eyed Noodle’s clothes, thinking about what she was going to put her on for the day. The weather was still nippy and winter was still terrorizing Lynn Beach.

Thankfully, her school made uniforms mandatory which helped when it came to buying school clothes. Another aspect of their life that had been put on her as if she wasn't just a young child a few years ago. Siasia didn't mind though. She was willing to do anything for Noodle.

After she had Noodle's clothes laid out on the bed, she searched for something for herself. She planned on going up to Lynn Beach University to enroll for the next semester. She had just enough money to do that as well as get the new camera lens she needed. Her gas tank had been filled up the other night and would last her another week, which left her with enough to pay her phone bill but they needed groceries and she liked to have a little money to the side in case Stacy came back from a gambling binge broke. With the weight of the world on her shoulders, her mind drifted to the night before where she felt free for the first time ever.

"One song that describes how you feel," Noodle's voice pulled her from Far Far Away Land.

Only one song came to mind. Pulling her phone from her pocket, she knew she could play it since they had WI-FI that they got for free because Noodle was enrolled in school. Mya's My First Night With You played, almost bringing tears to eyes. How was it that a complete stranger brought her so much peace? One night with Qamar made living worth it again. Siasia would be thankful for that one night with him but that was all it could be. Anything outside of that would only end in a disaster.

"Cried my first tears of joy with you." Noodle's neck elongated as she tried her best to sound like Mya. There was potential; she just needed more training.

"What you know 'bout that, lil girl?" Siasia twirled Noodle in a circle. "This is old even for me, so I know it was before your time."

"You played it before." Noodle laughed, loving small moments with her favorite

person in the whole world. “I’m going to buy you everything in the world when I become famous.”

“I know you are, Noodle.”

“But when you get rich first, can I live with you?”

“I’ll always take you with me, Noodle.”

“Even if my real mama tries to get me back?” Noodle had been mentioning her birth mother more and more lately and alarmed Siasia.

Wrapping her arms around her, Siasia tried to assure Noodle that she would go to jail or hell about her. It didn’t matter to Siasia that Noodle wasn’t biologically her sister. Noodle was hers in her heart—she felt her in her soul. She’d burn the world down to keep her with her. It was the only way she could assure her baby was safe. The ten-year age gap made Noodle more like her child than just her stepsister.

“I’ll never let you go. Now, get dressed if we’re going to stop for breakfast.” Siasia concealed her tears. Thoughts of someone separating her from Noodle made her heart stall and her body shake with fear.

Once Siasia dropped Noodle off at school, she was headed to the college to sign up for the next semester. She didn’t stop to get her phone turned on because it wasn’t important. To play it safe, she wasn’t going to stay gone from the house too long since while she was there, she could connect her phone to the internet and have access to make and receive calls. Noodle’s teacher knew how to get in touch with her by using the Apple ID instead of phone number if ever the phone was disconnected.

A smile danced on her face whenever she graced the campus. It felt good—like she was supposed to be there. It meant more to her that she was going against all the odds

stacked against her and making a way for herself. Based on her background, she wasn't supposed to make it out. That kept her determined to do just that. After parking her car, Siasia tightened the strings around her jacket, hoping to shield herself from the heavy wind that seemed to be blowing with a vengeance. With Lynn Beach being on the water, it made the air cooler than some realized.

Dressed down in a pair of boyfriend jeans that cuffed her ass perfectly, she felt simple but beautiful. When it came to dressing, she had it down pat. Money wasn't an issue because she could hook pieces up from the thrift shop and make them look designer. Money had been tight her whole life, which meant she had to learn style early or risk getting teased. It all worked in her favor. Now, she was a confident and sexy brown skin beauty. The boys went wild for her and she used it all to her benefit. With her head on a swivel, she looked both ways before crossing the street to get to the finance office. Her body warmed as soon she stepped over the threshold. Inside the admissions office, she located the window for finance and made her way over.

"Hey, Ms. Aaliyah," Siasia smiled at the finance officer whom she was familiar with, having shot her daughter's first birthday picture.

Taken aback, Ms. Aaliyah leaned her body back playfully. "Hey, Siasia! How have you been, baby?"

"Good. You?"

"Better now that I see your pretty face. I need to set something up for my engagement photoshoot." Sticking out her left hand, she wiggled her ring finger.

Siasia yanked her hand towards her. "Congratulations, Ms. Aaliyah. You know I am there. Just let me know what you need and when."

"Thank you, girl. I'm thinking within the next month but I will reach out and set

something up with you. What can I help you with though?” Ms. Aaliyah asked, typing in her computer login since it logged her out after being inactive for over fifteen minutes.

“I want to pay for the next semester,” she said with her chest out and pride in her voice. It always felt good when she walked in there to pay for school. It was easy for her to try to get student loans but that would put her behind when she graduated. The debt wasn’t worth it. It would only add to all the other expenses she had with school and outside of paying back a tuition.

Ms. Aaliyah’s eyes brightened with glee. “Okay, girl! I know that’s right.” She was equally as excited for Siasia. They had developed a liking for one another since Siasia had enrolled into the school. Ms. Aaliyah always did her best to find deals for Siasia when it came to books or anything else she would need for class. When students no longer needed stuff, they would turn it in to her and she’d make sure it got to other students in need. Siasia was always at the top of her list.

Once Siasia had wrapped up handling her business, she made her way out the door, groaning when she ran into Champ.

“Hey, girl.” Champ’s smile was just as fake as her ass.

Dryly, Siasia spoke back. “Hey.”

“Damn, I thought we were cool? You can’t stop and talk for a second?” Champ asked, seeing Siasia had no intentions of stopping to shoot the shit with her.

Sighing, she stared in her face. “What’s up, Champ?”

“Girl who pissed in your milk?”

“Bye, Champ.” Siasia’s jaw clenched.

She had no real issues with Champ but could tell a fake bitch from a mile away. Champ liked to pretend she was a girl’s girl but really she was a mean girl. Champ treated people based on what she felt she could gain from them. Since Siasia had no status, she didn’t treat her like the friend she liked to pretend she was when Ally was around.

“Damn girl, I’m just speaking.” She rolled her eyes. “Anyway, you just signed up for next semester?”

“Mhm,” Siasia responded with tight lips already over the back and forth.

“Okay, I see you getting your shit together.”

“The fuck that’s supposed to mean?” Siasia glared, ready to pop her in the mouth.

Champ knew the look all too well so she back peddled. “I ain’t mean no harm, SiSi.”

“My name is Siasia. Either say what you really want or move the fuck from round me. I ain’t in the mood.”

“I was just speaking since we are friends.”

“Ha!” Siasia laughed out loud at the audacity. “Never that. You are Ally’s friend, not mine. Bye, Champ.” She walked off, not giving her time to respond. It was best for the both of them.

Siasia’s mood was high and she’d hate to allow a nothing ass bitch change that.

She never understood girls like Champ. Champ came from a good home, had goals

and dreams but wasn't truly satisfied unless she was picking on the girls she thought were beneath them. She'd heard the slick things Champ had said about her, so it was beyond her as to why she'd want to fake friendship like she had her best interest at heart. Champ was a turtle—the poisonous kind. You thought they were cute watching them jump all over your yard not knowing they only were trying to get close enough just to poison you. Siasia wasn't in the mood, so she trekked on to her car.

Next semester's tuition had been paid in full, so Siasia's mind was at ease. With the leftover money she could buy the lens she had been so desperate to purchase, so she headed to the used camera store near the school. After that, she stopped in the thrift shop on the block, before ending her morning grabbing groceries so Noodle had something to snack on when she got home from school.

Tired from running around all day, Siasia didn't waste any time getting in bed to take a nap before Noodle's bus dropped her off from school. Visions of Qamar's arms wrapped around her, ushered her right to dreamland where she hoped he would meet her.



## Page 6

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6

Qamar jogged onto the field as the late afternoon sun cast long shadows across the green expanse. The sound of cleats crunching against the grass and the rhythmic thud of soccer balls being kicked filled the air. He adjusted his headband, pushing his locs out of his face, ready to dive into the intense practice session ahead.

Coach Daniels blew his whistle, signaling the start of the drills. Qamar joined his teammates in a series of sprints, his powerful legs propelling him forward with each stride. As sweat began to bead on his forehead, he felt the familiar rush of adrenaline that always accompanied practice. On the field is another place he was able to just be. Yes, the expectations were high but soccer came easy to him. He could do it with his eyes closed.

As a kid, after Luna's money from her deceased father dropped, they had Qamar in every sport imaginable. After one spring league of playing soccer, he knew it was his calling. His sister, Solar, made sure he excelled by helping him learn the rules and the game. In middle and high school, he played football, basketball, and soccer but when it came time for him to choose, soccer was his lover. It was unique and the one thing his big brother, Lunar, told him was stand out and be unique so they can't overlook you. That was a lesson that would stick with him forever.

"Qamar, over here!" Drake shouted. He was a forward while Qamar was the central midfielder.

Qamar kicked the ball with precision, watching as Drake deftly maneuvered around the defenders. The two had an unspoken understanding on the field, a seamless

connection that made them a formidable duo on and off the field. During a brief water break, Qamar took a moment to scan the sidelines. He spotted a few thirsty girls waving and cheering him on. The sight never excited him. However, he did wish Siasia would've been over there. Thoughts of her had been heavy on his mind, and he couldn't wait to get next to her again. Her presence brought him peace and when he was constantly in his own head, he needed the reprieve.

With renewed energy, Qamar returned to the field, determined to give his best. The team moved into a scrimmage, and Qamar found himself in possession of the ball. He dribbled past one defender, then another; his movements swift and calculated. As he approached the goal, he took a deep breath and launched the ball with a powerful kick.

The ball sailed through the air, curving gracefully before landing in the back of the net. A triumphant cheer erupted from his teammates, and Qamar couldn't help but grin. He jogged back to his position, exchanging daps with Drake.

“Locker room!” Coach Daniels blew his whistle, ending the two-hour long practice.

As practice came to an end, Qamar felt a sense of accomplishment wash over him. He knew that every drop of sweat and every ounce of effort brought him closer to his dreams. He only wished that his family let him do his own thing without having to be under their watchful eye while breaking a generational curse that no longer existed.

“Aye, your night must've been good?” Drake asked as they made their way back into the locker room. “Out there playing better than ever.”

“Nigga, watch out.” Qamar dodged the dap Drake tried to give him. “I'm always that nigga on that field. Fuck out of here.”

“But was your night good?”

Sneakily, Qamar smiled. “How old are you, twelve?”

“Shit, if it means being in your business then hell yea.” Drake jerked his head forward like duh .

Qamar didn't feed into him, instead he went to remove his practice uniform so that he could hit the showers and make his way to class. He hated when they had practice on a day he had an early morning class.

With his eyes closed, Qamar laid across his couch with thoughts of Siasia. He wanted to call her to see how her day had been, see if she'd been thinking about him as much as he'd been thinking about her.

Jarring him from thoughts of Siasia, his phone vibrated against his chest. It was a facetime call from one of his favorite people in the world. “French,” he answered with a big smile in the phone.

“Baby boy, what you on?” French inquired. From his background, Qamar could tell he was in one of his many shops.

French had a hard childhood, like the rest of them but overcame it all and was now a proud owner of The Jig Auto Shop. The name was symbolic to him. Born in and raised in The Jig, in Sapphire City was worn like a badge of honor especially when you found a way out. Qamar was also from The Jig. It was where he met French. French was one of Lunar's best friends along with Javen, who was now married to Lunar's fraternal twin sister, Luna.

Lunar, French, and Javen taught Qamar so much at a young age and when Lunar was tragically killed, French and Javen continued to be in his life. He loved them both but had a special bond with French. French was his brother but also the only father figure he'd ever had. French was also in a relationship with Qamar's other big sister, Solar.

“Shit, tired as hell. What you on?” Qamar covered his mouth as he yawned.

“Uncle Qamar,” French and Solar’s oldest daughter, Aku, popped into the screen. She was never too far from her daddy.

“Hey, pretty girl. What you doing at the shop?”

“I’m working, duh.”

French laughed. “Get your non-working ass back,” he teased his baby girl before showering her with kisses. It didn’t matter to him that Aku was now ten and he had two other kids, she would always be his baby. “You looking like you lost your best friend.”

“Man, watch out. I’m just chillin’. Had practice and class earlier now I’m just in the crib with my feet kicked up. Which shop you at?”

“I’m in Sapphire City. Where your BM?” French asked about Janay. “She bout ready to drop that baby, huh?”

“She went back to her mama’s house.”

“Why you ain’t there with her?” French’s face scrunched, showing his disappointment in his first son.

Running his hand down his face, Qamar sighed. “I got practice and class and shit. I can’t just leave for the next few weeks. She knew that when she decided to keep the baby.”

“You sound like a little fuckin’ boy. You knew what would happen when you ran up in her raw.”

“I keep telling y’all I used a rubber.” Qamar was getting frustrated. He knew he fucked up when he made Esmeray but after that, he fully understood the consequences of not protecting himself. Since then, he’d never hit a girl without protection and he damn sure didn’t run up in Janay without one until she was already pregnant.

French blew his breath in dread as if he didn’t like what he was about to say. “This me and you, baby boy. You know you can keep shit real with me always... do you think the baby yours?”

The rate of his heart picked up because the thought had been on his mind since she first told him she was carrying his second baby. Qamar liked Janay but he had never loved her. If he was being honest, his care for her grew when she told him she was pregnant. Over the last eight months, he’d learned to respect her and had some love for her.

“Nah, not really but is it weird that I still want to take care of the baby? Like, I feel she mine in my heart but my mind know it’s a strong possibility that she ain’t,” Qamar confessed while he stared at the ceiling.

French’s voice held a smile. “I raised you right, baby boy. You a real ass nigga, and I swear I’m so proud of you. I would say still get the test just so your mind never has to wonder and do with that information as you want. Janay better not be on no crazy baby mama shit with you ‘cause you too real of a nigga for that.”

“Man, she already be on my head about other girls like we in a relationship.”

“That’s ‘cause you good to her. Women don’t understand that just because a nigga ain’t no dog ass nigga don’t always mean he’s in love with you... niggas just be raised right, and I swear I raised you to be perfect,” French bragged.

Perfect? The word made Qamar's body freeze. He hated the word and hated even more how it was used when it came to him. In the eyes of his super successful family, he could do no wrong. He was the chosen one but Qamar didn't feel like he was living up to the standard. They forgave him for Esmeray and didn't bat an eye when he told them about Janay being pregnant.

French's head angled. He tried to decipher the look on Qamar's face. When his mind drew a blank, he asked, "What that face for?"

"Nothing," Qamar mumbled like he did when he was younger.

"Yea, okay. I ain't bout to beg you to get the shit off your chest. When Es coming down?" French changed the subject. "Solar had her bossy ass over here the other day."

Thoughts of his baby girl being loved on by everyone in the family pulled him from the sour mood he'd almost gotten caught in. "That's my heart, French."

"Trust, we know. You all she talks about with her talking ass. 'I'm gonna put this up for my daddy. You know that's my daddy favorite color?'" he mocked his niece while snaking his neck like her.

"She gone make sure I'm straight. Malaysia be hot as hell about that."

"Malaysia is a good mama."

"Dope ass baby mama too. She don't give me any issues and takes great care of our baby."

"Don't expect Janay to be like that. Women are all different, and I can tell she ain't with that kumbaya shit." French laughed at his own joke.

“Man, don’t I know it. You been good, though?” Qamar sat up. His body ached with every move he made. It didn’t matter how much he got used to working out, his body always ached afterwards.

“Yea, I’m good. I got my kids.” He looked away to see if Aku was close before he continued. “Your sister ready to get married.”

“You ain’t?” Qamar’s youthful face became serious. “You been with Solar for years, you ain’t think she was gonna want to carry your last name?”

The way the conversation went, threw Qamar for a loop. As far as he knew his sister Solar and French were madly in love with each other. They’d all grown up in The Jig together. The two of them were coparents before they even had sex. When Solar was just sixteen, she had a rebellious streak of doing any and everything that made her feel grown. Mommy issues were a real thing and the driving force of a lot of her rebellion. So much so that she found herself pregnant by a grown man. He was locked up shortly after and instead of revealing her truth to the family, she kept his identity to herself.

Solar and French were close. Their love had bloomed from childhood but he never took it there with her even though he was only two years her senior. To return the favor of how she’d poured into him as friends, he stepped up to help her with her daughter, Aku. He signed the birth certificate and claimed her as his own. He thought Solar had given him the identity of Aku’s biological father but later found out, she lied. By that time, he was madly in love with Solar and had declared it for the world to hear. Aku’s real father didn’t matter because French was all she would need. Now, they were three kids in without completing their union.

French had reservations. Sometimes, he didn’t feel like he was good enough to marry Solar. Solar had always been the girl of his dreams and with his own childhood trauma being unresolved, he questioned his manhood and whether or not she

deserved someone like him.

“I think I need to sit on that lady couch,” French playfully expressed. His joke contained his truth. “I love the fuck out of Solar, you know that.”

“Which is why I ain’t understanding why you ain’t giving my sister your last name. You got some else going on?” Qamar didn’t play when it came to his sisters. He loved French like a big brother... more like a father but when it came to the women in his life he would always choose them.

“Chill the fuck out, baby boy. I’m going to marry her but I need to unpack some of this shit I’ve been holding onto for all my life. I’m a man at the end of the day but how can I expect you to stand on business when I ain’t leading by example? I have a son too. My junior needs me whole. I ain’t whole yet, Qamar.” Tears pooled in his eyes but he wiped them away just as quick as they came. “I can’t let another nigga snatch up the best thing that ever happened to me. I’m damn sure gone put a ring on my baby’s finger.”

Qamar showed his understanding by nodding his head lightly. French was a complex soul that often got overlooked because of his witty and comical personality. Qamar and Solar were the only ones who saw through the fa?ade. They loved him in spite of.

“French?”

Sniffling, French looked into the phone locking eyes with his first love. Qamar had his heart the moment he was old enough to walk. “Yea, baby boy?”

“I love you the most,” he recited his words from childhood when he was only eight years old. It was true then and true now.

“Alright, nigga, you getting too soft. I love you too, Qamar. Don’t let this world



swallow you. Keep your head above water like Lunar taught us.”

Qamar couldn't agree more before he hung up the phone. Lunar was still a sore spot for him. He often felt like he was cheated out of the experience everyone else got when it came to their dreamer. Lunar was the reason for it all. He'd taught them about believing in themselves and they passed it down to Qamar —with higher expectations that often swallowed him whole. Instead of finding himself in a bad place, he decided to reach out to someone who could take his mind off his shortcomings.

He didn't have her number but saved the iCloud email she called the other morning. Clicking on the contact, he stared into the phone, waiting for her face to pop up on the screen. Seconds felt like excoriating hours. Still, he wasn't going to hang up until the three beeps sounded.

“What?” Siasia's groggy voice sounded before her face popped into the screen.

“That's how you sound when you wake up from a nap? I guess I can get used to that shit,” Qamar's deep voice teased her.

In shock, her eyes widened, unsure if she was dreaming or if it was real. “Qamar?”

“Yea, it's me, Mama.” He licked his lips, infatuated with her fresh face and slanted eyes. Her lips seemed to be swollen which gave him thoughts of her wrapping them around his throbbing dick. “What you on?”

“Um, just waking up... ain't that clear?” Siasia rolled her eyes, pretending to be annoyed. “And why you called my little sister iPad?”

“If you would've gave me your number, I could call your phone.”

“I told you it would be off. It's off, Qamar.”

“Don’t say my name like that, Mama.”

Squeezing her thighs together, Siasia tried to calm the beating of her pussy but thoughts of his finger taking her to bliss replayed in her mind. Her lips parted slightly, desperate to be on his; eager to taste his midafternoon lips. He had to taste good.

“Come fuck with me,” he suggested, praying he didn’t have to beg. Qamar was willing to beg.

“Um, I planned on chillin’ with my sister today. You know since I stayed out all night.”

“Shit, Noodle can come too. Send me the addy.” He was quick on his feet, showing her he was willing to do anything to be close to her.

Against her will, a smile displayed on her face. “You sure?” That was her last ditch effort to keep him from her house or lack thereof. In her twenty years on the earth, she’d never had a man pull up to the trailer park. “I can just meet you somewhere when she gets off the bus.”

“Nah, I want to drive you around and shit.” He scratched the sides of his head. “What time her bus usually come? I can be there right when it does.”

“3:50.”

“Cool. Send me the addy now, Mama.”

Rolling her eyes, Siasia sent the address while they were still on the phone. “You got it?”

Feeling his phone vibrate, he smiled. “Yea, I got you. Put that shit on for me, too.”

“Nigga please. You gonna get whatever I throw on.”

“Whatever it is, I know you gone be the prettiest girl. Let me throw something on too. I’ll be there soon.”

They stared at each other a little long with hearts in their eyes. Even through the phone, their connection was felt.

“Um, okay, I’ll see you later.” Siasia blinked with an innocence that only Qamar could see.

“Aye?” he called out, grabbing her attention back to the camera. “Just wanted to say, you already the prettiest woman, I know.”

“You are so full of shit.” She howled in laughter.

Qamar’s brown eyes sparkled. “I’m dead ass. Let me let you go before you change your mind... well, you can’t change it ‘cause I’m pulling up regardless.”

“Will I regret giving you my address?”

“Probably.” He shrugged, telling nothing but the truth.

It was her turn to reveal something before they ended the facetime. “I ain’t never gave a nigga my address.”

“Good. Only real niggas like me deserve that shit. See you later, Mama.”

“Bye,” Siasia whispered as the call ended.

Siasia sat in Stacy's worn recliner chewing on her cuticles. She already needed a fill-in but after the gnawing session, she would need it even more. The house was quiet since her mama and stepfather weren't home, which made the bubbles in her stomach bounce off the walls. The full glass of juice she had did nothing to remedy the cottonmouth she experienced. Thoughts of Qamar actually pulling up to her rundown version of a home was singlehandedly the scariest thing she'd ever done. On the bright side her parents were nowhere to be found. That was the silver lining of it all. A knock at the barely there door alerted her already high anxiety state.

"I know he didn't get out the car," Siasia mumbled to herself.

Needing to see it for herself, she peeked out the one window in their living room. Noticing his expensive sports car, she squeezed her eyes shut, wishing she could transport somewhere else.

"Mama!" Qamar called out before he rammed his fist against the door again. The way it pushed back, creating a sliver into the house he knew if he knocked again it would fall down.

Siasia assessed her living area, making sure it was as clean and put together as it could possibly be. It was all or nothing. With her head high, she pulled the front door open.

"You almost changed your mind?" Qamar asked, showing off his perfect, white Colgate smile. Even with his back towards the sun, his coffee with heavy cream eyes

sparkled.

“I’m ready ain’t I?” Siasia sassed, holding her hands out for him to see she was fully dressed. “I just threw something on,” she added a lie. She had indeed ram-shacked her closet looking for the perfect I just threw something on but its extra fly as hell outfit.

Resting his hands on the door frame, he leaned in. “Spin for me.”

With a mind of its own, her body spun in a slow, seductive manner giving him a full view of her outfit. In a pair of vintage style jeans and an old men’s button down shirt that she left unbuttoned to show off her full breasts barely covered by the flesh tones bralette, she knew she looked good. To make the ensemble event ready, she wore a pair of Adidas sambas. Her vintage bag paired well with the 90s inspired look, along with her box braids.

“Told you, you the fuckin’ prettiest. You ready though?” Qamar asked, still ogling her waist to hips ratio.

Siasia blushed hard with a nod of her head. She twisted the bottom lock before pulling the door up. Just as they stepped off the wonky porch, Noodle’s bus pulled up.

“That’s my sister’s bus,” Siasia announced, feeling dumb for stating the obvious.

Like the first night she pulled up on him, he posted up on the hood of his car looking like the sore thumb he was. Always dressed to impress, Qamar cut a striking figure in his denim jeans that hugged his long legs just right, paired with a designer sweatshirt that draped effortlessly over his broad shoulders. His matching sneakers gleamed in the sunlight, while a diamond pocket chain dangled from his jeans, catching the light with every move. Yet, it was the watch on his wrist—an exquisite piece that

whispered luxury—that truly commanded attention. Even from a distance, the rich, musky scent of his expensive cologne wafted through the air, wrapping around Siasia like a warm embrace.

As the kids piled out of the worn-down bus, their excitement was palpable, and a vibrant energy that filled the air. “Oh, I want a car like that when I grow up,” one girl declared, her eyes sparkling with dreams of the future.

“And the drip... the drip would get me all the girls,” another boy chimed in, his enthusiasm bubbling over as he envisioned a life filled with admiration and swagger.

Qamar beamed; his smile infectious as he bent down to dap up the little dudes brave enough to approach him. “You can have all this plus more,” he encouraged, his voice smooth and reassuring.

“How?” one boy asked, gripping his broken backpack straps tightly, his wide eyes filled with wonder, ready to absorb every word Qamar had to offer.

To these impoverished kids, he was a beacon of hope, a living testament that dreams could come true. What Siasia and the group didn’t know was that he had once walked in their shoes—different city, same bad hand dealt by life.

Qamar tapped the young boy’s head gently, his touch both firm and kind. “You gotta use this,” he said, pointing to the boy’s head. “And trust that.” With a flat palm, he rested his hand on the boy’s chest, grounding him. “And you gotta love what you have now ‘cause God won’t give you more if you ain’t appreciating what he already gave you. Then the most important thing you gotta do is dream.”

“Dream?” the boy who wanted to get all the bitches scrunched up his face, confusion etching his features. “Like when we go to sleep at night?”

Qamar chuckled softly, his laughter a warm melody amidst the chaos, and he knew in that moment, he was planting seeds of hope in those young hearts. “Yea but also when you’re wide awake. Dream all day, every day.”

“So, a dream got you this nice ass car?”

“Watch your mouth,” Qamar chastised. “Nah, my family’s dream got me this car.”

Siasia heard the sadness in his voice. There was something more to Qamar than what met the eyes. He had an uncertainty about himself. Like he second guessed it all when all she wanted to do was trade places with him.

“Yea well I know my family can’t do shit for me so.” The boy shrugged his shoulders while dropping his head.

“Then you do it for them.”

Siasia was so caught up in Qamar’s charm she’d almost forgotten about her sister. Just as she looked towards the bus’s door, she smiled at her Noodle. Their eyes connected with Noodle all smiles at the boy with the shiny car.

She ran towards them. “Aye back your nappy head self up off my sister and her man.” Noodle came through, fanning them away.

“Noodle!” Siasia fussed, ready to correct her.

“Nah, you heard my baby sis. I’m your man.” Qamar pulled Siasia into his side, whispering into her ear and creating another mess in her panties. It was like he knew the effect he had on her.

Pushing him off her, Siasia bent down to Noodle. “We’re going to hang with my

friend today. You cool with that?"

Noodle looked at her like she had two heads. "Duh." She walked past her to get to Qamar. "I'm Noodle." She held out her hand.

"Qamar," he charmed, making the ten year old swoon. "Today is a yes day. Yes, to everything. That's the only word we're using. Cool?"

"Heck yes!" Noodle jumped up and down, making Siasia shake her head.

"You have no idea the monster you will create." Siasia looked up at Qamar. She wasn't in heels which gave him more height over her.

"This your car?" Noodle asked as he opened the door for her to get in.

"It's yours today. Pretty princesses get to ride in hood carriages."

"I always wanted to be a princess, Qamar. How you know?" Noodle's big eyes looked up at him like he had all the answers. For her he would.

"I know everything, Noodle. Now get in and put your seatbelt on," he directed before clearing his throat to stop Siasia from opening her own door. "Don't act like you don't know how we operate."

Siasia smiled, grabbing her heart to calm its erratic beating. Once she was inside, he reached in to put her seatbelt around her. Inhaling him, she was content. This time she didn't push his door open since she was secured by the belt.

Qamar looked behind him. "You got enough room?"

"What you trying to say, I'm big?" Noodle faked appalled.



“Never, Princess.” He winked before putting the car in drive and pulling off. Doing a donut for the kids, they went wild.

“Show off,” Siasia teased, loving the way he showed love to the kids.

Any shame she felt about him knowing where she lived vanished the moment his eyes didn’t double in size when she opened the door for him. Qamar didn’t seem to care about her living arrangements. Another thing that went against everything she thought she knew about him. Qamar cranked the music up when Devin Port’s Living on the Edge came on.

“‘Cause one thang about it, I can make shit stretch. From this money to your body if you don’t come correct,” Noodle rapped along, snapping her finger and bobbing just like Qamar.

“What you know ‘bout that, Noodle?”

“I like Devin Port.”

“I knew you was made for me.” Qamar looked at her through the rearview, gaining him a big smile.

Siasia settled deeper in her seat, telling her ovaries to calm down. The way he was attentive to her little sister, she wouldn’t mind giving him a baby. Which was probably why he had one on the way. It was easy to see what other girls saw in him. He was easy, charming, and sweet as pie. That was all extra to his handsome face.

They pulled up to the phone company. “Remember it’s a yes day,” Qamar said, giving Siasia a look, reminding her of the rules.

“But what we here for?” Siasia shifted in her seat, feeling uncomfortable.

Shutting the car off, Qamar smirked. “You need a phone.”

“Need? I think that’s a stretch.”

“I need to get in touch with you,” he cleared up.

“Oh, can I get a phone too?” Noodle bounced in her seat.

“No!”

“A new iPad, yes.” Qamar looked at Siasia again. “You too young for a phone.”

“I’m not though. I’m ten and almost in middle school.”

“Almost don’t count.”

“You said we could only say yes.” Noodle pouted, crossing her arms.

Siasia turned her head so fast you’d get whiplash from watching it. “Noodle!”

“She good.” Qamar gripped her thigh. “I didn’t say no. I said you can get an iPad, Noodle.”

“I guess.” Her big eyes watered. It was her superpower.

A superpower Qamar was well versed in from dealing with Esmeray. He wasn’t budging. Instead, he pushed his door opened to let her out with Siasia pouting behind them. He held the door open for them which gave him the perfect place to yanked her up. Looping his finger in belt loop of her jeans, he pulled her back to his chest.

“This ain’t for you, it’s for me. Now fix your attitude and I might make sure you end

your night floating.”

Siasia wanted to kiss him so bad. The way he had this take charge aura turned her own so much. It was everything she dreamed of and nothing she’d ever witnessed. Qamar had to be a dream. If so, she never wanted to wake up.

As if he could read her mind, he pushed his face closer to hers. “You can have whatever is yours. I want to be yours. Kiss me, Mama.”

How could she not suck his lips off his face after that spiel? So, she kissed him with passion. So much passion, it scared herself.

“Ugh,” Noodle grunted, shaking her head. “We here for a phone and an iPad,” she announced to the salesman who was closest to her. “At least that’s what I’m here for. I don’t know about them.”

Everyone in the store snickered.

“Noodle stop calling me, I’m right here in the car with you,” Siasia fussed after Noodle’s third time calling since she had her new iPad with cellular service.

“Girl, I ain’t never been able to call people when I’m not connected to the Wi-Fi. This is fire!” Noodle bounced in the backseat. “And I don’t have anyone else’s number.”

“You want mine?” Qamar watched her head nod through the rearview mirror. After calling out his number, it only took seconds before she was dialing his number. “I got you locked in, Princess.”

“Ugh,” Siasia snorted at their behavior. She was trying her hardest to hold in the same excitement as Noodle. Just like her little sister, she was elated to have the latest

iPhone. The icing on the cake was not having to pay the bill. At least until Qamar got tired of them and moved on to the next girl with a banging body.

Hearing the excitement in Noodle's voice, Siasia was willing to do anything to keep it there.

"You good?" Qamar gripped her thigh.

"Yea. Where we going now?"

He grinned sneakily. "To get the princess some fly ass pieces."

"Clothes?!" Noodle bounced more.

"That's what you want?"

"Duh, Qamar."

Siasia snickered. "Told you, you will create a monster."

"Good thing I'm trying to stick around," Qamar replied casually like he meant it.

He didn't give her a chance to respond before he turned the music back up, gaining him a deep grunt from her.

They pulled up to Lynn Beach Mall; a place Noodle had never been and Siasia only went to window shop. It was full of high-end stores that had been out of her price range all of her life. Her hand shot to her mouth where she bit into her tender cuticles.

"Yes day, Mama... just chill." Qamar sensed her hesitation—knew from the jump she would be, but his desire to shower her with more than money could buy kept playing

on his mind while thumping in his chest.

“Look, I appreciate the phone and iPad but I can’t take anything else from you. Don’t get me used to this lifestyle only for it to be temporary... only for you to get tired of fixing up the broken girls and place us back out to the side of the road for trash pickup day.”

Noodle’s once exuberant elation had quieted. She was only ten but with the ten years she’d lived, she understood what her big sister was saying. It made sense too. Yes, today would be a day filled with nothing but yes and extravagant things but what about tomorrow? Would their regular, trailer park lives be back to normal when the sun rose and the birds didn’t chip? In the trailer park, even the birds were songless.

Kissing his teeth, he looked at Noodle who’s big and bright eyes begged him to give them the fairytale for forever. When his eyes connected back to Siasia, he knew he would. They reminded him too much of his own family—before the money and fame. “My family has this saying we say, it binds us and keeps our eyes towards the prize. To the moon. It means I got y’all forever.”

“How you know though? We just met.” Siasia was desperate for him to make it all make sense.

“If I say it, I mean it. Okay?”

Noodle nodded. “Okay. To the moon.” She stretched out her little pinky finger for him to lock his into hers.

Obliging, Qamar pinky promised with Noodle while keeping his focus on Siasia, who he could tell was still uncertain. And with right reasons.

“Y’all ready to get a few fly pieces?” Qamar hoped his smile would loosen the

tension and awkwardness in the car.

“Please, SiSi,” Noodle begged.

If there was one person on earth Siasia could never say no to, it was her little sister. “But don’t overdo it and remember she goes to school with other kids. I don’t need her standing out like a sore thumb.”

His eyes touched his brows from the big smile her agreeance gave him. “I’ll dial it back on her, but you, Mama? I’m balling the fuck out. Let’s go!”

After a long day of shopping until they dropped, Siasia found herself back in Qamar's bed. Noodle was gang when Qamar insisted they spend the night with him. He let her pick out fancy pajamas and everything else she would need to take a bath and be clean for bed. Now, Noodle was tucked peacefully in Esmeray's bed while Siasia sat with her legs crossed in Qamar's comfortable world. The sound of the shower turning off, perked up her senses. She had showered before him after she got Noodle situated. When Qamar rounded the corner with water dripping from his body and wrapped in a towel, she sized him up while digging her teeth into her lip.

"You see something you like?" he asked cockily, slowing his pace to the bed, loving the view of Siasia being tucked comfortably in his bed. He could get used to the vision.

Siasia was tired of playing the I don't want to be fucked games. "What if I do?" she flirted.

"I would say go for what you know but you ain't ready for me, Mama." Qamar's brow rose, daring her to challenge him.

"I think I can teach your young ass a few new tricks," she challenged back, using her eyes to beg him to give her what she really wanted. Siasia's only wish in life at the moment was to be under Qamar, staring into his eyes while he fucked her dizzy.

His head fell back in funny shock. "You." Qamar pointed at her. "Can teach me?" His long finger poked his chest. Now it was his turn to call her bluff. Even in a towel

swag dripped from him. Qamar minced his steps, making sure he kept his gaze on her. Siasia dressed in a cute, flesh toned luxury night set looked good enough to eat. So, he would feast on her like never before. With each step he took, Siasia's heart slowed, reserving its energy for the ride she was certain only Qamar could take her on.

“When it's just the two of us, you follow my lead. Here, I make all the rules. I tell you when to cum, how many times you can cum, and how much of me you'll take. Do you understand?” He bent to meet her eye level. With his arms resting on the bed on opposite ends of her body, he created a cage just for her.

Nervously, she swallowed the lust in her throat. “Okay,” she responded in a hushed tone.

Her body shivered at the feel of his calloused hands slipping under the babydoll tee she had on. Flesh to flesh, her skin felt like tiny little fire ants were attacking her. His lips attacked hers. Siasia's back flattened to the bed and her legs wrapped around his toned body.

Qamar's body showed just how much of an athlete he was. He was cut and chiseled in every place. If a muscle could be there, a muscle was there. Even the way his arms flexed while holding his body up turned her on.

“Mm,” Siasia moaned, savoring the exchange of his saliva.

Her hunger turned into greed when she gripped his face, pulling him more into her.

Delicate hands caressed his bearded face. It was euphoric—could be addicting if he was willing to chase the high of being with her. The way his eyes begged hers to let him have her sent electric shocks to her heart; jump starting it like it had been sitting in some abandoned yard long forgotten.



“Don’t question the feeling ‘cause I know you feel it too. Just let me have you tonight . You can change your mind later, okay?” Qamar was damn near begging her.

Searching his face for safety, Siasia agreed and sealed her fate on the dotted line when she pressed her lips back into his. Now her hands were on his bare back, making their way to the towel that sheathed his hardened dick.

Siasia giggled when she gripped his toned glutes.

“Man, quite playing.” He chuckled too, putting some space between them. Without thinking, his had stroked his veiny dick that curved slightly to the left.

Siasia lifted her bottom off the bed to remove her night shorts and panties. “Condom?”

His eyes glowed, showing a hint of anger before they settled. Without answering her, he reached into his nightstand to grab their protection for the night. Tearing it open with his pretty white teeth, he folded the lubricated rubber over his perfectly sized dick.

“I wanted to taste you again tonight but my dick is about to explode from all the pressure you causing.” Qamar tapped her thigh. “Open up for me, Mama.”

Siasia wasted no time spreading her thick thighs as far as they would go. Her slanted eyes stared into his, waiting for him to ease inside of her.

“Shh,” he hissed, feeling the heat and wetness from her entrance. “You wet as hell, mama.”

“I know,” she whined at him stretching her out. Her breathing picked up.

“You good?” He searched her face for discomfort.

She smiled thinly.

He pushed further.

“God!” she grunted when he was balls deep.

Like he’d just left practice, his chest rose and fell rapidly. Seconds felt like hours as he sat inside her, giving her time to adjust to him.

Suffocating her lips with his, he pushed in and out. His large hand dug underneath her, resting on the small dip in her back. He used it as leverage and to keep her in place.

“Qamar, you are ruining me!” Siasia admitted, hoping he understood what she meant. He wasn’t ruining her realistically—only metaphorically. Because in that metaphoric space no other man would be able to fill her the way he was doing it effortlessly.

“I know,” he admitted before sucking one of her swollen nipples into his mouth.

Siasia had perfectly full breasts that added to her natural coke bottle frame. He alternated between the two of them while pumping in and out of her. The sound of her wetness bounced off the walls, creating a unique sound of its own.

To show him she wanted more, she opened her legs wider. “Yes,” she hummed. “You feel so good.”

“Not better than you feel to me, mama. Your pussy is one of fuckin’ one. Greedy as hell too.” He looked down to see her cream coating him beautifully. “You remember the rules?”

“It’s your world,” she recited, eager to please him.

“That’s right.” His large hand hooked around her neck. “My world, my fuckin’ rules,” he spoke through gritted teeth while staring down at her.

Her eyes rolled into the back of her head when Qamar gripped her neck firmly while giving her fast and deep strokes. “You feel that shit?”

“Yes,” Siasia dug her nails into his arm, silently begging him to squeeze the life out of her because in the real world, she’d never get to experience anything close to what he was giving her.

“I’m talking about this?” He grabbed her hand, placing it on his heart.

The gesture forced her eyes to open. The beating of his heart was fast but slowly started to beat at the same rhythm as hers. A lone tear slipped from her eyes. “I’ve never made love.”

She brought his hand to her lips. “Make love to me, Qamar.”

“My rules, remember?” He smiled. “Rule number one, Siasia gets whatever she wants.” Pushing her legs to her shoulders, Qamar slowed his pace, making sure he was still deep enough to touch her heart. “You gone give me what I want?”

“Qamar.”

Lovingly he continued his strokes. “Answer me, mama.”

“Please!”

“Please what?” Qamar wound his hips, showing all her creases attention. “Give me

what I want.”

“What do you want?” Siasia was nearing her release.

“You.” He pulled out to show her he meant business. “Give me you and I’ll let you get that first nut off.”

Desperate and delirious, Siasia agreed. “Yes, you can have me just please put that dick back in me!” she yelled.

Doing as he was told, he put his throbbing dick back inside of her. “Shit.” His voice shook as her walls tightened around him. “Hold that muthafucka in a little longer for me.”

“I can’t.” Sweat dripped down her face. Her ears heated and everything went mute. With her mouth wide open she came hard. “Ugh.”

“You hardheaded, mama. Don’t worry there’s a lesson to be learned here.” He flipped her over like she was a feather. Qamar tapped his dick at her sopping wet opening. “Pussy fat and greedy,” he crooned, entering her again. “But she don’t listen and when she don’t listen, I got beat her ass.”

“Wait.” Siasia got scared.

“Un uh.” He shook his head. “This is what happens when you don’t do what the fuck. I. Tell. You. To. Do.” Qamar pounded her from the back, causing her to scream with pleasure. His hand came down hard on her ass.

“Fuck.” Her body shook.

“Toot that ass back up and take this dick.”

“Oh my gosh,” she panted. “Ooh.”

“This pussy taking to me, mama.”

“What she saying?”

“Telling me to thrash her ass. She greedy too, want to eat all this dick. You gone take it, mama?”

Her fingers dug into the sheets, needing to hold on to something for the never-ending ride he seemed to be taking her on. “I am cummin’!” she yelled as she dipped her back more. “How am I still cummin’?”

Her question was rhetorical because Qamar knew how and why she was wetting up his dick.

“Fuck!” He yanked his dick out of her tightness. It was squeezing him more and more, pulling all the blood in his body to the head of his dick.

Siasia collapsed on the bed with labored breaths.

Qamar grabbed her leg to pull her back to the edge of the bed. “I’m not done yet, mama.” He wasted no time diving headfirst into her sore pussy, hoping to ease some of her pain so he could get back inside of her.

The gentleman she barely knew didn’t exist in the bedroom. In the bed, Qamar was a man on a mission. His tongue sloshed around her swollen clit before he sucked on it with his lips. Inserting two fingers inside of her, he flicked them, pulling on her G-spot.

“Ugh, Qamar!” Her legs shook before clamping around his head. “What are you

doing to me?”

“Showing you why no other nigga deserves to get between these legs again... they can’t handle you like I can... like I do.” Qamar talked his big boy shit which turned her on even more.

Siasia grabbed at her stomach, feeling something she’d never felt before. As if he knew what he was doing—like he could read her body, he was back inside of her deep stroking her into the galaxy.

Longingly, he stared into her eyes. Passion turned his cognac eyes dark. “You said I can have you, right?”

Completely spent, her eyes rolled into the back of her head. Siasia couldn’t respond if she wanted to. Her throat was dry and her body was hot.

Qamar tongued her down, pushing her essence into her mouth. “Yea, I can have you,” he declared with his mouth still on hers.

“Until how long?” She found her voice. Still, she was unable to look him in the face.

“Shit, I hope you tell me forever,” Qamar admitted before grunted and exploding into the condom.

“This what good dick have you doing?” Qamar turned his head to look at her over his shoulders.

He was stretched out on his stomach while she rubbed all over his back. They were in his room but had the curtains pulled open, giving them the perfect view of the night sky.

Lazily, she smiled with a shrug. “I ain’t never had dick like that.” Before he could comment on her admission, she asked, “To the moon?” She traced the massive moon tattoo that covered his back. Along with it, there were the names of the people in his family.

“Mhm,” he hummed, loving the way her delicate hands created a trail of heat over his skin.

The two of them were exhausted but too high on lust to take their asses to sleep. They showered together before Siasia popped her head in on Noodle who was sound asleep. How she slept through the scream session Qamar had her in was beyond Siasia but she was grateful.

“I read an article on your family a few years ago. It was so inspiring.”

“Oh yea?” Qamar faked interest. He loved his family, but their legacy came with so much pressure.

“You were so young in that family photo. I told myself I would one day be named photographer for the next well-to-do Black family. Shooting brown skin is my passion.” He heard the smile in her voice. When Siasia talked about photography, she lit up on the inside and out.

“I was handsome back then too though.”

Slapping his back she huffed. “I can hardly remember.”

“Stop lying, mama. You probably had me on the screensaver of your phone,” he teased.

“Probably would’ve if I had a phone. Hell, I read the article in the doctor’s office one

day when my mama took me.” Her truth was so embarrassing, all she could do was laugh. Laughing to keep from crying was a real mission statement for her. “What I wouldn’t give to grow up in that kind of family.”

“You think so?” Qamar rolled over onto his back. “I love them so much. After Lunar died, Luna raised us as best she could. Our ma was on the bottle heavy, and me and Solar ain’t know who our daddy were so they were nowhere to be found.”

“Lunar, Luna, and Solar?”

“Lunar and Luna twins. He died the year before he turned eighteen, leaving Luna to pick up his slack. My big brother was a man before his nuts dropped.” Qamar smiled, thinking about his brother who was taken too soon. “I try to follow in his footsteps and walk the path he would want me to walk but it’s hard. Luna made a way by the grace of God. She ain’t do it on her own though. Lunar’s best friends stepped up and stepped in like the young big steppers they were. Even with all them obstacles in their way, all of them: Luna, Solar, French, Javen, and Tiny made it to the big leagues in each of their fields.”

“You don’t sound happy for them,” Siasia said, confused.

To make sure she felt his next words, Qamar stared her in the face. “I’m so proud of my people. Because of them, I was given a better life since I was still young to reap the benefits. They all afforded me so many different opportunities. Don’t get me wrong, I’m blessed as hell.” He wet his lips. “Shit just fucks me up because where the fuck can I take them when they already took it to the moon?” Qamar’s personal thoughts somehow spilled out and his eyes went to the window.

With her eyes following his to the night sky, she looked past the moon. “Beyond the stars, that’s where you take them.”



“You ever been to a soccer game?” Qamar asked, fully engulfed in his own emotions.

Siasia looked at him crazily. How could he go from spilling his guts to asking her about soccer? She could tell he’d never opened up to anyone like that before. It was like he was soaring freely before reality set in and he came crashing back down to reality. Any preconceived notions she felt before started to vanish the more time she spent with him.

“Uh, no.” Uncertainty laced her response.

“It ain’t soccer season yet but I want you and Noodle to come to one of my practices. I gotta get y’all up to speed before the season starts.”

Her heart swelled from the way he made sure to include Noodle. “I mean if the times match up, I don’t see why we can’t.”

Liking her response, he nodded. “Oh, and you ain’t working at the club no more... and no more of that little side business you had going on. I ain’t one to judge but it’s a wrap on that, mama.”

“You saying all that like you gone pay my bills.” She snaked her neck, ready for a full on argument.

“Shit, I can do that.”

“For how long though?” Siasia wasn’t with the temporary shit or him being caught up in the moment after mind blowing, good sex. She wasn’t a plaything he could put back on the shelf. She came with Noodle and that meant she needed to be more sure about him than anything else. Just from spending one day with him, she could tell her little sister was just as smitten with him as she was. It was funny and sexy to watch until it all came crashing down and she had to nurse a ten-year-old’s first heartbreak.

Instead of answering her right away, he yanked her down to him where he wrapped her up in the strongest arms she'd ever been in. "Until you say so."

"What if I say so now?"

"You ain't." His confidence was enough to convince her. "Now lay down so your body can heal just in case I find myself back between your thighs before the sun comes up."

“How you feeling?” Qamar balanced his phone on his shoulders while he searched the closet for something to throw on. He had to be at the private airstrip in less than an hour.

“Ready for her to come out. I kinda regret not having a baby shower. You think we should’ve?” Janay inquired out of breath. She was nearing her due date and her bundle of joy made sure to remind her of it by sucking all the life out of her.

“That’s your call. You know she gone be straight regardless.”

“I miss you. I miss us, Qamar. I think you should really give us a chance.” Janay didn’t care about coming off as desperate. She grew up in a two-parent household and wanted the same for her daughter.

When Janay admitted to wanting more than a coparent relationship from him, he never knew how to respond. Qamar prided himself on treating women the way he wanted men to treat his sisters and since he was a girl dad, he made sure to show them by example, but it was more difficult to be the nice guy and take the high road. He didn’t want Janay like that—would’ve told her to abort the baby if it didn’t feel so horrible saying it out loud. Now, there they were young and trying to figure out a life only one of them seemed to want.

He tried to find the best words to divert the conversation away from the whole family thing but his words were alluding him. “All you need to be focused on is having a healthy baby.”

“I am... I can do both, Qamar. I’m just saying we’re compatible. I come from a nice middle-class family. Your family loves me and I love Esmeray. We could really work,” Janay tried laying it on thick. “I mean, you ain’t really give me a chance.”

“Janay,” Qamar spoke exhaustedly, tired of the same conversation every time they spoke. That and there was something ugly hanging over their heads.

“You know he won’t be there if it’s his, Qamar. We talked about this.” She sucked on her teeth as her heart started to chip. Qamar was too nice to give her an even break. The way he minced his words and still looked out only allowed for small piece of her heart to break when he reminded her of the ugly truth.

“We talked about it but it is still very much some real ass shit that could change at any given time. My people don’t even know and as far as I’m concerned, they won’t. Because of that, I can’t see us being more than what we are... more than what we were.”

His brows dipped when he heard her snuffle.

“Okay, I won’t bother you anymore,” she spoke through tiny abrupt intakes of breath. “I just?—”

“Stop doing that shit, Janay!” Qamar fussed, annoyed with her antics. “I ain’t did wrong by you so don’t try to make it seem that way. Ain’t you well taken care of? Don’t she got everything she need and she ain’t even here yet? Like, come on, I’m doing my best.”

“She got everything but a father!” Janay hollered. Pregnancy hormones had her sad one second before fire was coming out of her mouth the next. “I’m here in Jade City preparing for the arrival of this baby and you’re still in Lynn Beach living your best life. But she got everything she needs,” she mocked him. “Nigga, she needs you.”

“She ain’t here yet!” Qamar based. “You want me! That’s all this shit is about. But I will tell you this, if you try to use my baby as a pawn, I promise you it will all blow up in your fuckin’ face.” He hung up on her, pissed that she was even able to get him out of his good mood.

His eyes closed as he rested his head on the entryway into his closet. Without hesitation, he dialed her back.

“What nigga?!” Janay answered angrily.

“Look, I’m sorry.”

“For what?” Leave it to her to not take accountability for the way the conversation went. In her mind, she was right, and he was wrong. It was something he foresaw being an issue when it came to their daughter.

Qamar massaged the temples of his head. “I ain’t sorry for what I said but how I said it. You the mother of my daughter. I can’t talk to you like that, so I’m sorry.”

Janay’s heart fluttered. “Okay. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Call me if you need me,” he said before hanging up for, hopefully the final time.

The back and forth with Janay put him behind schedule which meant he needed to break the speeding laws to get to the private airport. After he slipped his clothes on, he rushed out the door, hoping to still make it to his destination on time. Thoughts of Siasia and Noodle occupied his mind while he swerved in and out of traffic, listening to Devin Port. He rapped the lyrics while tapping out the beat on the steering wheel with his fingers.

He eased his car into a parking space just as his baby girl walked down the airplane’s

step. Lynn Beach was bright and beautiful on that day like the sun knew it needed to shine brighter for his baby girl. He pushed the door open to go meet her.

“Daddy!” Esmeray yelled, her little legs taking off towards him.

Her mother, Malaysia, yelled out, “Stop running!”

“She good.” Qamar laughed, bending down to catch his little lady. “I missed you, Es.”

“Then, why you ain’t come home?” her little self sassed. She was a pure firecracker.

“You know I got school and stuff, Es,” he tried to reason with his four-year-old mother. “But you here now.”

“Mhm.” Esmeray pursed her lips. “What you gonna take me to?” she asked, still in his arms, letting him know she wanted to be picked up.

Malaysia made her way to them with a man following to load their luggage in the car. “Hey, baby daddy,” she jested with him giving him a side hug. “Janay had that baby?”

“Like you care.” He huffed.

“I do. She gone be Es’s little sister. You know I ain’t on that bullshit she try to be on.”

It was true. Malaysia was over the phase of being a bitter baby mama. She loved Qamar. Always would but their relationship was strictly platonic. It was hard for people to believe because he was fine, and she was attractive. To the outside world they had to still double back every now and then. That was the furthest from the truth.

She wished him the best and he did the same for her. He would always take care of her though.

Not wanting to entertain negative conversations about Janay, Qamar changed the subject. “Y’all hungry?”

“Yes!” Esmeray bounced in his arms.

“If she said yes, it don’t even matter what I say. Let’s go.” Malaysia rolled her head.

“I see you in the truck today,” she commented on him ditching his Corvette.

“Shit all this stuff y’all be bringing won’t fit in my baby. Why Es got two bags like she ain’t got clothes here?” he asked Malaysia.

She waved him off. “You know how she is and I ain’t bout to be arguing with no damn four-year-old.”

“But you letting her run the plays? Yea, okay.” He looked her upside her head.

The three of them got into the car with one place on their mind. Lynn Beach was known for the many Black-owned eateries placed throughout the city. There was one place in particular that Esmeray loved more than any place on earth. Kids Eat Free was her favorite restaurant. She claimed their tenders were the best in the world and to top it off, they had gourmet deserts and a bougie indoor playground.

Neither of her parents asked where she wanted to eat because they both knew. Qamar felt she liked visiting him more for Kids Eat Free than it was to see her own daddy.

At the restaurant, they got out the car looking like the picture-perfect family. Malaysia’s complexion was deep in color and had been passed down to her baby girl. She was on the taller side standing at five feet, seven inches and she was slim. She

could easily be a model with her height and exotic features. Her beauty was what stood out when he laid eyes on her in high school. Qamar could still admit she was stunning, he just didn't see her like that anymore. He would love her forever though.

"Welcome to Kids Eat Free. How many in your party?" The hostess at the hot pink check-in desk smiled.

"Three," Esmeray held up her three fingers.

The woman's smile grew at the cutie pie calling all the shots. "Okay. You want a table or booth?"

"A booth." Esmeray's long lashes fluttered. A feature she'd gotten from her daddy.

"Follow me." She grabbed their menus and headed to the requested section.

Their booths were closer to the indoor playground that mimicked outdoors. There was grass and dirt along with artificial wind surrounded by glass so the natural sunlight could shine in. At night it was even more magical. It was very family friendly but elegant enough to serve as a cute date night for adults.

"Can I go play?" Esmeray asked with her hands in prayer.

Qamar looked at Malaysia before looking back at his baby girl. "Yes, but when you see your food at the table you need to bring yo' ass back to eat."

"Okay," she barely got out before she was off to meet temporary friends.

Malaysia placed her hands on the table. "So, what's been up with you?"

"Same shit, different day. Let me ask you something."



“Oh lord,” she faked worried.

Qamar laughed, seeing where his baby got her dramatics from. “Real shit. When you had Esmeray, did you think we were going to be together? Like, was that the only future you saw for us at the time?”

Malaysia wasn’t expecting that question. It threw her off so much that she adjusted her sitting posture while her mind played out every detail from when they were sixteen.

“You come from a two-parent household so was that what you saw for us? Was it something you knew your pops would be disappointed about?” he ranted, talking a mile a minute.

“Damn, slow down.” She used her hand like a stop sign. “First, why you asking me this?”

His face scrunched. “I ain’t trying to get back with you if you thinking that.”

Malaysia’s body relaxed. “I was about to say... thank God. Let me guess, Janay?”

“Hell yea. She pressing me about giving her a chance and shit but my heart ain’t in it at all. Never has been.”

“That’s the difference between her and me. We...” She pointed between the two of them. “We were in a relationship, so of course I thought we were going to ride off into the sunset. You and Janay were new... just getting to know each other while fucking. My experiences and expectations weren’t the same.”

“But when did you know we wasn’t going to be a family?”

“That’s the thing, Qamar, we are very much a family. I love you so much. I’ll give my life for yours because we are family. We just ain’t in a romantic relationship and I like it this way.” Malaysia sighed. “Your biggest opp is that big ass heart you carrying around. Janay knows it and will use that shit against you.”

“You really ain’t feeling her, huh?”

“It’s not that. I just see shit and know what you need.”

Stretching his arms across the back of his side of the booth, he kissed his teeth. “What I need, baby mama?”

“A bitch that’s familiar to the Qamar from The Jig. Not a privileged bitch like me and Janay.” Malaysia laughed, showing off the one dimple in her left cheek.

“You think you know me?” He smirked.

“Sometimes better than you know yourself.”

They fell into a content silence, happy about where their relationship stood. As teen parents so much had been against them. Years of childish antics almost broke them but with the family they both had, they made it through better than ever. Both of them had so much love for the other that happiness with other people was all they wished for each other. Happy parents created a happy kid.

“Look at her like you’re excited she’s having your baby,” Siasia directed while squatting low to get the shot from different angles. Sand crawled between her toes as she used them to keep her body steady.

“He better fuckin’ be happy I’m carrying his big-headed ass baby,” her client, Chat, fussed. She was big, hot, and annoyed. The sun was high and bright, heating their

bodies regardless of it technically still being winter.

Snickering, Siasia got a few shots in before she fully extended her body to stand.

Doing what she loved always put her in a good mood. The last few days had been pure bliss and worry free. Her bills were paid, she had a phone where clients could get in touch with her, and Noodle was happier than ever. When money wasn't an issue, Stacy kept his hands to himself and that kept her relaxed, not having to worry so much about her mama.

"Girl, it's hot as hell out here." Ally grimaced, wiping the sweat from her forehead. She was Siasia's unofficial assistant for the day and had she known all the stuff she'd be doing, she would've declined.

"It's a beautiful day but I should've picked a cloudier one," Chat said, wobbling with her husband holding her back.

"Tried to tell you," he said, cutting his eyes at her.

Chat swatted at him. "Boy please. My pictures are going to be bomb. Ain't that right, Siasia?"

"Yes, ma'am." Siasia smiled.

"I mean they better be with how musty I am," Ally commented, kicking her feet and hoping to get some of the sand out of her shoes. "And you picked the beach of all places."

"Lynn Beach is a beach, Ally." Siasia shook her head at her prissy friend.

"And I love the beach." Chat cheesed. "But it is hot so let us get out of here. I need to

blast the AC in the car.”

They all laughed, watching her struggle to waddle through the thick sand. She was full of baby and cute as ever. She and her man both.

“So, what you bout to do now? You working tonight?” Ally asked, trekking behind Siasia with all the extra lens and lights. Everything felt heavier leaving than it did coming. Probably because they were hot and tired. Working under the sun was a high dosage of melatonin.

“To do photos, yea.” Siasia shrugged.

Ally sucked her teeth. “I can’t believe you let that man tell you how to make your money. That ain’t the SiSi I know.”

“It ain’t like I liked the shit anyway.”

“That’s beside the point. You don’t know him, and he’s already telling you what you can and can’t do. It ain’t like he’s going to wife you up.”

The comments stopped Siasia dead in her tracks. “The fuck that supposed to mean?”

“Come on, Siasia. This ain’t no damn Pretty Woman Black edition. He is the golden child of public figure, Black family probably worth a billion dollars collectively. Do you honestly think he’s going to choose you when this shit is over? Y’all just at the starting line. When he gets closer to the finish line will he be carrying you over it with him?” Ally had so much conviction in her words that they conveyed with her eyes.

“He invited me and Noodle to come to his practice tomorrow,” Siasia spoke with just as much confidence.

With haste, Ally pushed her phone into Siasia's face. "Meanwhile he's out with his first baby mama and their kid looking like a happy family. Have you talked to him today?"

"You follow him?" Siasia asked, appalled that her friend seemed to be spying on the boy she liked. The first boy that she actually liked and wanted to really get to know; her friend was spying on him and plotting his demise.

“Y ou go to this school, SiSi?” Noodle asked, her big eyes wide with amazement as she took in the campus.

How Siasia had been convinced to bring Noodle to Qamar’s practice was beyond her. The closer they got to the soccer field, the more her skin grew clammy. It was an eighty-degree day in March, but it felt like she was walking through the gates of hell.

“I start back this summer, Noodle,” she replied, her voice dry and distant.

With each step, Siasia’s regret deepened. Confronting Qamar about being cozy with his baby mama had ended with him inviting her to his practice instead of arguing. She had flatly refused, but Qamar knew exactly who to turn to. Earlier that day, Noodle had darted off the bus, pleading with her big sister to take her to Qamar’s practice. Now, here she was, her stomach in knots and her heart uneasy.

As they neared the soccer field, the rhythmic thud of the ball being kicked and the shouts of teammates filled the air. The setting sun cast a warm glow over the field, creating long shadows that danced with each movement. The players, faces a mix of determination and joy, moved with fluid grace as their cleats dug into the turf. The scent of freshly cut grass mingled with the faint smell of sweat and effort.

“Qamar!” Noodle called out, waving her hands enthusiastically and drawing too much attention to them.

Siasia cringed but forced a smile onto her face. Using his hand as a visor, Qamar

grinned and pointed towards Malaysia and Esmeray, who were sitting close to the railing right in the front. Was he out of his damn mind? Siasia took a deep breath, leading Noodle over to where Malaysia and Esmeray were sitting. The two of them greeted her warmly, their eyes twinkling with curiosity and a hint of mischief.

“Hey.” Malaysia’s smile reached her eyes. “You must be Siasia?”

The recognition caught her off guard. “Um, yea. This my little sister, Noodle.”

“This our daughter, Esmeray.”

Siasia might’ve been tripping but her ears heard our daughter with strong emphasis.

“Oh, she so pretty.” Noodle reached out for Esmeray and to Malaysia’s surprise, she allowed her to pick her up. “I know I’m gonna love you.”

“How?” Malaysia asked just to make conversation.

“Because I love her daddy... I gotta love her,” Noodle spoke with so much sense. She looked Esmeray in the face, examining every inch of the dark brown little girl. “She’s pretty like a doll.”

“Thank you. Your hair is pretty.” Esmeray smoothed her hands down Noodle’s hair. She’d put it in a bun and left two dangly pieces in the front. Esmeray was fascinated with the swirls of hair across her forehead that twisted and twirled with precision.

“Qamar! Look!” Noodle tried to lift Esmeray into the air like a prized trophy.

“I see you, Noodle. You keep an eye on her, okay?” Qamar cupped his hands around his mouth to push his voice further.

“Wow.” Malaysia wiped at a single tear that fell from her eyes. “My baby don’t like too many people but the way she’s in your sister’s arms like they were meant to be together is beautiful.”

“Yea,” Siasia agreed.

Looking up at her since she’d yet to sit, Malaysia patted the spot beside her. “Girl sit down so you can get all the tea.”

“Huh?” Siasia was confused.

“Don’t act like you ain’t trying to figure out what freaky shit me and my baby daddy got going on. Let me put that pretty little head of your to ease. I don’t want that nigga and he don’t want me. The way he told me about you last night, I don’t stand a chance anyway.”

Siasia choked. “What?”

“Oh, you thought me and him were a thing? Girl, hell no.”

“So y’all just coparent?”

“Mhm.” Malaysia bobbed her head. “He likes you a lot, and I think you might be a good look for him. That boy is carrying so much in his heart and on his shoulders, he could use an around the way girl like you.”

Listening to everything Malaysia said, Siasia’s shoulders un-slouched. “He likes me,” she commented just above a whisper.

“Now sit here and learn the damn game. Chile, I still get confused.”



They both laughed, falling into natural conversation while Noodle and Esmeray paid so much attention to everything Qamar did on the field. As the practice continued, Siasia found herself relaxing a bit. Watching Qamar on the field, she couldn't help but admire his skill and dedication. Despite her reservations, she felt a small spark of hope. Maybe, just maybe, things could work out.

After practice, Qamar jogged over to them, his face glistening with sweat but his smile as bright as ever. "Thanks for coming," he said, looking directly at Siasia. "It means a lot."

Siasia nodded, her heart softening. "Yeah, well, Noodle really wanted to see you play."

Qamar chuckled and ruffled Noodle's hair. "I'm glad she did. And I'm glad you did too." He reached out for Esmeray, surprised when she turned her head still in Noodle's arms. "Damn, you turning on me for Noodle?"

"Turned on me too." Malaysia fake mushed her daughter's face.

As they walked back to the cars, Siasia couldn't help but feel a sense of relief. Maybe this was the start of something new, something better. As the sun set behind them, casting a golden glow over the field, she allowed herself to believe anything was possible.

Qamar bumped Siasia's shoulder. "You feel better now that you understand?"

They were sitting on a bench while Malaysia played with the girls on the playground. It was getting dark but the park's lights were bright enough for them to still have the time of their lives. The park was empty with the exception of them. That made it that much more special.

“Why didn’t you just tell me that yesterday?” She faced him.

“Would you have believed me?”

“Probably not.” Siasia laughed, knowing she wasn’t trying to hear nothing he said last night.

“Why?”

“You are an anomaly. On paper we don’t even make sense,” she revealed, exposing her insecurities.

“Fuck paper.”

Siasia agreed. “Yea, fuck paper.”

“We can write our story in the stars. In the stars we’ll make sense.” Qamar wrapped his arms around her, pulling her closer to him.

“How you know? We just met a month ago.” She anchored her attention on him, looking in his eyes like he had all the answers.

“I can feel it. You bring me comfort. With you, I feel like I can just be. Ain’t no pressure when I’m with you.”

“So, you think I’m easy? I don’t require much?” Siasia’s brows created an upside-down triangle in the middle of her forehead.

Lazily, his hand fleshed against his face. “Man, you just gotta be difficult... make shit sound worse than what it is.”

“When you’ve been hurt and let down like I’ve been hurt and let down, it’s all you know.” She tried to smile to hide the pain in her eyes.

Reality was a bitch like that. You walked around all day feeling down, unloved, used, and depressed but when it was time to actually express it, you’d either shut down or use a smile or joke to mask how ugly your day really was.

“Don’t collect hurts. Don’t keep up with shit that keeps your heart from smiling. Let any and everything go that causes you pain... even if it’s me one day,” Qamar spoke with knowledge maybe even a little foreshadow.

Whatever it was, it didn’t cause Siasia any worry. “I doubt that. You’re easy to love.”

“Love?” He smirked, looking out at the girls. “This shit feels perfect.”

“But what happens when on some days it doesn’t feel so perfect? Or when you really get to know all the dark shit I try so hard to keep from you?”

“Looking forward to hurt again? Didn’t I just check that shit, mama?” Qamar eyed her. “We just talked about this.”

“Nigga, whatever.” Siasia looked up at him in annoyance before pulling her camera out. Placing it to her eye, she snapped a few candid shots of Malaysia and the girls on the swings. “Go over there so I can some with you in it.”

He wanted to ask about the deep dark shit she was trying so hard to hide but decided against it. “They better be good,” Qamar jested, standing to his feet.

Dressed in joggers and a plain white shirt, he swaggered over to the swings. With each step he took, Siasia snapped his image from the back with the girls in his foreground. She followed behind him, getting closer capturing the smiles and laughs

of Noodle and Esmeray who seemed like twin flames. If she could pause life right there, she'd relive the night over and over because for the first time ever, Siasia felt peace.

"Come on, Qamar, lets race like we used too," Malaysia suggested.

"You mean watch me beat you like I used too?" Qamar jested, lifting Esmeray from her swing.

Noodle jumped from her moving swing. "I want to race too."

"Me too." Already, Esmeray wanted to follow behind everything Noodle did.

Siasia snickered, still making sure to capture everyone in their natural states. When they lined up, she became the finish line. "Wait right there so I can get this shot first," she called out to them, snapping the perfect image with the full moon sitting behind them perfectly.

Lately, God had been giving her perfect and beautiful days and nights. The glow of the moon was a photographer's dream. A cluster of camera flutters sliced through the air before she gave them the signal to take off. Running with all their might, they were still no match for Qamar. Even after he'd practiced his heart out. Laughter filled their bellies knowing full well he was going to smoke them. Siasia captured it all on video after she put the camera in record mode.

Bent over to catch her breath, Malaysia snorted. "You ain't shit... you didn't even let your daughter win."

Lightly jogging around them, Qamar got in Esmeray's face. "She gotta learn early. The world won't let her win, she gotta work for that shit."

Esmeray grunted, hating when she wasn't the victor but instead of running into his arms, she went to Noodle. "Hold me, Noodle." She faked tears.

"Come here, Es." Noodle cuddled her while giving Qamar angry eyes.

"Oh, my lord." Malaysia rolled her head. "Already, she got you wrapped around her little fat fingers."

"Don't call my baby fat, Malaysia," Noodle fussed. "My baby just chunky."

"But why you sounding like a person five times your age?" Siasia teased. "Just yesterday you were my baby and now you got a baby."

"I'm still your baby, SiSi. Always."

"I know, Noodle."

"Aww y'all so damn cute." Malaysia wrapped her arm around Siasia. "Who does your hair?" she asked. "I been meaning to ask you all day."

"I do," Siasia said like braiding your own hair past your butt was no big deal.

"Can you do mine before I leave tomorrow night?"

Siasia looked at Qamar who only shrugged. "Um, I guess."

"Oh, thank you sister wife." Malaysia laughed. "It's destined to be. Both our names end in sia." She wagged her tongue. "Yea, I like her, Qamar."

"Yea, me too." He winked at Siasia, making her blush. "Noodle, you staying the night?"

“Um, don’t you think you need to be asking me?” Siasia rested her hand on her hips.

“Nah. I know you gone try to say no. My baby, Noodle, always down to chill with me.”

“She has school in the morning.”

“Okay, I’ll take her,” Qamar said like it was no big deal.

“Please?” Esmeray fluttered her big eyes at Siasia.

Malaysia placed her hands in the prayer motion. “Yea, please?”

Kissing her teeth, she stalled them out like she really needed to think it over. When it came to being under Qamar, there was no other place she’d rather be. “I guess. But she still has to be in bed by her bedtime.”

“Thank you, SiSi!” Noodle hugged her as best she could since Esmeray was still in her arms like they didn’t almost weigh the same amount.

Making their way to their cars, Qamar pulled Siasia back, planting his juicy lips on hers. “I been dying to do that all day,” he growled.

Siasia moaned in his mouth, savoring his taste. “I been waiting for you to do it all day.”

“Next time, take what you deserve,” he spoke through small pecks before he finally let her breathe. Just as he pulled away, his phone rung. Looking down at the name flashing across the screen, he looked at Siasia with sad eyes before he answered. “Yea?”

“I’m in labor, Qamar. She is coming,” Janay cried, sounding in pain.

He swiped his tongue across his lips. “O—okay. I can be there within two hours,” he stuttered. “Hang tight, Janay.”

Siasia grabbed her chest, ready for their perfect day to not be so perfect.

With regret he looked at her before down casting his eyes. “Janay’s in labor. I gotta go to Jade City.”

“What does that even mean?” Siasia wasn’t dumb but there was no way God could be playing a cruel trick on her just when happiness seemed to be right in her grasp, He snatched it away.

“I gotta be there for her, mama.”

“No! My name is Siasia... call me Siasia.” Her voice broke, mimicking the actions of her heart. Even while afraid to admit it, she knew she was in love with Qamar.

“Siasia.” He huffed. “I gotta...” He slammed his eyes shut, hating the hurt he knew she was going to collect. “I’ll call you later. Tell Noodle, she can stay later.” Qamar went to walk away, unable to see the disappointment in her eyes. “Aye, Janay’s about to have the baby, we gotta get on the jet.”

Malaysia’s eyes darted to Siasia with sorrow. She wanted to comfort her knowing how this must look... how it must feel but time waited for no one and if Qamar was getting on the plane, she and Esmeray would be right beside him. No other words were said; only Qamar whispering something to Noodle. Even her young eyes held worry. Worry that the fairytale had come to a crashing halt and she would no longer be a princess. Shaking it all off, Siasia waited for Noodle so they could go home. Back to the real world in their crummy trailer where Qamar’s light eyes didn’t exist

because he was clearly on his way back to the moon.



“Hold her head, boy!” Luna fussed at Qamar, getting up to place her arms under his.

They were all in Jade City at Tiny and Maverick’s home, which they had purchased since the basketball team Maverick played for was based there. Tiny was the baby mother to Qamar’s deceased brother, Lunar. None of them knew she was pregnant until after Lunar’s death, when she showed up needing their help with a whole newborn baby on her hip. It took the whole family by surprise, but they welcomed her and their nephew in with open arms.

Maverick met Tiny when she and Luna visited Javen in college at a party. The two of them had been connected at the hip ever since. Now, with Little Lunar, who was twelve, and their youngest son, Monday, who was six going on sixty-six, with his old man soul, Tiny and Maverick felt complete.

Tiny plopped down on the couch. “Luna, you acting like it’s his first time. He almost got as much experience as you.” She laughed at her own lame joke.

“Come on now, Tiny, I thought you was on my side.” Qamar cut his eyes at his sister. Tiny didn’t share his blood, but nothing or no one could tell Qamar she wasn’t one of his sisters. She nurtured him, loved on him, and kept some of his secrets. He would love her forever.

Tiny grinned, her eyes sparkling with mischief. “I’m always on your side, Qamar. But you know I gotta keep you on your toes.” She reached out and ruffled his hair, a gesture that was both affectionate and teasing.

Qamar chuckled, shaking his head. “Yeah, yeah. Just don’t forget I’m the baby brother, and I need all the help I can get.”

Luna rolled her eyes but couldn’t hide her smile. “You’re not a baby anymore, Qamar. But I guess we’ll always see you that way.” She glanced at Tiny, who nodded in agreement.

As the family settled into the cozy living room, the warmth and love between them were palpable. They had been through so much together, and their bond was unbreakable. Qamar looked around at the faces he cherished and felt a deep sense of gratitude. No matter what challenges lay ahead, he knew they would face them together, as a family. It made putting his own dreams and desires on the backburner doable.

Janay cleared her throat as if she needed to remind everyone that she was in the room. They knew she was there and had moved shit around for her to be there comfortably. The whole family even catered to her every want. Qamar glared at her before he put his eyes back on his daughter. Belinay Moony was only a week old and she was loved already. With each passing day, Qamar fell deeper in love with the tiny being with the darkest set of eyes. Born at barely six pounds, she was tiny and could be held easily in the palm of his hand. He wouldn’t dare do it while surrounded by all the women. They would choke on their own spit trying to cuss him out.

“Aww, my Belinay,” Luna cooed, still standing beside Qamar. “I remember when you was this little.”

“And I remember when you told this story the last time I had a baby.”

Luna glared at him while Tiny laughed her ass off. “I mean, he ain’t lying. Luna you be acting like an old ass lady with your I remember when stories.” She tried to sound like Luna who’s voice was soft with a ghetto, southern belle twang.

Luna's talking voice had the type of tone that reminded you she was an award-winning singer. Just talking sounded like a song—warm and nostalgia inducing.

“Can I see pictures of him?” Janay asked with excitement in her voice. Anything to feel closer to Qamar. She wanted to know who he was and where he came from. When they first started messing around, he was tightlipped with his life's experiences. He didn't mention his daughter until Janay confessed to be pregnant herself.

Tiny gave Janay sad eyes.

Luna cleared her throat. “We don't have that many,” was all she said. The sad truth was they were too damn young to think about capturing the moments and Stephanie was drowning in liquor.

Qamar sniffed. “Where y'all husbands at?” he asked, changing the subject.

Janay kissed her teeth and crossed her arms before slamming her back into the couch. She hated how Qamar treated her in front of his family. It had all the ladies giving her sad and pitiful glares while he did nothing to hide how he truly felt about her. Then to add injury to insult, he was buddy-buddy with Malaysia.

“Outside acting like they looking at the landscape when they really just trying to get away from us. French and Solar on their way too,” Tiny answered while scrolling through her phone.

“Yea, your daddy on his way,” Luna teased Qamar about him loving French and listening to everything he said.

Tiny shook her head. “Janay, you met French?”

“Um, I seen him but I won’t say we’ve met. He seems kind of mean,” Janay revealed, knowing she wasn’t well received by Qamar’s family. She’d tried so hard to at least get on French’s good side. Just from meeting him, she knew how influential the man was to her daughter’s father’s life.

“Mean?” Tiny was taken aback by the accusations. “That nigga is the friendliest nigga I know... sometimes he too damn friendly.”

“Right,” Luna agreed, cutting her eyes between Qamar and Janay. “Maybe it’s you.” She shrugged, digging Janay’s coffin even more.

Luna was usually a girl’s girl. She had no time for mess or drama but when it came to Qamar, she sometimes didn’t recognize herself. If she needed to be mean on his behalf, she was willing and ready. Qamar was her first baby, and she’d rather walk to the moon than to ever feel like someone was doing him wrong. From the moment she met Janay, she knew the pretty young woman wasn’t for him. The stars he had in his eyes at sixteen for Malaysia wasn’t even there and back then, Luna knew that was nothing but puppy love. Still, here they were, a family due to Janay birthing his second child.

Janay held her arms out. “Q, give her back to me.” The bite in her tone didn’t go unnoticed.

To keep his own attitude at bay, Qamar swiped his tongue across his teeth, swallowing his words while passing Belinay to her stank attitude ass mama.

When he bent down, he spoke through gritted teeth. “Don’t get beside yourself, Janay. She mine too, right?”

His light eyes flickered dark sending a chill down her spine. “Ye—yea,” she stuttered, patting her daughter on the butt as a habit.

“Family!” French called out, his loud voice saving Janay from the grilling Qamar was ready to give her. “Where my grandbaby slash niece?” he asked, rounding the corner to the family room that was large and open with a sweet scent filling the air.

“Which one are you? The granddaddy or the uncle?” Solar asked with Adrian Jr on her hip. If he could live in his mama’s skin, he would. While Aku and Apollo preferred their father when they were younger, now they preferred their space.

“Uncle Q!” Apollo barreled into Qamar like the linebacker he was destined to be. He was tall and thick, almost knocking Qamar down.

“Apollo.” Qamar hugged his nephew. “Why you ain’t in school, boy?”

“Cause you had a baby and we don’t live in Jade City so we had to drive and clearly, we can’t be at school and in the car at the same time.” Aku rolled her neck.

“Aye, chill out!” French fussed. His baby wasn’t a baby anymore. She had just gotten her period and everyone could kiss her ass.

Qamar cocked his head back. “Oh, I see what’s up with you. Come here, Aku.”

Like the little girl she used to be, she melted in her uncle’s arms. Qamar had always been her favorite and now that he was having kids of his own, she didn’t know how to accept his time and love being spread thin. To show her love for him, she loved on Esmeray all the time. She was the only child she let come in her room.

“You know I’ll always love you, right? You my first baby... made me feel like I could be the best girl dad ever.”

“I did give you confidence, huh?” Aku blushed cockily.

“Come get your kid, Solar.” French rolled his head towards the ceiling.

Solar laughed. “Oh, she mine now? She been yours since she was born.”

“He be cappin’, ma,” Aku called her dad out.

Once again, Janay cleared her throat.

“Girl, we see you.” Solar laughed before flopping beside her to get a good look at her new niece.

“You don’t see us?” Luna crossed her arms, feigning hurt.

Apollo walked up to her to give her a hug. They were almost the same height from how short Luna was. “Hey, my sweet boy.”

“Where, Jaci and the twins?” he asked about Luna and Javen’s kids.

Over the last eight years, they added fraternal twins to their family. Jaci was six like Apollo since they were all born in the same year which included Tiny and Maverick’s son, Monday. The twins, Halo and Javen Jr. were a year younger at five.

“They upstairs with Little Lunar. Gone up there,” Tiny told him before he ran off.

“Let me go get on their nerves too.” Aku snickered while grabbing Adrian Jr, whom they’d nicknamed Frenchy for short, from her mama so they could have adult time.

“Thank you, baby.” Solar kissed her on the forehead. “Bring him back if he starts doing too much.”

“He know I’ll pop them legs.” Aku took off, seeing her mama about to swing on her.

“You better not hit my baby.”

“Leave her alone,” French came to her defense. “Let me see that baby.” He held his hands out to Janay.

“Damn, at least speak to the girl.” Solar grilled him.

Janay smiled. Solar and Ms. Stephanie were her favorite because they made everyone show respect to her and be nice.

French looked Solar upside her head. “Mind your business.”

“So you ain’t my business?”

His bright skin blushed. “I am,” he said before kissing her.

“Eww.” Luna fake gaged.

“Where your ugly ass husband at anyway?” Solar inquired, looking around the house.

“French your business, not Javen.”

“Shit, he been my brother.”

As if he heard his name, Javen walked in with Maverick following. “I thought I heard your loud ass.” He dapped French up.

Maverick grabbed Tiny to sit her on his lap as he sat on the huge sectional that was big enough for the whole family to sit on. Kissing all over her face, he whispered, “I love you,” in her ear.

“Get a room.” Qamar twisted his face.

“I think it’s cute. I can’t wait to experience that kind of love,” Janay swooned at them.

“I’m trying to see who she look like,” French examined Belinay.

“Do it matter?” Qamar asked with a blank expression on his face.

The room grew quiet with everyone looking between Qamar and Janay, who started to chew on her thumb. There was something they weren’t saying but like most things, it wasn’t their business until Qamar filled them in. No matter how tough it was to allow him to make his own decisions, they had to let him do it. Instead of addressing it, they all just sat around talking about nothing in particular and passing the baby around until she and her mama got tired and retreated to one of the guest rooms on the main floor. After a week at home with her family, she decided to stay at Tiny’s for Qamar to be close to their daughter. He had been so hands-on and attentive. When she was tired, he let Janay sleep. His teachers had agreed to allow him to turn in work from home until Janay’s six weeks were up. Being the school’s star player came with many perks that he wouldn’t take for granted.

Frustratedly, Qamar huffed when Siasia didn’t answer his fifth call of the day. Ever since the night at the park, he hadn’t heard from her—fourteen days since he’d heard from her. If it wasn’t for Noodle calling Esmeray, he wouldn’t know if she was dead or alive. He missed her though, and just wanted to hear her voice. After getting Belinay and Esmeray situated for the night, he decided to sit out in the backyard and try her once last time before he called it a night himself but like earlier, his call went unanswered. Exhausted, he played with his beard.

“Baby boy,” French announced himself as he took a seat beside Qamar. “You look stressed. Talk to me.”



“I’m good.”

“Two kids different from one, huh?”

“Man.” Qamar laughed. “I should’ve thought this shit through. Two kids with two different mamas... I’m a walking statistic.”

“I’m with you when you right. How you been doing though? Janay giving you hell?” French pulled a blunt from behind his ear to spark up. After puffing a few times, he passed it to Qamar who accepted it without hesitation.

He allowed the smoke to fill his lungs before he exhaled it. “She want something I can’t give her and that fucks with my head.”

“Let you tell it, everything be fuckin’ with your head. Maybe you the problem.”

“Can’t be. Like, it’s so much on me that I hate she’s putting even more on me.”

“You talking about the baby because she ain’t ask to be here and I’ll beat yo’ ass before I allow you to be a deadbeat.” French’s nose flared just thinking about Qamar running out on his responsibilities.

“I’ll never do that. I know what it feels like to be abandoned. I would never do that to anyone’s kids.” Qamar passed the blunt back. “Between the family, school, and trying to be the best daddy, a nigga feels unworthy.” There it was. He’d finally admitted to what was holding his mind down. A small weight lifted off him.

“You need therapy or some shit?” French asked, concerned.

Qamar snorted. “Nigga what?”

“I’m serious.” French cleared his throat. “I’ve been seeing this chick that’s been helping me work through some of my own shit.”

“Your life is perfect, French. What you need to work through?”

“My daddy is my mama’s daddy,” he blurted. No one but Solar knew the true dynamics in his family. It was all kinds of fucked-up—more than people thought. Yes, his granny damn near pimped him out when it came to her old druggie friends but the truth was, she did the same to her own daughter. Sucking in hard, he needed the weed to work faster.

“Damn,” Qamar whispered. “I didn’t know.”

“No one did but Solar. It fucks me up because now I got my own kids and couldn’t imagine them going through some shit like that. Now, your sister wants to get married but I feel unworthy. That girl has been in my corner since we were kids. She’s loved me even when I’ve pushed her away. Its only right, I give her the world and my last name but I gotta make sure I’m the best version of myself. You know?”

“Solar gone rock with you regardless, though.”

“That’s the problem. She’ll accept my flaws and that ain’t fair to her. She’s fuckin’ perfect and deserves the same from me.” He choked on his words just thinking about letting down the only woman he’d ever love.

Qamar’s words were stopped at the ringing of his phone. Hoping it was Siasia he hurried to answer. “Noodle?” he said, seeing her name pop up on the screen.

“Um, Qamar, my mama and daddy are fighting really bad and I’m scared.” Noodle’s voice shook.

“Where Siasia at?”

“I think she went to work but she ain’t answering. I’m scared this time. I mean, they fight all the time but it’s really bad this time.”

“Fuck.” He shut his eyes, thinking of what to do. “I’m on my way. Just—you got someone house you can go to?”

“No. Siasia don’t let me go to people’s houses.”

“I’m on my way. I’ll try to call your sister and you keep calling her too. Stay in the room.” Qamar made sure Noodle understood before he hung up the phone.

“Another kid?” French asked with laughter in his voice.

Standing up, he wiped the back of his jeans off. “This girl gone make me wring her fuckin’ neck.” He grunted, thinking about Siasia being back in the club after he told her not to. “Aye, tell the pilot to get ready. I’ll be back. Can you help Janay until I get back? I know Malaysia would but they ain’t really fuckin’ with each other.”

“You know I got you. You good though?” French looked Qamar in the eyes, trying to read him.

“Yea,” he said before walking towards the house.

He turned to French, his face lighting at the sight of him. “French, you are perfect. You taught me so much—been the best brother, daddy a nigga could ever ask for. I remember you taking me to school, telling me to pray, kissing me on the forehead... you was a kid doing all that. In my eyes, ain’t no other nigga walking this earth more perfect than you. Shit, you up there with God, if you ask me. Solar feels the same way. Don’t punish her by sabotaging yourself.” Qamar pulled him into a hug with

tears in his eyes. “You one of fuckin’ one, nigga.”

Siasia twirled around the pole, locking eyes with her faithful customer, Brenden. His eyes surveyed her body from the roots of her braids to the pink polish on her toes. The music was soft, and the blue lights of the club shone down on her, illuminating her brown skin. He wasn't the only one vying for her attention. Off in the corner a new face captivated her, making her squirm in her skin. He was dark and thuggishly handsome with gold teeth that told of his life's story. It was no question what he did. He was a get money nigga not from Lynn Beach. He was probably there to soak in the warmer weather, escaping the cold from wherever he was from.

The music switched but Siasia didn't leave the stage. Dancing in the club started as a desperate way to make a couple dollars fast. It was more than a waitress made and since she was able to also do the club photos, the opportunity was a no brainer. Now, it kind of served as an outlet for her. In the club, she became this bad bitch with high confidence that oozed sexiness. It was also one of the things in her life that she had control over.

While at home, she had no say so in whether Stacy was going to beat her mama almost to death. Siasia felt helpless trapped in the small confines of their worn-out trailer.

With mixed emotions about Qamar, she needed an escape so the club had been a part of her daily routine for the last two weeks. Watching him walk away, leaving her in the park that night had her replaying every moment with him play by play— breaking it all down like a fraction because the signs had to be there. Then, her mind kept going to the picture of him and Janay with their precious newborn baby that was

plastered all over the blogs.

When Devin Port's newest song started, she did her big one. She wasn't that good at climbing the pole but she could make her ass shake and work the floor like no other.

Siasia's ass bounced to the beat. One cheek, two cheeks, she bent over in front of the mystery man who had been tossing money since she got on stage three songs ago.

When she looked up, her eyes connected with Brenden whose white skin had started to turn red from his anger. Brenden was her best customer before Qamar. In theory, he was her only customer contrary to the rumors of Lynn Beach University. Over the years, there had been others but Siasia always tried to take a step back from the line of work. That was where the club came in at. This time when the music stopped, she decided to take a break and work the floor. That and she was dying to get to know the fine ass man who couldn't keep his eyes off her.

"Girl, he want you bad," Ally sniggered, whispering in Siasia's ear. "He fine as hell too."

"I know, Ally. I'm going to ease my way over there before one of you other whores do it."

"I don't want who don't want me, and I'm certain he ain't stunting these snow bunnies." They both laughed at that but never judged. Black girls wasn't the only ones needing extra cash to survive. And with Lynn Beach being a college town, the dancers came in every flavor.

"Let me take my ass back on the floor. It's some decent money in here tonight," Ally said before sauntering away.

Before Siasia could get to the back to freshen up, Brenden was on her like he was her

man. She hated when he did that; she hated how the desperation showed in his red eyes. Just hated all around how he didn't mind approaching her in public. It often gave her chill bumps and not the good kind.

"Hey, Siasia," Brenden slurred, digging his fingers into her sweaty stomach. "You done for the night?"

Flaring her nose, Siasia snatched away from him. "The fuck?!" She glared at him. "No, I'm not working tonight or any night. I told you that a few weeks ago."

Brenden had an issue with taking no for an answer due to his privilege and not just because he was white. His father was the dean at Lynn Beach University. Brenden's father was connected in all ways and that made his son feel inferior to everyone else. Especially the Black girl with the best pussy he'd ever had.

"What has been your problem, lately?" he asked through gritted teeth.

Brenden was cute in a chill white boy kind of way. He dressed nice and always smelled nice but the chemistry he liked to pretend was there, just wasn't for Siasia.

Looking him in the eyes, she forced a smile. "Look, I'll call you later and see what you're up to. Okay?"

That must've been all he wanted to hear because his tight lips smiled. "Yea, you do that." He hugged her before going back out to the floor. He wasn't a fool and wanted to stick around to see where her night ended.

She relaxed, watching him disappear into the crowded club. Relief washed over her. Going into the dressing room, she sat on the bench to gather her bearings before she picked up her phone. She had numerous missed calls. As she went through the call log, her heart sank at the numerous times Noodle called her. Quickly, she called her

back. Listening to the phone ring, her legs bounced.

“The fuck you at?” Qamar roared into the phone, shocking her.

She looked at the name on the screen confused. “Where is Noodle?” At the sound of Stacy’s voice her throat closed up. He was in the background going off.

“Aye, nigga, back the fuck up before I beat your ass like a real man supposed to. The fuck you over here beating on a woman for?” Qamar hollered. “Noodle, get your stuff. Matter fact, leave it. I’ll buy you whatever you need.”

Frantically, Siasia grabbed her bag. She didn’t care about changing clothes or throwing anything over her very revealing outfit. With her things in her arms, she ran out the club with the phone on speaker. Based on all the chaos she heard in the background, her only concern was Noodle and assessing the damage on her mama.

Ten minutes later, she found herself pulling up to her trailer where Qamar’s truck was parked. Siasia rushed out of the car, running into the house where he had Stacy hemmed up by the neck.

“Please!” Cynthia begged with her right eye swollen shut. “Just go!” she cried, knowing that Qamar stepping in would only cause more damage than good. That and she didn’t know him from a can of paint.

In shock, Siasia paused before getting in between Stacy and Qamar. “Let him go, Qamar,” she grabbed his arm, her body shaking from the deadly look in his eyes.

“Siasia, where are your clothes?” Cynthia yelled once she turned her head to get a better look at her daughter.

She stood with nothing but a cheap matching bra and thong set.



Stacy grunted at the sight of her. “So, this why you got this young nigga here? He your pimp or something?”

“What?! No!” Siasia snapped.

Qamar had eased his grip on Stacy neck slightly, still glaring at him. When Noodle opened the door for him, he only saw red. She had tears streaming down her pretty, light brown face. It reminded him of one of his own kids or one of his nieces. All he wanted to do was kill the monster under the bed.

Finally getting a good look at Siasia, his blood ran hotter. “Go put some fuckin’ clothes on and lets go before I catch a murder charge.” Angrily, he released Stacy, watching him hunch over to rub his neck. “Stay down before I put you down.”

Noodle’s eyes popped open when Siasia pushed their room door open. “Noodle are you okay?” she asked, examining all over her little sister. If a hair was out of place, she was going to be the one to put Stacy in the dirt. Cynthia could allow Stacy to hit on her all she wanted but when it came to Noodle, she’d take that ride downtown. A relieved look washed over her face once she’d confirmed Noodle was okay.

“SiSi,” Noodle took short deep inhales to calm her crying. “SiSi, it was so bad. I thought he was going to kill her this time. I tried to call you but you weren’t answering, and I know you told me to stop calling Qamar but I didn’t have anyone else to call. I was so scared.”

“Shh, it’s okay. I’m here now.” Siasia pulled Noodle into her chest, rubbing her back, desperately needing to feel her.

“And you ‘bout to bring your ass on,” Qamar cut into their private moment. “Put some fuckin’ clothes on and lets go. The jet is waiting.”

“The jet?” Siasia looked at him like he’d lost his mind. “Nigga, didn’t you just have a baby? Worry about that and not us.”

With all in the answers buried in his eyes, Qamar stepped to her. “Didn’t I tell you, you ain’t working at that fuckin’ club anymore? I see what type of games you like to play. Get y’all shit and meet me in the car.” He snorted in disgust before turning to walk out the house.

“He mad at you, SiSi,” Noodle laughed, grabbing her book bag that she’d packed while Qamar checked her daddy. Slinging it onto her shoulder, she looked at her sister wondering why she was still just standing there.

“You already got a bag packed?” Siasia cocked her head back. “So, fuck what I say. You just do whatever he tells you to do?”

“Yea, when you don’t answer for me.” Noodle wondered what the problem was. Qamar had come through for her in her time of need. In a time when her own sister was too busy trying to use the club to mend her aching heart. “Put on some clothes and lets go. I ain’t never been on a plane.”

“What about school, Noodle?”

“I don’t know.” She hunched her shoulders, really not concerned with school. She was tired from not being able to sleep while her parents fought like they were in a wrestling match and getting paid. All she wanted to do was be safe and go to sleep. Even her ten-year-old mind knew nothing about her home life was good. So, if Qamar wanted to take her away, she was more than willing.

Siasia had been out voted. She also knew she wanted to be wherever Qamar was because he had all the answers. He’d fixed every one of their problems that had been presented to them, so no matter how mad she wanted to be with him, her heart and

her mind just wouldn't allow it. Instead of finding something else to argue about, Siasia slipped on a dingy t-shirt and worn sweatpants. Next, her feet fell into a new pair of crocs before she packed her work duffle with the essentials she'd need while Noodle's king flew them off to Far Far Away Land.

The sound of the jet's engine hummed creating a lull that put Noodle right to sleep. After the shock of riding on a private jet died down, of course. Siasia had to admit, she was impressed and wondered if Qamar's had more access to money than she thought. The jet was painted a midnight blue that almost looked black with a realistic moon also painted on it. and the ambiance didn't end on the outside. The interior was just as elegant and kept the whole moon theme which Siasia was learning to understand.

Between the two of them very little words had been spoken. He even made it is business to sit on the opposite side of the jet with Noodle. Qamar's face had been buried so deep into his phone, Siasia doubted he remembered she was there. She felt invisible and stupid for taking her ass back to the club. Had she listened to Qamar, she would've been there when everything went down. That way, Qamar never would've known how toxic her family life really was.

Cringing inwardly, she dreaded the stain all that must put on her. She was already walking around with a scarlet letter A tattooed to her forehead. Siasia didn't want to tarnish herself any more than she already was. However, it seemed she had no say in it because now he knew. Thanks to big mouth ass Noodle. The thought alone had her rolling her eyes.

"You good over there?" Qamar asked, finally giving her some attention.

Pointing at herself, she asked, "You talking to me?"

"Who the fuck else would I be talking to, Siasia?"

“Shit, I don’t know. You didn’t seem to notice me the whole ride over or before now. Keep that same energy.” She scoffed, twisting her body towards the window to show him she was over the conversation and over him and his shitty attitude.

Siasia jumped at the feel of Qamar’s long fingers digging into her shoulder. “Let me talk to you,” he requested, turning to walk towards the back.

Siasia didn’t move because who did he think he was? If he wanted to talk, he should’ve done it when she first got in the car or when they boarded the jet. Now, she had no interest in talking.

“Siasia!” Her pussy thumped when he called her name with authority.

“Ugh.” She pouted, getting up from her seat to follow him to the back.

In the back, she swallowed hard seeing the queen sized bed positioned in the cozy little room. Oh, they have stupid money, she thought.

“Come here, mama,” Qamar said, sliding his shirt over his head. “You need something, don’t you?” He sat on the corner of the bed.

She gulped, nodding her head caught in the trance of his eyes. No matter how upset or disappointed she wanted to be, she was elated to be near him. Slowly, she made her way to him, standing between his outstretched legs.

“Didn’t I tell you, when you want something, you take that shit, mama?” His hands roamed up her worn sweatpants, stopping at the waistband. He lifted her shirt to kiss her taut belly.

Her body shook, desperate for him to do it again.

Like the mind reader he clearly was, he placed more tender kisses on a spot she didn't know she had. "Fuck, I missed you," he growled, easing her pants down while taking deep inhales of her natural scent.

With her pants around her ankles, he groped her ass, spreading her ass cheeks apart. The coolness of the air turned her on. She lost herself when he flicked his tongue over her belly button, tasting the saltiness of her night at the club. "Turn around," he instructed. "Touch your toes."

Doing as she was told, she whimpered when his hand came down hard on her round brown ass. "You been at that fuckin' club after I told you not to. I don't like when you don't listen, mama."

"Ooh," she whined, squirming under his words.

He rubbed his hands on the spot where he slapped her ass before smacking it again. It was hard and loud. Each time he did it his dick jumped. "Look at the pretty ass pussy." He blew on her growing bud, loving the stickiness he created just by looking at it. His mouth watered to taste her, so he did just that.

"Shit." Siasia tried to stand because the sensation was just too much.

To her dismay, he pushed her back down.

"Touch your fuckin' toes, I said." He went back to flicking his tongue over her clit before he sucked it into his mouth. Latching onto her like a baby on its mama's nipple, he tried to suck the soul and the defiance out of her.

The sounds of him slurping on her pussy was enough to drive a preacher man wild. In his zone, Qamar gave her ass some attention.

“Baby,” Siasia panted, throwing her ass into his mouth. When his finger slipped inside, her pussy leaked more. “Qamar.” She tightened her eyes, closing them to enjoy the feeling of him pleasing her in a way she’d never been pleased before.

He fingered her ass as he went back to licking and sucking on her pussy. Turning his tongue into a small dick, he used it to fuck her meaty insides. With his free hand, he pulled his growing dick out of his own pants before slamming her on it. Bare, and skin to skin, he fucked her hard.

“Ugh... oh my gosh,” Siasia cried out.

“Shit the fuck up, mama. You too damn loud!” He bit her shoulder while still pounding her pussy out.

“Baby you so deep in me.” Her body grew hot from the feeling of his heavy dick inside of her.

“This what happens when you don’t listen, mama. I gotta remind you why I’m in charge,” he whispered in her ear.

Grabbing her stomach, she tried to ease some of the pressure while trying to stand. That was a mistake on her part because next thing she knew, she was in the air while he fucked her from the back.

“Qamar!” she yelled, thinking she would fall. Siasia was no light weight. She was thick and meaty, but nothing he couldn’t handle.

Aggressively, he continued to fuck her with long hard stroke. “Stop trying to run and take this dick since you want to be so damn hardheaded.”

“I’m sorry.” Siasia bit into her own lip drawing blood. “I. Won’t. Do. It. Again.” Her

words were broken from him tearing her pussy up.

“You think I don’t know that? I know you ain’t gonna do it again. Now take this dick like the disobedient girl you are.” He laid her on the bed, still deep inside of her.

Siasia tried to run again but he had a death grip on her braids. She couldn’t move if she wanted to.

“Your pussy so good, mama. I can feel all of her. You like raw dick, don’t you?” He looked down to see her sap coating his dark brown dick like white paint. “Hell yea, you do. This pussy showing the fuck out for daddy. This daddy’s dick, mama?”

“Yes!” She didn’t hesitate to admit her body belonged to him. “It’s yours, daddy.”

Her voice sent shockwaves through his body. “Then fuckin’ act like it and throw that shit back. Show me this my pussy.” He loosened his grip on her hair, placing his hands behind his back for her to fuck him back.

Siasia had never been a scary bitch, so she arched her back and rode his dick like the professional she was. Their bodies clapped together like a church choir. She grunted at how big and long his dick was. Qamar was not only blessed with dick but also blessed with knowing how to use it. If he fucked every girl like that, she was thankful she knew how to fight ‘cause bitches fought over good dick attached to a nigga that talked you through it.

“Mm hm.” He slapped her ass. “Show out for daddy,” he coached in a trance.

“This pussy good to you?” she asked, shocking herself.

“The fuckin’ best, mama. I’m about to nut all in it too.”

“No!” Siasia panicked, turning her body to suck his big dick in her mouth.

Qamar’s eyes widened but he didn’t stop his stroke. He fucked her face, looking down at her slanted eyes. Siasia was the prettiest girl with eyes that told a story he was desperate to know. Thinking about fixing all her problems, he released a load into her mouth. Nut and slob dripped from the corners of her mouth.

“Show me.” He tapped his dick on her swollen lips.

Obliging him, she opened her mouth to show him she had indeed swallowed.

Qamar did something he’d never done before. He kissed her passionately. “That attitude gone now, huh?”

Sluggishly, Siasia smiled. “I need a nap.”

“We almost there. You’ll get some sleep when we get to the house.”

“Why I can’t go to sleep now?” She pouted.

He laid in the bed on his back, staring at her with those bedroom eyes and a slick bead from eating her pussy. “Because I need you to ride this dick, mama.”

With a sore pussy and all, Siasia straddled him, easing down on his semi hard dick. Her mouth fell open at the feeling of him swelling inside of her. If he wanted more pussy, then she wanted more dick.

Qamar gently pushed open the door, careful not to make a sound as he carried a sleeping Noodle in his arms. The house was massive, the kind of place that seemed to swallow sound. Siasia followed closely behind, her eyes wide with a mix of exhaustion and awe. She had never been in a place so grand, with its high ceilings



and elegant décor.

They had just gotten off the jet, the hum of the engines still ringing in their ears. But the beauty in the house from the moment they pulled up made Siasia's tired eyes open with wonder.

Closing the door, it automatically locked on its own since the lock was smart and didn't require human interactions. It locked automatically every time the door was shut unless programmed otherwise. Qamar adjusted Noodle in his arm, using the other to direct Siasia to follow him with a light tap on her thigh. Chill bumps covered her spine. Any time he touched her she was willing and ready to take him down right then and there. Even with the ache between her legs, Siasia could go another round with him. The mile high club was cool but sex on the moon was even better. That was what being in Qamar's world felt like—the moon.

The journey to his room seemed long since the house was massive. They walked through the kitchen and up the stairs that led them right to his room. He was the baby and only child that still lived with Stephanie so it was no brainer when she offered him the room that was deemed an in-law suite. His everyday scent filled her nose as soon as the door was pushed open. Gourmand. Siasia swept her eyes around the room, determining it was exactly the way she'd expected his room to be. It had grey and black furniture with hints of mustard to add a pop. His bed was big but the sitting area off to the side was what caught her attention. The floor-to-ceiling window was curtainless—like his condo in Lynn Beach.

“You nosey, ain't you?” Siasia joked as Qamar tucked Noodle in his bed.

Trying to keep his voice down, he chuckled. “I never thought about it like that.” He shrugged. “Maybe I am. I think I like windows because I get to see the sky—talk to the universe.”

“Dream about going to the moon.” Siasia smirked.

“Lately, I been thinking about the stars... can’t seem to figure out why.” He faked confused, resting his finger on his chin.

His long legs headed to the sitting area in front of the window. Tapping the seat beside him, Qamar beckoned her, watching the slight sway of her hips. The hips he loved to be between.

“You ain’t sleepy?” Siasia asked, tucking her feet under herself and getting comfortable.

Qamar yawned. “I wasn’t until you just said that. I slept a little on the flight to get to Lynn Beach, shit gave me an extra ten hours seem like.”

Siasia swallowed hard at the mention of him saving them from Lynn Beach.

“How long your pops been hitting your mama?” Qamar’s question sliced through the small moment of silence.

“He’s not my pops. That’s Noodle’s daddy but he ain’t mine.”

“Semantics, mama. Stop glazing over the real questions, though.”

Huffing, she looked out into the sky. The moon didn’t glow as bright since it wasn’t full. The stars did twinkle though. They always did when she was near Qamar. “The how long don’t really matter. All you need to know is she ain’t smart enough to leave.”

He hummed, allowing her confession to sink in. “Why was you at the club? Is that something I need to look forward to every time you run away?”

“Runaway?” Siasia scoffed. “Nigga, I’m grown.”

“But you love running away from home.”

“Qamar, just stop!” she snapped. “This ain’t home, and I’m reminded every time I step into your world.”

He pulled her onto his lap and stared into her eyes. “She ain’t mine,” he confessed.

“Who?” Siasia’s asked with her face bunched, staring into his brown orbs.

No longer able to resist the urge, Qamar pecked her lips before elaborating. “Belinay. She ain’t mine but she’s mine.”

“I’m scared to love a man because my mama always picks the wrong man which means I’ll pick wrong too because that shit is hereditary,” she confessed. A truth for a truth because even when he was pouring his heart out, she didn’t want him to feel alone while doing it.

She pushed her lips back into his with her eyes closed tight.

“I’m the best man for you so I think you’re picker ain’t broken.” Qamar smirked.

“And she don’t have to be yours to be yours,” Siasia said with a silky voice.

Pinching her chin between his thumb and index finger, he made her look at him.

“Stop running away from home. Stop running your ass back to the club and I’ll create a world for just us. You won’t have to feel uncomfortable in mine... I’ll give you your own.”

She sighed, her breath mingling with his. “You promise?”

“With everything I got,” he whispered, his voice breaking slightly.

The night seemed to hold its breath, the stars twinkling as if in agreement. The cool breeze wrapped around them, carrying the scent of jasmine and the distant hum of the city. Siasia felt a warmth spread through her chest, a flicker of hope igniting. Maybe, just maybe, she could believe in a future where she didn’t have to run, where she could find solace in Qamar’s arms.

“Okay,” she whispered back, her voice barely audible. “I’ll try.”

He smiled, a genuine smile that reached his eyes. “That’s all I ask.”

As they sat there, wrapped in each other’s embrace, the world around them seemed to fade away. For the first time in a long time, Siasia felt a sense of peace, a glimmer of a new beginning. And with Qamar by her side, she dared to dream of a world that was truly their own.

“Noodle, it’s a little too early to be so amped up.” Qamar chuckled, his voice light as he playfully tugged her along the expansive driveway that stretched out like a parking lot, its concrete warm beneath their feet.

“I can’t wait to see Es. You told her I was coming?” Noodle’s eyes sparkled with anticipation, looking up at him as if he held the key to all her dreams.

Qamar felt a familiar tightening in his chest at that hopeful gaze, a reminder of the weight of expectations. The thought of disappointing another person, of not being enough, gnawed at him like a persistent ache. He wrestled with self-doubt daily, yet he masked it well, unwilling to let Noodle see the cracks in his armor. Just as he had with Esmeray, he was ready to embody the person Noodle believed him to be, even if it meant wearing a mask of confidence that felt foreign against his skin.

“Nah. I didn’t tell her. All she knows is I had to handle something really quick. Noodle?” he called her name softly, watching her gaze shift back to him, curiosity shining in her eyes. “Don’t ever let anyone make you feel a way. Even if it’s my people.”

“What does that even mean?” she asked, furrowing her brow, her innocence a stark contrast to the complexities of the world around them.

“Keep your business to yourself. I’ll tell them what I think they need to know.” With a gentle push, he opened the front door, and they were met by the familiar chaos of the house—a vibrant symphony of laughter and life that greeted them like an old

friend. It was just as he'd left it the night before, a whirlwind of memories swirling in the air.

After their one-on-one conversation, his heart was heavy with the responsibility of leaving Siasia at his mama's house. She needed to be ready for the storm that awaited her. While she slept, he had taken Noodle with him. The morning sun spilled through the car windows as they made their way back to Tiny and Maverick's house in Jade City. His heart ached with the pull of family, but he couldn't neglect Janay and the newborn, the tiny life that had just begun.

All movement halted as Qamar and Noodle stepped through the door, the energy in the room shifted as they entered; a moment suspended in time as the world outside faded away.

"This your kid, too, nigga?" French was the first to ask, gaining him a few snickers and side eyes while everyone waited to see if Qamar had indeed brought home another baby.

He could see their disappointment, and he gulped it down. Nosey Esmeray finally looked up from sitting with Aku. Her big eyes doubled in size as she jumped down in full speed to get to Noodle. Noodle just as excited to see her, crouched down to grab Esmeray up in her arms.

"Noodle!" Esmeray's excitement was contagious.

And confusing. Everyone looked at each other for answers to who the cute little girl was and how in the hell did Esmeray know her.

Luna cleared her throat. "Qamar?" Her voice and eyes demanded an explanation.

Still young and innocent without an ounce of couth, Noodle smiled with her hand out

and Esmeray now wrapped around her bony hip. “I’m Noodle.” She smiled.

No matter what question still needed to be answered, Luna couldn’t be mean or rude to Noodle. With just as big a smile on her face, she shook Noodle’s hand. “Luna. I’m Qamar’s big sister.”

“I know.” She pursed her lips. She turned towards French with an even bigger smile. “French?” she asked, already knowing since Qamar had shown her pictures of everyone he loved one night on FaceTime.

“How you know, Qamar, Noodle?” French inquired, searching her face for traces of Qamar. Technically, she couldn’t belong to him because she looked to be at least ten but stranger things had happened in their family.

“I’m not his daughter. Anything else you want to know, ask him. I’m just a kid.”

Qamar chuckled when she winked.

“Where is Belinay?” Noodle asked, looking around for traces of a newborn baby. Her face scrunched when she didn’t see her new little sister-niece.

Now, Qamar really had some explaining to do. Luna grabbed his arm to drag him out of the room. French followed closely behind them while everyone else sat back with wide eyes on Noodle.

“What the fuck, Qamar?” Luna gritted once they were in Tiny’s office with the door closed. “You left your newborn baby last night to pop back up with another kid attached at your side.”

“Aye, calm down, Luna.” French put his arm out. “Give him time to answer.”

If looks could kill, French would be laid out from the death stare she gave him.

“Last I checked, I was grown as fuck. All y’all need to know is Noodle ain’t mine but that don’t mean I ain’t gone look out for her.”

“What’s her name?” Luna sighed, her shoulders sagging.

“What?” Qamar’s eyes bounced between her and French.

French smirked. “Nigga, what’s her name?”

“Who name?” Qamar was confused.

“You are such a damn lover boy. What’s Noodle’s mama’s name?” Luna crossed her arms across her full chest. Childbirth had done her body good. The once handful of breasts she had were now full and juicy.

Slowly, a smile expanded across his face. Thoughts of Siasia made his heart skip beats. She was so special to him. “Her sister’s name is Siasia.”

“Sister?” French crinkled his brows. “Where her sister at?”

“At Ma house.”

Luna’s arms went up in the air before falling by her side. “The fuck, Qamar?!” He was going to give her a damn heart attack with his rash decisions. “Did you forget Janay, nigga?”

“No.” He gripped the back of his neck, applying pressure to ease the headache that came on when he thought about how he was going to smooth things over with Janay and Siasia. “But she ain’t my girl.”



“You better get him, French. Javen!” Luna called out, ready to leave the men to handle Qamar because he had clearly bumped his damn head. “I swear Stephanie dropped you on your head when you were a baby,” she mumbled, rolling her eyes at Javen as he walked in.

“The hell you did that got my wife mad at me?” Javen asked, looking between French and Qamar.

Javen no longer towered over Qamar. They were almost at eye level now that Qamar was grown. After he turned fifteen, he shot up like a beanstalk and took the sports world by storm.

“It’s a girl,” French blurted with a cheesy grin on his face.

“Ain’t it always a girl?” Javen took a seat in the pink office chair behind the desk.

“But he just had a girl. A whole six pound baby girl.”

“Y’all niggas doing too much.” Qamar exhaled sharply.

French flopped on the small blue sectional. “Nah, baby boy, you doing too damn much. Like give your dick time to breath before you have a gang of baby mamas.”

Qamar kissed his teeth. “Fuck y’all. I know what I’m doing.”

“Then fuckin’ enlighten us.” Javen sat up with his hands clasped on top of the desk. “Because from where I’m sitting, this looks like a fuckin’ episode of Love and Soccer.”

“Nah, Flavor or Qamar,” French added, laughing like he’d told the best joke ever.

“Janay know we ain’t together.” He hunched his shoulders. “She’ll be okay.”

“Where the new girl at?” Javan asked French, knowing Qamar would beat around the bush.

“Stephanie house.”

“What?!” Javen shook his head in disbelief. “You know what, when this shit blows up in your face don’t come crawling to us.”

“Speak for yourself, nigga. I got Qamar’s back even when he’s wrong,” French declared.

“And that’s the damn problem. Y’all gotta stop babying his dick slangin’ ass. Let him hit his head and figure it out.”

Qamar tuned them out as they went back and forth. He would never admit it but Javen was right. The shit he was purposefully stepping in wouldn’t be as simple and easy to get out as he tried to convince himself it would be. Janay wasn’t simple. She wasn’t ready to let go of the idea of them being together and after having Belinay, her emotions were all over the place. He knew he had to be gentle with her because he never wanted her to feel less than. She just wasn’t for him.

Whatever decisions he made, he needed to be precise and make them quickly because his two worlds were merging fast.

Noodle sat in the swing with Esmeray securely on her lap. They were out in the backyard just chilling and playing. Malaysia had her eyes on them while she did whatever she was doing on her phone. Qamar allowed the blinds to close once he was content with it all.

“So, you just up and left to go where?” Janay asked while holding the bottle in Belinay’s mouth with her back propped against the headboard.

His light eyes coated her in all the goodness they did from the moment she noticed him in class. “Did you sleep good?”

“Where did you go, Q?”

“I had some shit to handle, Janay. I told French to help you with whatever you needed.”

“He didn’t lay down with me and make her. We need you ! Not your sisters. Not your brothers. And for damn sure not your baby mama.” Her round eyes poked at him. “So, again, what the fuck was so important that you left your newborn baby?”

His phone rung, grabbing his attention to it. Instead of answering it, he declined the call. Qamar’s eyes were back on Janay who had switched Belinay onto her shoulder to burp her. Holding out his hands, he grabbed his daughter. Across his own shoulder, he tapped her bottom to ease any gas she might’ve had.

“Don’t ignore me. You know I hate that shit.” Tears welled in Janay’s eyes.

“The test came back,” he confessed while walking around the room. His body moved in a sway that seemed to show how it wasn’t his first rodeo.

When he had Esmeray, the women in his family tried to do everything for him but Qamar wasn’t having it. He was hands on with her, watching, and learning, making sure he was the best father he could be.

Janay drew in a stuttered gasp. “Wh—what did it say?”

Qamar closed his eyes and inhaled Belinay's scent. "It don't matter."

"But it does," she whispered. Janay knew what the plan was but she didn't expect for him to hold up his promise to her.

When they first met, he wasn't the only dude she dealt with. Every other weekend she would go back home where her on-and-off dick appointment lived. Sometimes, he would even go down to Lynn Beach to slide between her legs. Then, she met Qamar. They had sex, and she found out she was pregnant shortly after. The timeline matched up with both of them since she had sex with them within the same three days.

Qamar didn't believe he was the father because he wore a condom each time. When Janay reveled the truth—along with the other guy basically saying he would have nothing to do with it, he stepped up. In hindsight it wasn't the best decision because it gave Janay unrealistic expectations.

"It don't." Qamar stared her down. "Belinay, the Turkish meaning of the moon's reflection. She mine, Janay."

"What about your family?" she whispered, still watching him move around with her daughter in his arms.

Janay knew she wasn't the family's favorite, which meant as soon as they found out Belinay wasn't his, they were ready to drop their fake fa?ade. And she wasn't ready to hear what Malaysia had to say.

He stopped walking long enough to look her in the eyes. "She mine which mean she my business."

It was their pledge to keep the truth between just the two of them. Their little secret.

“Daddy!” Esmeray burst through the door with Noodle behind her. “Noodle want to see my sister.”

Noodle eased from around the door with a sneaky smirk on her face. She had put Esmeray up to taking her because she was tired of waiting. Morning had turned into afternoon with no sign of the other part of Qamar that she wanted to love.

As if Noodle belonged, he eased over to her so she could see the newest piece of his heart.

“Aww,” Noodle cooed. Her eyes bounced from Qamar to Janay, trying to see who Belinay looked like.

Her button nose scrunched which rubbed Janay the wrong way. “Who are you?”

“Noodle,” Esmeray spoke up with her nose just as scrunched.

Noodle was wrapped up in Qamar’s world so much so that she didn’t even hear Janay. “Can I hold her?”

Placing the tiny human in her arms, he guided her on how to hold her properly. “You gotta hold her head like this.”

“Is this right?” Noodle looked up at him so much admiration.

“Mhm. You gone babysit when she gets older?”

“Yea.”

“And me too?” Esmeray pointed at her chest.

Noodle smiled. “Both of y’all ‘cause I love y’all so much.”

“Q, who is she?” Janay had had enough of the private moment they seemed to be having. Her wide nose spread more. The pregnancy body was still cursing her and she hadn’t quite accepted the changes of carrying a child.

“Hey, I’m Noodle,” she introduced with the most innocent smile and eyes. “She’s so pretty and little.”

Looking at Noodle warmed Janay’s heart, removing all the animosity she had seconds before. Her innocent aura was contagious and blocked out all negativity. Noodle was special and as she faced life head-on, she would grow to master it—able to twist and turn people into puddy.

“We’ll talk later,” he directed to Janay. “Where yo’ mama, Es?”

“Gone on a date,” Noodle answered, still focused on Belinay.

Janay swallowed, waiting for Qamar to feel away. When he didn’t her racing heart slowed to a normal rate.

“Qamar!” Stephanie’s voice boomed through the hall, slicing through the air like a knife. The sound echoed off the walls, a familiar mix of authority and concern that made Qamar’s heart race. His eyes widened, darting to Noodle, searching for some kind of reassurance or explanation.

“Siasia down there,” Noodle finally admitted, her brow furrowed in realization, as if the weight of the message had just hit her.

Janay’s gaze flicked between them, confusion etched on her face. “Who is Siasia?” she asked, her tone a mix of curiosity and suspicion, as if she sensed the tension

brewing beneath the surface.

“My daddy’s girlfriend,” Esmeray piped up, her innocent tone cutting through the moment like a bell ringing in a quiet room.

Before Qamar could react, Janay was already off, sprinting across the grass, determination in her stride. Panic surged through him as he watched her go, knowing that whatever confrontation awaited would only stir the pot further.

“Wait! Janay!” He chased her unable to catch up with her like he wasn’t the athlete and she didn’t just have a baby.

Stephanie stood in the hallway with her arms folded across her chest and smoke coming out of her ears. She was pissed that Qamar had left a complete stranger in her house without her knowledge. Then, he had the nerve to bring another girl into town when he just had a baby with another. Her son was out of his mind, and she needed to be the one to hold him accountable.

Janay rushed past Stephanie only to stop dead in her tracks when she looked at Siasia.

Siasia stood frozen, caught in the moment like a deer in headlights, clad in a pair of Qamar’s oversized sweatpants that hung loosely around her waist, a t-shirt that swallowed her frame, and one of his big jackets draped over her shoulders, making her look almost small and vulnerable. To top it off, she wore his giant slides that flopped with every anxious shift of her feet. The nerve of her, knowing full well who Janay was; the internet had already spread the images of Janay and Qamar at the hospital, cradling their newborn like a precious gift. A knot twisted in her stomach, a mix of dread and realization settling in as she braced for the inevitable.

“Are you out of your fuckin’ mind?” Janay raged. Her chest pumped up and down. Pissed was an understatement. “Qamar, I just fuckin’ know.” She pinched the bridge

of her nose unable to complete a full sentence.

“Calm down and let me talk to you.” Qamar stood in front of Janay, blocking her view of Siasia.

Siasia’s foot tapped against the floor as she tried her hardest not to say anything.

“Nigga, fuck you!” Janay grilled him before spinning around to call her mama and get the fuck on.

The hard thuds of her stomping off seemed to shake the floor. Steam followed her, leaving a trail of a burning heart. She couldn’t believe Qamar could be so disrespectful. No, they were not together but she had just had his daughter. Like, how could he be so selfish to go out and give another girl pieces of him he withheld from her? If those were the games he wanted to play, she could play it too. First with taking her baby the hell away from him, his family, and the homewrecking bitch.

Luna stepped up. “Wait a minute, Janay.” Javen pulled her back, not wanting her to insert herself in Qamar’s drama. They needed to let him handle his shit like the man he was.

Qamar gave Siasia sympathetic eyes before turning to follow behind Janay.

“Mama, please come get me,” Janay sobbed into the phone, her voice trembling as she frantically shoved clothes and random belongings into her duffle bag, the zipper straining under the chaos. Each item she tossed in felt like a piece of her heart, heavy with confusion and hurt. Qamar’s baffling actions replayed in her mind, a stark contrast to the kind and sweet man she had always known, the one who had insisted they could only ever be Belinay’s parents.

With a desperate swipe of the back of her hand across her running nose, she tried to



regain her composure, but the tears kept flowing. “Mama, I know, but please,” she pleaded, her voice cracking with emotion, the weight of her heartbreak palpable in every word.

Noodle looked at her in sadness, still holding onto a sleeping Belinay.

“Janay.” Qamar finally made it into the room. “Just let me talk to you.”

“Fuck no! You should’ve talked to me before you made the decision to bring another woman here. Be proactive instead of reactive, nigga.” She pushed her finger into the side of his head since he’d taken a seat on the bed.

Noodle watched, unfazed because arguing and fighting seemed to be the foundation of what a relationship was. It was all she knew based on her own parents who couldn’t seem to get their shit together.

“Don’t put your hands on me!” Qamar barked. “Aye, Noodle, take Belinay in there to my sister.”

“No, the fuck.” Janay stood in front of the door.

Noodle looked back at Qamar because Janay was a grown up and she was just a child. When Janay went to grab her daughter from Noodle’s hands, Noodle screamed, afraid of the baby falling.

“Bitch!” The words came out of his mouth before he could stop them. “The fuck wrong with you?”

At the same time, Siasia was running towards them. “Bitch, I will kill you if you put your hands on my sister again!” Spit flew from her mouth as Javen yanked her into the air like she weighed nothing. “Let me go.”

Janay laughed. “ Bitch? ” She looked at Qamar who had placed Noodle behind him while he held Belinay in his arms, protecting them the way she wanted him to protect her. “The mother of your daughter is a bitch? I bet you ain’t never said that to your precious little Malaysia.”

“Janay, watch the fuck out. You doing too much. I ain’t meant to call you out your name but I ain’t playing this childish shit with you when it comes to my kids.”

“She ain’t your kid!” Janay clapped, referring to Noodle. “Maybe a step kid,” she grimaced, cutting her eyes at Siasia who was still trying to get to her.

While hell broke out, Janay’s mother had arrived since she didn’t live that far. The sound of her phone ringing was the break they all needed. She answered as tears pooled in her eyes. “Mama, Qamar won’t give me my baby. I just want to take my baby and go. This is too much for her. Too much for me.”

“The fuckin’ dramatics.” He scoffed.

“I’m calm, just let me go,” Siasia’s chest heaved as Javen slowly placed her on her feet. Spinning around him, she darted to Janay, landing hard blows on her face and making her drop her phone.

Luna screamed. “Break them up!”

Qamar stood in shock, unable to do anything besides cuss and fuss since he still had Belinay in his arms.

Noodle saw her sister fighting and took off on Janay too. “Don’t hit my sister!” She swung wildly.

French snickered but went to grab Noodle away from the fight. Siasia was walking

Janay all around the room, and she wasn't letting up. Janay fought back but was still no match for the trailer park in Siasia.

"Siasia, let her go." Qamar tried to pass his daughter to Luna but she was focused on getting the men to break the shit up.

Tiny and Maverick were out and would be ready for round two when they got home and realized the episode of Love and Hip Hop that was being shot in their home.

"Hold my baby." He pushed Belinay into Luna's arms.

Qamar pulled his pants up, trekking his way to where Siasia had Janay on the ground. Without hesitation, he yanked her into his arms while she still swung wildly. "Calm down, mama," his gruff voice crooned in her ear.

As always, her body moved on his command. Unfairly, it belonged to him without question. Upset and embarrassed, Siasia wrapped her arms around his neck and her legs around his waist, burying her face in the crook of his neck.

"This bitch attacks me and you console her like I was in the wrong." Angrily, Janay pushed her wild hair out of her face. "Give me my fuckin' baby!" She went to snatch the baby from Luna.

"Didn't that just cost you an ass whooping?" Luna looked her upside the head because under no circumstances would she tolerate Janay snatching her niece out of her arms. "Calm down and I'll pass her to you," she agreed while rolling her eyes.

Janay huffed, trying to calm herself enough to grab her baby. To think she'd just had a baby and already tussling with her baby daddy's new bitch. Safe to say Renata tried to warn her. Told her the real Qamar would rear his ugly head as soon as she popped that baby out. All of that said and still, Janay wanted him to be hers in the pit of her

belly.

“The fuck happened?” Renata asked after she’d beat on the door for what felt like an hour. “I know y’all ain’t in here jumping my baby?” Her dark eyes seared into everyone, stopping when they connected with Qamar who held Siasia like she was their newborn baby.

“Oh, I see what this is.” Renata kissed her teeth. “Get your shit and lets go, Janay.” She pointed her finger at Qamar to declare, “I don’t want to hear shit when Janay ain’t stunting you anymore. From this point on, it’s about Belinay and nothing else. You crossed the line so stay there.”

Qamar shrugged, truly unbothered by any of it.

Janay sucked in her tears as she gathered her things. Thoughts of nights without him close to help with Belinay created an ache in her chest. He had been such a good dad even when he found out he wasn’t biologically the father. She knew she could do it alone but didn’t want to. Still, that wasn’t something she would confess in a room full of people already judging her.

As she went to walk out the room behind her mother, Qamar gripped her elbow, pulling her close to him. With his lips puckered, he kissed Belinay on the head. Through all the chaos, she remained sleep like she was born in a war zone. Pulling away, he spoke to Janay through his eyes. She got the warning that didn’t need to be verbalized. The pain radiating through her wanted to blurt out how Belinay wasn’t even his daughter but even she wasn’t that crazy. That confession would only create more issues

“M a, you really messy for that shit,” Qamar fussed at Stephanie while they sat in the living room.

The way his mama decided to drive two hours to stir up shit was beyond him and he needed to understand the reasoning behind it. He loved Stephanie but hated how his family always seemed to be in his business as if he couldn't figure his own shit out.

Siasia was still a little riled up. It was evident in the way her leg bounced. Her disposition also showed she lacked confidence in that moment. Everyone's eyes seemed to be on her, making her feel like she was in a fish tank and they tapped the glass taunting her—reminding her she didn't belong in their world.

Stephanie waved him off. “Oh, there you go making your issues someone else's. Ain't no reason you had this girl in my house while you brought your ass back to Jade City to play house with Janay.”

“How was that your business though?” Qamar based.

Siasia looked him upside his head. “Oh so that's what you was doing? Playing house with your bitch ass baby mama? Nigga, you could've left me in Lynn Beach for all this.”

“I'm a woman first, Qamar. It wasn't right,” Stephanie added, squirming when Griff pinched her side.

“You know you ain’t right when Stephanie makes sense,” Solar hummed with pursed hips. She went between calling her mother by her name and calling her mama, depending on whatever childhood trauma she had swirling around in her head.

“Solar, chill.” French grilled her, making her kiss the back of her teeth before sitting back.

Qamar grilled her, hating how she always had something to say. Instead of addressing her, he put his focus back on Stephanie. “I ain’t say it was right but I wasn’t playing house with her. She just had my baby, the fuck I’m supposed to do be a deadbeat like the niggas you gave birth for?”

“Oh, you on one today,” Stephanie taunted. “Maybe I shouldn’t have done it but I ain’t mad about it either. You show up in the wee hours of the night with Siasia and her little sister. You didn’t tell me anything so I did what was right. That girl don’t know me from a can of paint, and I don’t know her.”

“You said all that to say what?”

Siasia jumped up. “To say, you was dead ass wrong, because you are!” she snapped, hating how Qamar couldn’t seem to take accountability for the hand he played in her whooping his baby mama’s ass. Yes, she knew Janay was somewhere in the cut but it hit different when she woke up and he was two hours away with the girl. She didn’t have that level of maturity and had never seen it to understand it.

Slowly, his honey brown eyes outlined her face. Qamar wanted to be mad but the way her braids hung towards her fat ass, all he could think about was bending her over and calming her down.

“Oop,” Solar’s lips popped.

“Sit down, mama.” Qamar glared at her, warning her to not make a scene— don’t let these muthafuckas get you in trouble .

Swallowing hard, Siasia sat back down, gaining herself a few snickers.

Qamar dragged his sight back to his mother. He loved her so much. Probably more than any of the other siblings. He’d gotten the better parts of her and was her baby. Where she usually coddled him, Stephanie seemed to be switching up on him and he needed to understand why.

“Ma, what’s up? Talk to me ‘cause you feeling like an enemy right now.”

“Oh, Qamar, you are so spoiled that the one time I make you man up, you think I’m against you. I’m for you... been for you since I brought my ass back into y’all lives but what you did was reckless. I told you to handle the situation with Janay and instead, you feed into her fantasy.”

“How? She know I don’t want her.”

“But does she know you want me?” Siasia was back in the mix with a little more courage.

“Mhm, cocky... I like.” Solar’s commentary gained her scolding look from French.

French stood, yanking Solar’s hand. “We out.”

“It was just getting good,” she squealed while being dragged out the house.

Qamar ignored Siasia. “I was trying to be a father unlike all the men you decided to have babies for, Ma.” He cut his eyes at Stephanie. “Did I do it wrong? Maybe but my intentions were good.”

“To you they were but not to Siasia or Janay.” Stephanie doubled down on her thoughts. She knew her son was a good man, but he hadn’t lived life enough to always make the best decision. And unlike most times, she decided to not egg his bullshit on and make him face the shit he was unintentionally creating. “I ain’t against you, Qamar, never will be but be mindful of the things you may or may not be creating. Unnecessary chaos.”

Siasia couldn’t have agreed more with Qamar’s mother. His heart might’ve been in the right place but the execution was anything but.

“You still mad?” Qamar flopped on the loveseat that sat perfectly against the wall, giving the perfect view of downtown Jade City.

They were no longer tucked inside Tiny’s tension filled home. After all the chaos, he felt it was better for them to let the house calm down. Based on the silent treatment Siasia gave him, he no longer felt that was the best route.

Huffing, Siasia swiped her finger down her phone with force. Out of the corner of her eye, she took him in. Dressed down with his leg hanging over the arm of the couch, he looked so cool. The type of swag that poured out of him needed to be studied because even in distress, he didn’t seem to break a sweat.

“I know you hear me.” He laughed before tossing something at her.

“Stop!” She frowned, ducking the balled up straw paper from the fast food they had on the way to the hotel.

“Stop acting like I ain’t here,” he countered. “If you got some shit to get off your chest, the floor is yours.”

“The floor should’ve been mine when you made the decision to show up to my house



to whisk me and my sister away to play house with you and your baby mama.” Siasia laid her phone down, ready to unpack everything she’d been feeling the moment she walked in her trailer to him being Captain Save-a\_hoe. “You invited yourself into my world. I didn’t ask you to.”

His buttery caramel eyes stared at her blankly— looking for the issues only she seemed to have found.

Placing her feet on the floor, she continued with her rant. “My life ain’t pretty. I ain’t come from a wealthy family. My house wasn’t filled with love and laughter. My mama loves a man that doesn’t know how to keep his hands to himself, and she doesn’t love herself enough to see the issue with that. I don’t know who my daddy is, and Noodle don’t share my blood. We don’t fit in here.”

Tucking his lip behind his teeth, Qamar sat up shocked. Shit was officially getting real. Never did he expect for Noodle to not be blood related to Siasia. No they didn’t look alike but neither did him and his siblings, thanks to Stephanie being a rolling stone.

“Say what now?” He stood up to make his way towards her.

Like he knew she would, she tucked herself inside herself. Qamar hated when she did that. He’d witnessed it the first night they spent together. It was something he silently vowed to rid her of.

“I’m just saying... we ain’t from the same place— don’t even live in the same universe. All this proves it.” Her hand waved around the room to emphasize how their lives were different.

The luxury hotel proved it. Without effort, he could afford to put them in a room that cost more than the rent in her trailer.

He scoffed. “You don’t know where I’m from. Matter fact, put your shoes on. We ain’t staying here tonight.”

“Wait!” She jumped up, her hands leading her to him. “What part of we don’t belong here don’t you understand? Like, what about that makes you think I want to go to another rich place with you?”

Siasia couldn’t believe Qamar. It was like he wasn’t hearing her. He wasn’t feeling her or trying to understand where she was coming from—didn’t try to ease the building tension being around his rich life seemed to bring her. She liked him better when it was just the two of them tucked away in his room—away from the world.

“Do I make you feel safe?” Qamar stared down at her. His heart twisted while seconds felt like hours waiting for her answer.

Siasia squeezed her eyes shut. “Qamar,” she whispered through her sigh.

“Do you feel safe with me?”

“I just?”

Qamar pulled her face towards him. “Are you safe with me?”

Siasia confessed, “The answer scares the shit out of me.”

“And you not answering scares the fuck out of me.” His deep voice fell into the voice of a child—afraid of rejection. “I’m trying, Siasia.”

“Trying to do what?”

His pleading eyes made her mad at herself for giving him a hard time. “Just ride with

me, mama.”

How could she say no to anything he asked? If he wanted her kidney, Siasia would give him two without thinking about her own life. With his square face, boyish eyes, and a grown man’s beard—how could she cause his downturned eyes to sink further?

“What about Noodle?” It wasn’t a clear yet but they both knew she was going to ride with him.

Satisfied, Qamar called up Malaysia to ask her to come to the hotel to look after Noodle while he took Siasia on a ride. Without hesitation, Malaysia agreed.

“Do I need to change clothes?” She looked down at her attire, causing her stomach to clench. Dressed in his clothes gave her a feeling she couldn’t put in words just yet. It felt good.

A mischievous look came into his eyes. “Nah, mama, you look good in anything especially in my shit.” Qamar’s teeth sunk into his lip.

Still, she wanted to play coy but her face flushed red.

Qamar pulled her into his arms, coating her in safety. “You safe with me,” he declared. “When you can’t say some shit, I’ll say it for you.”

“You trying to take me to the moon, Qamar?” Wrapping her arms around his waist, Siasia craned her neck up at him.

Gently, he pecked her nose. “Nah, mama, beyond the stars.” He smiled, melting her resolve and walls even more.

Chill bumps coated her skin before her heart warmed her again. Siasia wouldn’t

admit it out loud but she was falling for Qamar and fast. He was gentle, kind, and great in bed. He seemed interested in all the parts of her, even the ugly ones. How he had so much self-doubt, she didn't understand because to her, he was perfect. She dropped to her knees with her carnal desire to rid him of any doubt. Siasia's mouth pooled with moisture at the thought of tasting his salty flesh. His dick jumped when her slanted eyes peered up at him.

On her knees, with both hands, she slid his pants and boxer briefs down and was greeted with a needy, long, and veiny dick. Kissing the head of his mushroomed dick, she affirmed him. "I trust you, Black man. With my life, Black man."

Qamar sucked in a huge breath when her mouth covered as much of him as she could. "Shit," he hissed as she worked her mouth over him. His eyes misted from her affirming him. It was something he never knew he needed to hear but never wanted to go a day without hearing it croon from her lips.

Feeling the weight of his dick on her tongue aroused her—challenging her to swallow him whole. Like the pro she felt she was, she sucked his dick better than anyone. Siasia was a certified head doctor, solidifying his desire to keep her forever. When he moaned and gripped her scalp through her braids, she really went to work. Spit dripped from the corners of her mouth. The sound of her sucking the life out of him bounced off the walls, creating a euphoric vibe.

Siasia palmed his chiseled thighs, sucking him with no hands. She gagged a little but never stopped.

"You eating this dick, mama," Qamar growled. "You're doing so good." He massaged her scalp.

Even on her knees, Qamar made her feel like the most precious innocent thing on earth. Slowing her neck work, she made love to his dick with her mouth.

Siasia flicked her tongue over the head of his throbbing dick, forcing more blood to rush to it. “Mm,” she moaned, enjoying his taste. “You like the way I suck your dick, daddy?” She pulled back just enough to talk.

“I like everything about you but especially the way you’re gagging on this dick. Swallow it.” He glared at her with adoration in his eyes. His bare feet balled up, digging into the plush carpet of their suite.

Just as she took him to the back of her throat, Qamar’s phone rung, causing him to groan but it didn’t stop his nut from shooting down her throat. “Let me see.” Using two of his fingers, he stretched her mouth wide.

Obediently, Siasia showed him she had indeed swallowed all his kids.

Qamar smiled in satisfaction. “You are fuckin’ perfect.”

Placed perfectly on her knees, she cheesed hard, making her eyes tighten.

“Malaysia,” Qamar answered his phone. “Here I come.” He adjusted his clothes before heading to the room’s door. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For being perfect.”

“You didn’t tell me we were going out of town, Qamar,” Siasia fussed, watching the billboards on the highway pass her by.

After Malaysia and the girls got situated, the two of them wasted no time getting on the road. Qamar was ready to take Siasia on a full on tour of his childhood and where he came from, hoping she could see why he was so infatuated with her and Noodle.

“Did you ask?” he teased while gripping her thigh, creating a mess between her legs.

Since she’d been in Jade City with him, he’d been driving another SUV that she was just as in love with as the other cars. Of course, it was blacked out with dark tint and all the bells and whistles a person with kids would need. If she had too, Siasia wouldn’t mind living in it.

“Don’t get smart, nigga.”

“What happened to daddy?” Qamar glanced at her with flirty eyes.

Her eyes widened before she covered in face in embarrassment. “You know, I really hate when bitches call their niggas their daddy.”

“Why?”

Her shoulders hunched up and down. “Shit just sound weird.”

“But not with me?”

“I mean...” Siasia twisted towards him. “Why you call me mama?” She chewed her lip.

“You remind me of home.” There was no hesitation or doubt when the words casually escaped him. Qamar didn’t try to clarify it either. He meant what he said.

If her heart could jump out of her chest, it would for sure find solace in his pocket. She was safe and so was her heart.

“Pick a song.” She giggled.

Music was the soul of her life. The pick a song game was how she understood and coped with her feelings. When all else failed her in her life, she found joy in picking a song and breaking it down.

Qamar tapped the steering wheel in deep thought. After a few seconds, he smiled and said, “Diary by Wale.”

“I’ve never heard that one.” Her face scrunched while going into her phone to search up the song. Once she found it, she played it, listening intently.

Out of the corner of his eye, he watched her, waiting for her reaction. “Queen. She deserves the title, but she rejects what I give while she nurse the wounds by them,” he rapped.

Siasia swallowed slow and hard.

“Wife. You deserve the label,” he continued after the chorus almost took her breath away.

Wale recited what sounded like a poem that added to her aching heart that she wanted to mend just to be what Qamar just said she could be; what he claimed he saw in her. Everything she never wanted to be. Something she’d never strived for until he walked up to her, offering her money to sleep with him. At least that was what she thought but as the days went on and he showed up for her in ways no one had ever done before. Nothing felt real. Everything felt mythical.

As the song faded out, she was compelled to blurt, “I want to be everything you want me to be.”

“What do you want to be?” he asked just as the Sapphire City sign appeared on the side of the road. Ten years ago, the sign wasn’t there. It replaced the small city limits

sign that locals often ignored and visitors never noticed. So much had changed in the city thanks to his family's success and the world wanting to make Sapphire City something it had never been.

Deep, sad confusion etched across her pretty, blemish free brown skin. A change in pressure of his hand on her thigh pulled her eyes to him. "Free." The simple four letter word summed it all up the best way she could. "I know that sounds silly because I ain't physically shackled but?—"

"But the needs of others and their perception of you makes you feel like you're choking on the same air you need to breath. Yea, mama, I just want to be free too." His eyes seemed to plead with her for the understanding that they weren't so different—tax bracket aside.

Siasia entangled her fingers into his, bringing them to her lips where she placed a delicate kiss to them. " Reassurance by Jastin Martin."

To help ease his mind and wipe the look of confusion from his face, she played the song, laughing at how long it took for him to understand her blurting out a song as if they weren't just playing pick a song. It was new for him but second nature to her. "If you need some reassurance, baby to me you're perfect. You perfect."

Her heart skipped a beat at the sight of Qamar's face lighting up.

"How can I keep you?" His question didn't need an answer. He would figure out the details along the way. "Start it over, mama."

Siasia cackled but obliged. If the request came from him, the answer would always be actions—doing so, with him and for him came just that easy for her. No thoughts, just actions.



It didn't take long for them to pull onto a street that looked out of a storybook. Beautiful colored houses, perfect lawns, and kids laughing and playing in the streets. It was movie like.

Lunar Drive .

Siasia read the street sign. Her head jutted towards him for understanding. The name was tatted on his back along with the others of his family. He was officially out of her league now. A whole fucking street named after his people.

“Welcome to The Jig, mama.” Qamar smiled as the sun brightened his eyes.

Kids ran up to the car when he came to a stop and rolled his window down.

“Qamar!” they shouted once his face became clear.

A little boy who looked to be about the same age as Noodle trekked over, tugging on his jeans. “I ain't seen you on TV yet.” His boyish face scrunched as he reached his hand inside the vehicle to dap Qamar up. His upturned eyes looked around Qamar to see who was on the passenger side. “Hey, miss lady.”

Siasia waved, bashfully.

“I ain't seen you in a while and that's the first thing you say to me?” Qamar faked hurt with his hand on his heart. “I thought we was better than that.”

“We is but I'm trying to see you on TV before I let my ma put me on the soccer team. Nigga, ain't no Black folks on that field.”

“It's plenty of Black people, Bu.”

Bu twisted up his lips. “They ain’t Black like us. Them niggas speak Spanish and shit.”

“They still Black though.” Qamar snickered at his young friend’s assessment and foul mouth. It reminded him of how reckless he used to be as a youngin.

“Move yo’ dirty self out the way, Bu.” Tootie, another neighborhood kid, shoved. “Qamar, give me some money.” Her small hand was out and all the way in the car. “Hey, girl.” She waved at Siasia.

“Tootie, what you need money for?” Qamar asked, opening the glove compartment to remove a few twenty-dollar bills. Placing the money in her hand, he made sure to pass one out to the other kids crowding around his car.

Tootie patted her head like she saw the other women in the neighborhood do when their scalp itched. “Ain’t no telling. Mama said you can’t be a little lady with no money in your pocket.”

“She told you right.” Qamar shook his head.

No matter how much money they put back into The Jig, the people were still the same. He loved his city, but his neighborhood was where his heart resided. He had it tatted across his chest and made sure to take the lessons of The Jig with him everywhere he went. No matter how much money he got, it would always be home to him.

Slapping hands with a few more of the little neighborhood boys, he pulled off headed to the park they got built in Lunar’s name. It had state-of-the-art equipment with a rec center that cost over five million. The city loved Luna and Javen for all they’d done to upgrade a worn and abandoned neighborhood. All the houses had been torn down and replaced with newer ones. The corner store Luna once worked at had also been

replaced.

Although it didn't look the same, it was still The Jig.

"Two-hour ride for you to bring me to the park?" Siasia asked, looking out at the beautiful landscape.

Qamar cut the engine to his truck. "That's all you see, a park? Mama, this is me... this is who I am. Where I'm from." He looked out with pride. "Shit wasn't always like this. My people fed the neighborhood that never let us starve. My brother died here so I like to believe his spirit is still running these same streets."

"I didn't mean it like that... I want to see everything that makes you, you. I'm ready for the rest of the tour," she laughed, mimicking a line from one of her favorite movies.

"Bring your ass on." He got out the car before opening the door for her as well.

There was only a small group of boys at the basketball court which meant they pretty much had the park to themselves. The breeze in Sapphire City was cooler than the ones in Lynn Beach. Their spring evenings were breezy and often required a jacket to keep warm. Luckily, Siasia had on one of his large sweatshirts, so she was comfortable.

"How you look so good in my shit?" He twirled her around before catching her in his arms. Her back to his chest, he walked her to the benches. "I wish I would've met you years ago." His mouth moved faster than his mind

"Why, Qamar?" Siasia rolled her neck, pretending to not be fazed when he blurted cute shit to her like that. Qamar was a lady's man.

“Feel like I ain’t been myself until I laid eyes on you, mama.” He hugged her tighter, making sure she felt what he was saying.

Siasia hugged him back. “Our timing don’t matter. I’m here and you’re here. All that matters is what we do with our time together.”

“You say that shit like this temporary. You already planning your escape?”

Siasia put his hand over her heart for him to feel how rapid it beat. “Ready to run for my fuckin’ life.”

“Aye, little boy!” someone called out from a porch not far from the park. “Come here, nigga!” the person called over again with their hands in the air.

Seeing the house the person was at, Qamar knew exactly who it was. “Come on so I can introduce to someone. He ain’t family like that but I fuck with him heavy.”

“You just be draggin’ me from place to place. Do you have a home?” Siasia joked, not knowing her joke held some truth.

Qamar didn’t have a primary home outside of the condo in Lynn Beach. He literally jumped from house to house depending on his mood. Most of the time, he was at his ma’s house, but he wasn’t above crashing at one of his sibling’s houses. He preferred being under French more than anyone else, though.

“Got me following you like a lost puppy.”

He slapped her ass. “You ain’t trying to be my little house dog?”

Siasia grilled him. “Don’t play.”

He ducked her playful swing at his face. “You think ‘cause you beat Janay up you got hands now?”

“Keep playing with me and you’ll get that same ass whooping yo’ baby mama got. Y’all will be sharing more than a kid.” She smacked her lips.

Qamar held his stomach from laughing. “You funny when you ain’t in that big ass head of yours overthinking everything.”

“If you lived the life I lived you’d be in your head all day everyday too. I have to think of everything... have a plan before shit goes south because it always does. I know you trying to level the playing field, but you never will. I understand your life ain’t always been what it is now, but it ain’t never been like mine either.”

Gazing into her eyes, there was so much Qamar wanted to say. So many ways he wanted to map out their lives together but he was just as scared. He would never admit he was just as afraid of rejection as she was. Instead, he locked their fingers together as they walked across the small street. The smell of fried chicken attacked their senses as he walked closer to the house that had music blasting from the inside.

Siasia surveyed the man who had called Qamar. Even with tattoos on his face, he was still fine as hell. His tawny skin looked perfect against his fresh lineup and his outfit spoke of importance. His button down was rolled up to his elbows while his dress pants hugged his legs beautifully. She swiped at her mouth to make sure none of her slob dripped.

“Jay,” Qamar greeted, wrapping his arms around the beautiful specimen of a man. They embraced brotherly.

Jay stepped back from Qamar to get a good look at him. “Nigga how long has it been?” He examined him, clearly proud of what he saw. “You look good, baby.”

Qamar's smile stretched from ear to ear. "You too. Out here on your black billionaire shit. I'm trying to get like you."

Jay was a family friend that was almost a part of the family. Jay and Luna dated while she and Javen were on a break. Qamar would always be team Javen but Jay came in and gave him a different perspective on life. Qamar adored Jay and they kept in touch throughout the years.

"If you give my partner a call, he'll have you on the best professional team in the country."

Jay had reached out to Qamar a year ago to put him in touch with an associate he knew that owned a soccer team. The Emerald City Kings were one of the top teams in the country and owned by a Black man. If Qamar wasn't trying to stay in school to make his family happy he would've reached out with no issues. However, heavy is the head that wears the crown and the crown his family put on him, was to never come off. They instilled that into him since he was born. It had always been known that with wealth or without, they had high hopes and expectations for the baby of the family.

Sadly, Qamar ran his hand down his face with a deep sigh. "I know, man."

Since he was once a part of their circle, Jay knew the pressure Luna put on Qamar. His heart went out to him because he knew how much the idea of success could cripple a person. Qamar had confided in him before and it was one of the main reasons he tried to connect Qamar with his associate.

"Who you out here talking to?" a beautiful dark-skinned woman with wide hips pushed the front door open to ask.

She was goddess like with her big, slanted eyes and enchanting voice.

Siasia could only wave with a goofy, love struck look on her face.

“Oh, this Qamar, Luna little brother,” Jay introduced before his eyes went to Siasia. “And?”

“Siasia.” She smiled bashfully. So far, all the men she’d met that was connected to Qamar were alluring down to the little neighborhood boy who had a foul mouth.

“Siasia and Qamar, this is my wife, Candi.” Jay tucked Candi into his side with pride, and Siasia didn’t blame him. Candi was beyond beautiful with her dress and blinged out cowboy boots on. Her natural hair pattern was coily but full of life and bounce. And her eyes—they pulled you in and held you captive. She looked ethereal and unreal in the setting of the sun’s light.

“Luna as in broke my man’s heart once upon a time then dropped an album with songs about him on it?” Candi crossed her arms while staring Qamar down.

With his hands up in surrender, he smiled and said, “Guilty.”

Siasia held her breath feeling like shit could go left at any given time. She didn’t know Luna at all but was under the impression that she and Javen had been together since birth. At least that was what their love gave on social media. The way that man took his family everywhere with him and vice versa, she just knew they were true soulmates. So, it was no question as to why the new information of Luna loving another man and making a whole damn album about it shocked the hell out of her.

Candi rolled her eyes. “Tell her, thank you for me. She let this man go for him to find me.” She looked up into Jay’s eyes with love. Her finger jutted back out when she remembered something. “But tell her don’t make another damn song about him.”

Qamar snickered. “I don’t think you got to worry, she retired.”

“So I’ve heard. Moonlight did her big Lauryn Hill shit—drop some fire and went to raise her kids.” Candi nodded with appreciation because motherhood was the foundation of what she felt her life’s purpose was. “You got kids?” She looked at Siasia.

She shook her head, no.

“How that work when I know Qamar got kids?”

“Damn, you been pillow talking?” Qamar jested towards Jay.

“Not too much on my man,” Candi stood in front of Jay. “I seen it on the blogs.” She laughed, lightening the mood.

“Damn, I gotta get my circle smaller,” Qamar spoke out loud but was talking to himself.

Jay’s hand landed on his shoulder. “I been told you that. Come chill with me for a while. You don’t mind do you, Miss Siasia?”

“Um.” Her eyes went to Qamar to gauge his mood. “Sure.” She shrugged once she seen he was okay with it.

“Yes, back that shit up on him, Siasia!” Candi cheered, watching Siasia grind on Qamar.

After going inside, Siasia found out the home belonged to Jay’s mama. She fried some fish now everyone was in the backyard listening to music. With Jay and Candi being older than them, most of the music was from their generation with them



spinning a few new school songs every now and then.

Jay's mama, Jolene, sent someone to the neighborhood store to get them a few drinks. Now, everyone was full and felt great.

"Like this?" Siasia cheesed, her eyes damn near closed from the big smile on her face.

Tossing her ass into Qamar, she put her hands on her knees and created the perfect arch in her back. Slowly, she worked him over as if it was just the two of them.

Qamar's eyes sat just as low from the weed he and Jay smoked together. The sounds of the music coupled with the feeling of Siasia's hot pussy, he was ready to take her somewhere to punish her for showing out in front of company.

"I can tell a stripper when I see one," Candi observed. "you dance, Siasia?"

Feeling good and not ashamed, Siasia nodded her head never missing a beat while still dancing on Qamar.

"All the more reason why I'm rooting for you." Candi winked.

Siasia blushed.

"You trying to take my wife, ain't it?" Jay ogled Candi, seeing exactly why people were turned on by her.

A mortified look plastered across Siasia's face. "No!" she spoke quickly.

Jay and Candi laughed. "I'm just messing with you, Miss Siasia."

“She’s a dope ass photographer too,” Qamar tossed out casually.

Candi look shocked. “For real?”

Normally, Siasia would plug her small side business into any and every conversation but Candi and Jay seemed like real professional people. “I freelance.” She shied away this time.

“Oo!” Candi squealed. “We have a photoshoot coming up with Black Excellence Magazine for the 40 under 40 edition. You want to shoot us?”

Her eyes bounced between Candi, Jay, and Qamar who smiled hard with a head nod telling her to say yes. “40 under 40 millionaires?” she asked for clarification. She’d heard of the list and of course one of her dreams was to have a photoshoot for Black Excellence Magazine. It was one of the top publications for Black people.

“Yes ma’am. You are looking at one of the only Black marijuana companies in the world. Jay is the owner of Black Magic strains of weed,” Candice bragged, wagging her brows playfully.

“ We , Magic... we are the owners,” Jay corrected, calling Candi by the nickname he’d adorned her with when he first laid eyes on her. Said her big catlike eyes and beautiful dark skin reminded him of a magical black cat. She’d been his Magic ever since.

“I—I’m sure,” Siasia stuttered before licking her lips. “I’m sure they have their own photographers.”

“And I’m sure they’ll let us bring our own. Give me your number ‘cause you doing it.” Candi handed Siasia her phone, not willing to take no for an answer.

Doing as she was told, with shaky hands she punched in her contact information.

“I used to like girls too.” Candi pursed her lips, teasing the already flustered Siasia.

Qamar choked on his drink while Siasia plastered a fake smile on her face. Silk’s Meeting in My Bedroom started to play before they could dive deeper into Candi’s confession.

Jolene burst out the door with her arms in the air. “Aye!” She swayed her arms. “What y’all know ‘bout this shit?” she drunkenly asked while winding her hips in glee.

Jay pulled Candi into him further to sing in her ear. “You gotta sing to her, Qamar. That’s how I got my wife. They ain’t never had a singing ass, fine ass, paid ass nigga so you gotta show them why you the winning team.”

Candi giggled, loving when Jay’s non-singing self sung slow jams to her. It had been the catalyst of their relationship. The first time he did it, she fell hard. Now, she was spoiled with a nightly concert.

“Show her why us Geminis the got damn truth,” Jay spoke loudly over the music since Jolene had turned the music up.

Siasia loved his deep southern accent. It reminded her of her mother who had been born and raised in Alabama.

With a goofy smirk on his face, Qamar looked down at Siasia. Intertwining their fingers with just enough space between them for her to see his face. “You’re everything that I’ve been searching for. There’s no need for me to search no more.”

He pulled her hands from her face when she covered them to hide the extreme

blushing he had her doing.

Candi playfully punched Jay. “Nigga, you didn’t sing to me like that.”

“I mean that nigga sister is one the best singers of this decade, you didn’t think the talent stopped with her did you?” Jay laughed. “Qamar, my nigga, you making me look bad.”

Qamar ignored them as he continued to serenade Siasia, who was just as shocked as they were. His voice was sexy, with a beautiful tone that seemed to wrap around her like a warm embrace. If he wanted to, she knew he could take the music industry by storm. His presence was magnetic, and he was fine as hell, so the women would go crazy even if he stood on stage saying nothing. The way he poured his soul into the song made her heart race, and she couldn't help but wonder what other hidden talents he possessed. As the melody flowed, she saw glimpses of a future where his name was on everyone's lips, and his music was the soundtrack of their lives. However, she knew soccer was his passion.

Qamar's eyes never left Siasia’s as he sang, making her feel like she was the only person in the world. His voice carried a raw emotion that spoke to her soul, and she felt a connection that was undeniable. Everyone around them faded into the background, and all she could see was him. His confidence was intoxicating, and she found herself drawn to him in a way she couldn’t explain.

It felt beautiful in a frightening type of way because the truth was, they weren’t the only two people in their world. No matter how nice it felt, Qamar came with a gang of others—kids, family, and baby mamas. It was a lot and just thinking about it stressed her out.

Her heart begged to differ.

“I don’t have all the answers, mama.” Qamar sighed, hoping his words conveyed the depth of his uncertainty and vulnerability. He looked at Siasia, searching her eyes for understanding. With furrowed brows, Qamar laid his forehead on top of hers.

Emotions flittered across her pretty face. “That’s what I don’t believe. You have more answers than you know. You’re just allowing others to dictate what you believe is right or wrong. It’s your life. You gotta live it for you and your kids, fuck what everyone else has to say.”

Her gentle touch eased his running mind. “You say that like you gone be beside me.”

Siasia pressed her lips into his. Everything in her wanted to be beside him for the next chapter in his life, but realistically, it wouldn’t work. Her life was far too complicated while his was chaotic—it wouldn’t work no matter how much she wanted it to. “In another life, maybe, but right now, I gotta get myself together.”

Her pushback made the caress of her finger felt like sandpaper against his skin.

“See, that’s where you wrong at. You gone be right beside me, floating into the stars on a ship made out of love. You ain’t leaving me, mama.” Mischievously, he smiled before snaking his tongue into her mouth.

A moan escaped her, mingling with the sounds of the music.

Candi cleared her throat, bringing them back down from wherever they had journeyed to.

That was the issue with dealing with men like Qamar. It was just too easy to forget your real life. A life where shit was all kinds of fucked-up. But as she looked into his eyes, she wondered if maybe, just maybe, they could find a way to make it work despite the chaos.

“ A nd that’s the damn problem, you be so ready to baby him up like he’s not a grown ass man,” Solar fussed with Frenchy on her hip. He was a Velcro baby— attached to her hip.

French kissed his son on the cheek. “Your mama always trippin’ out on me. She don’t love me like you love your daddy.”

Frenchy laughed while still holding onto his mama for dear life. When it came to choosing a parent, his choice was biased. French was team Qamar and after the family call about the events that transpired twenty-four hours ago, he was clearly the only one. The women were ready to nail him to the cross while French understood his baby boy’s angle. For so long everyone did everything for Qamar and now that he’d made mistakes, they expected him to make perfect decisions the first time around—lesson to be learned as quick as the infraction had been made. It made no sense to French, so he was going to bat for his first love.

Kissing her teeth, she pushed French away. “I’m just saying that was some foul ass shit Qamar did to Janay and the other girl. If I was either one of them, I would still be on that nigga head.”

“You saying that like if one of them would’ve hit your baby you wasn’t going to try to kill one of them.”

Solar didn’t respond because it was true. When it came to the people in her family she was a beat ass first, ask questions later type of girl. Especially for her little

brother.

Solar and French were at home waiting for Qamar to come by before he headed to the private airport to take Siasia and Noodle back to Lynn Beach.

“What you think about that girl, anyway?” Solar laid Frenchy down who had started to doze off just that quick.

“I think she cool.” French shrugged because he didn’t know Siasia like that. After the fight at Tiny’s house, Qamar kept her and her sister close. They hadn’t been back around the family since.

Solar cut her eyes at him annoyed. “You think it’s a good idea for him to be jumping from girl to girl? Like, he’s been on the prowl since he started fuckin’... I just don’t want him to be another stereotype with all these kids by different women.”

“I think y’all be too focused on the wrong shit when it comes to baby boy. He trying, Solar, damn!”

“Trying to do what, be the next Future Hendrix?”

French caught himself from laughing since Solar wanted to be the next queen of comedy. Instead he mused her head. “Y’all be on my boy too hard.”

“No we don’t. He just needs to focus on the shit he should be focusing on and leave these little girls alone.” Solar’s mouth twisted. “I can tell that girl don’t have much going on. I mean who flies to a city with her little sister with a man who just had a baby?”

Qamar stood at the front door with Siasia and Noodle beside him. Siasia was embarrassed to hear what had just been said about her but she couldn’t deny that her

popping up with Qamar did look weird. To have her impressionable sister with her didn't make the situation any better. It was an inner battle she had already been dealing with and hearing it from another person's mouth didn't make her feel any better.

"Damn, Solar, I ain't know you was so fuckin' judgmental," Qamar sneered, smoke coming from his head.

Solar wasn't one to apologize so she didn't. "I'm just saying what everybody else was thinking." She waved him off. "That's why you need to start knocking on the door instead of just coming in people's houses."

"Nah, Solar, you wrong," French agreed with Qamar.

Her eyes bucked. "I'm wrong?" She pointed at her chest.

French shook his head. "Come on in so we can talk, though, baby boy."

Qamar shook his head. "I'm good, French. I ain't never been pressed to be somewhere that I feel disrespected."

"Oh please." Solar rolled her eyes. "You want to be grown but still lean on us to clean up your shit. Yea, I ain't got time for it today."

"Did I ask y'all to clean up my shit?" Qamar huffed. "I ain't never asked y'all to do shit for me! Let's make that clear."

"But you didn't stop us either. You have two kids but don't have a place of your own. Your schooling is paid for and yet you still complain about having to go. You are a fuckin' child that needs to grow up and fast." Solar walked up to Siasia. "And you seem like you have too much baggage to be running behind a little boy. What you



think because he lays good dick that he's a man? Oh, let me guess, he buys you shit too, huh?"

Siasia's eyes got wet but she wasn't going for Solar talking to her crazy. Stepping up, they were almost chest to chest. "Watch your mouth in front of my sister. I'm not disrespecting you, so don't disrespect me. Maybe if y'all let him make his own decisions, he wouldn't fall in line and follow behind y'all like the lost little boy you claim him to be."

"Siasia, come on." Noodle tugged on her, trying to pull her back towards the front door.

Siasia was in her zone and wasn't trying to hear nothing. Instead of listening to her sister, she snatched her arm from Noodle.

Solar sized her up. "Little girl, I advise you to back up. I ain't Janay."

"Chill out, Solar, for real." French yanked her behind him. "You doing too much."

"And you always babying him up. He has two kids!" She held up two finger like they didn't know how to count. "It's time he becomes a man and man the fuck up!" Solar yelled.

Qamar fake laughed while nodding his head. The pain was evident in his eyes. Listening to the vile shit his sister spewed almost shattered his heart. Then to hear her be so rude while saying nasty things about and to Siasia, he was on fire.

"You really trying to stand her acting like your shit don't stank? And wonder why French ain't in no rush to take you down that aisle."

French's neck snapped towards him. "Aye, baby boy, you getting too close to the

edge.”

“Nah, I got some shit to say.” Qamar waved French out of the way. “You around here passing judgement on her when you wasn’t so clean once upon a time either. I remember watching niggas sneak in and out of the house when Luna used to leave us by ourselves. I knew that nasty ass grown man was your baby daddy but I let you rock out how you rocked out. And you around here talking about I need to grow up when you ain’t so grown your-damn-self. I don’t blame French for making you just another baby mama. You ain’t ready to be no body’s wife.”

Solar’s mouth fell open. “Nigga, fuck you!”

“Yea, fuck me but French you might want to get a DNA test for Apollo. I’m out.”

Qamar grabbed Siasia’s hand but stumbled forward from the blow Solar sent to his back. “Bitch!”

Siasia grabbed his face just as quick as the word shot from his mouth like a bullet. “No! Qamar, that is your fuckin’ sister you don’t do her like that,” she fussed, almost breaking down when she noticed the tears in his eyes.

French tossed Solar over his shoulder.

“No, let me go, Adrian!” Solar kicked and punched into French’s back. All she could see was black. How dare Qamar tell her dirty little secret like that? They were blood and she never thought she’d see the day they fought the way they were.

As kids they went back and forth but it never got that bad. Words that couldn’t be taken back flew across the room, wounding the other so deep, it might never heal.

“I bet you need me before I ever need you, little boy !” Solar hollered. “Let’s see how

you take care of those kids and that bitch when the family ain't funding you!"

Like an evil villain, Qamar laughed at her. "If you think I don't have my own motion, you don't know me, sister. Y'all ain't funded shit since I was eighteen besides the education y'all want me to get. Fuck you and worry about telling French about how much of a hoe you are and how you can't keep your legs closed when he's having a mental breakdowns or feeling like he ain't enough for you. You don't fuckin' deserve him!"

Like a gun went off, Solar clutched her chest where the bullet pierced her. His words hurt more than she thought words ever could. "Oh," she groaned at how fast her heart raced in her chest. All the breath in her had been knocked out of her. Whatever fight she had, disappeared listening to the little boy who she'd protected since birth broke her down like a fraction.

Tears welled up in her eyes, blurring her vision. She could barely see the face of the boy she had loved and nurtured, the one who now stood before her with such cold, unforgiving eyes. Each word he had uttered was like a dagger, slicing through her heart with unrelenting precision. She wanted to reach out, to pull him into her arms and make everything right, but her limbs felt like lead, weighed down by the crushing feel of betrayal.

"Fuck you," she whispered, her voice trembling with the weight of her sorrow. "Over a bitch? You break me down over a girl you barely even know?" Her mind raced, trying to grasp onto any fragment of hope, any sign that this was just a terrible dream. But the reality of his harsh words echoed in her ears.

The room seemed to close in around her, the walls pressing in as if to suffocate her. Her breaths came in ragged gasps, each one a struggle against the tidal wave of emotions threatening to drown her. She had always been strong, always been the protector, but now, in this moment, she felt utterly powerless. The bond she had

cherished, the love she had poured into him, seemed to shatter into a million pieces, leaving her standing in the wreckage of her own heart.

“Get the fuck out, Qamar!” French boomed. “Before I get on your ass. You out of fuckin’ line. Its family over any and everything and you do her like this?”

He loved Qamar, he’d been his first test run as a father but when it came to Solar, no one was above her. Listening to her heart shatter turned his blood into rage and if he didn’t want to put his hands on Qamar, it was best he leave. And fast.

“ Me? I ain’t do shit. She started it and for the first time, she couldn’t finish it. Tend to your baby mama , we out.”

Watching the showdown, Siasia had tears running down her face. It was all the proof she needed to leave Qamar alone. If he could break his own sister down with words, she knew he wouldn’t hold back on her if she pissed him off bad enough. That and she hated to be the divide between a beautiful family like the one he had. He couldn’t see it now, but being loved and having support was all she wished for. She locked her hand into Noodle’s, who was just as emotional as she was. Siasia couldn’t see herself going back and forth with her sister like that. All she wanted to do was get back to Lynn Beach and get her shit together. If the impromptu trip didn’t teach her anything else, it gave her hope of achieving her dreams.

Siasia felt a deep ache in her chest as she watched the siblings tear each other apart. Her heart ached for Solar, who seemed to been a pillar of strength, now crumbling under the weight of her brother's harsh words.

Noodle squeezed her hand, a silent gesture of solidarity. They had both experienced their fair share of family drama, but nothing quite like this. Siasia glanced at Noodle, seeing the same resolve mirrored in her sister's eyes. That and the love her sister had for Qamar seemed to be a battleground for the ten-year-old. They were no longer

welcomed and probably never would be.

For the first time ever, the thought of returning to Lynn Beach filled her with a sense of calm. It was a place where she could breathe, where she could rebuild herself without the shadows of others' conflicts looming over her.

As they turned to leave, Siasia took one last look at Solar and French. She hoped they would one day realize the value of the family they had, the love and support that she longed for but never truly got.

The trip had been a whirlwind of emotions, but it had also been a catalyst for change. She was ready to embrace the future, to chase her dreams with renewed vigor and hope.

Qamar's heart and head hung heavily, knowing not only had he created a tear in their infamous to the moon pledge, he also wouldn't be taking Siasia beyond the stars. She didn't have to say anything, he felt her pulling away from him with each step they took to get back in the car. Even Noodle avoided looking him in the eyes.

Inside the car, he inhaled and exhaled before starting the engine. The light she seemed to always find in his eyes was gone when he stared at her. "Don't give up on us, Siasia."

"Qamar, you have a lot you need to deal with. We're just a distraction and a way for you not to face what's really going on with you. After what I just seen, I don't see you having any issues moving forward with living your life the way you want. Here's your chance to show everyone that you know what's best for you . Besides, I got my own shit to figure out."

Siasia leaned back into the seat before staring out the window. As far as she was concerned there was nothing else left to say. She enjoyed him but it was time for both

of them to face reality and figure their own shit out.

“ N oodle!” Esmeray’s raspy voice crooned through the iPad. “Where you go?” Sounding like someone’s mama.

Noodle had her iPad propped up while she online shopped on Siasia’s computer. It was the middle of the week, and she was on spring break just chilling around the house. She didn’t really hang with any of the neighborhood kids so she was usually in her shared room on some kind of device.

“Noodle!” Esmeray pouted, ready to call her daddy so he could make it right.

“Es, I’m here. You gotta stop whining so much,” Noodle scolded, hating when her little baby threw a tantrum.

The distance between Siasia and Qamar couldn’t keep Noodle and Esmeray apart if they tried. After a few days of trying to respect her sister’s broken heart, she was back locked into the world of Qamar with no shame. When Noodle loved, she loved for eternity and her bond with Esmeray was rock solid.

“Okay, Noodle.” Esmeray pouted, always ready to obey whatever her Noodle told her.

Siasia burst into the room with a frown that seemed to be permanent these days. She looked from Noodle to the closet catching an attitude immediately. “Didn’t I tell you to go through your old clothes and see what you can wear from last summer?”

Siasia had been stressed about clothing a constantly growing Noodle. The seasons were changing and although it never got too cold in Lynn Beach, shorts and tank tops wasn't appropriate during the cooler months. Now that it was really starting to warm up, Siasia knew Noodle would need new summer clothes. It was cool— just another thing added onto her always growing to-do list.

She wouldn't complain too much since it seemed Stacy and Cynthia had gotten their shit together. There had been no eviction notices or past due bills coming in the mail over the last few weeks. It had to be God giving her a break.

Siasia hadn't worked the club and was trying to gain new clients by running a promotion for thirty-minute shoots. So far, five people booked her and she prayed she got a few more seeing as Noodle needed a few new clothes.

"I'm ordering clothes online now. What you think about these shorts?" Noodle looked up at Siasia with big eyes, tanned skin, and a big bun sitting on top of her head.

"How the hell are you ordering shit online? Who's card do you have?"

Noodle passed the black card with gold writing to Siasia like it was no big deal. Grabbing it, from the name alone, the card felt like it weighed a ton knowing it was unlimited.

"Did you steal this, Noodle?" Siasia's mouth opened as she glared at her sister in disbelief. "I know damn well you didn't so tell me how you got it?"

"He gave it to me," Noodle responded. "Like that night when we left the park, Qamar handed me his card told me to use it every day if I wanted to because he knew you wouldn't."



Siasia stood there, her brow furrowed in confusion. A whirlwind of thoughts raced through her mind, each one more chaotic than the rest. She placed her hand on her heart to make sure she wasn't imagining the pounding. Pounding like a drum it fueled the fire of her frustrations. Qamar just wouldn't allow her to find her own journey in a galaxy unknown to man.

"Why won't he just leave us alone," she mumbled under her breath, clenching the card in her hand. A storm of confusion and anger brewed in her head.

But like all things attached to Qamar—like the sun breaking through the dark clouds that seemed to have followed her for a lifetime, thoughts of him warmed her skin and spread all over her body, softening the scowl she'd been carrying around for weeks. A smile broke through at the thought of Qamar never abandoning her even when she'd ran off on him time and time again.

"You okay, SiSi?" Esmeray's deep voice reminded her that wetness had somehow coated her face.

Siasia wiped her face before confessing, "Yes, Es."

"You not mad at my daddy anymore?" Esmeray eyes blinked through the iPad's screen.

Noodle snickered.

Knowing how her daddy told her to stay out grown people's business, she hurried to snitch. "My mama fussed at him. I heard her say it," she whispered the last part, hoping Malaysia wasn't close enough to hear.

That pulled a light chuckle from Siasia. She and Malaysia had kept in touch since they'd met. Siasia thought Malaysia was a vibe and a very sweet girl. The

intimidation she'd felt in the beginning had long ago vanished because Malaysia wasn't worried about Qamar and vice versa.

"And Qamar really said it was okay for you to use his card?" She needed to make sure, so she asked once again.

Noodle wagged her head frantically. "Mhm. And I been paying the bills with it so Mama and Daddy won't fight anymore."

Sudden anger lit her eyes. Just when she was thankful that her parents seemed to be getting their shit together, she found out that it was her ten-year-old sister keeping the house afloat. If she didn't love her mother, she'd be on her ass like her name was Stacy. The love for her mama ran deep. So deep that as she stormed into the living room to cuss her out, she stalled looking at the cast still on her mother's arm and the black eye that seemed to be permanent.

"Hey, baby, you look nice. Where you going with that fine boy that ruffed Stacy up?" Cynthia smiled but it didn't reach her eyes while only one side seemed to lift at all.

Cynthia had been sitting in the living room with the TV on the local news channel. She'd been in a daze so the TV watched her. Even when he wasn't there, she never sat in Stacy's recliner, unlike Siasia who made it her business to sit in it every day since she had clearly been the king of the house.

Siasia choked on sorrow. The sight of her mother never got easy. "Ally is supposed to be picking me up soon. You good?" She inched closer to take a seat beside her mama.

Another forced smile.

"I'm going to leave soon, SiSi," she confessed. "I'm serious this time," she promised, placing her hand on top of her daughter's, hoping Siasia could feel her sincerity. "I'm

just afraid he's going to take Noodle from you. You know his ugly ass been talking back to her no-good ass mama?"

Siasia shook her head, no.

"Mhm." She tightened her lips. "He think I don't know but I do." If you ever get a chance to leave this place, do it and never look back."

"But—" Siasia searched her mother's eyes, hating the blackness around the left one.

Stacy was left-handed. The saying couldn't have been true because he wasn't smart at all.

"No buts. I want you to live the life I never dreamed of living. All I wanted to do was find a boy, fall in love, and have you. You are the best thing that ever happened to me, and I know that don't mean shit right now but I need you to know that."

"Mama, why you talking like you going somewhere?" Siasia scraped the back of her hand across her face. "We're going to live together. You just gotta get the courage to leave."

Cynthia looked past Siasia. Her head swung as she took in the dingy trailer. It lacked love and smelled of pain. It wasn't a home she should've been raising her girl in.

"That boy been paying these bills so Stacy been having the time of his life. Do you love him? If you don't you should. I saw the way he looked at you. It reminded me of my first love."

"My daddy?" Siasia sat up, hoping to get some information on the man who's DNA she carried.

Cynthia waved her off. “Girl, hell no. It was a man named Pete. Well they call him Big Pete now. He was fine as wine. We called him the heartbreak kid because he’d make you fall in love—love you back too then he’d be gone in the wind. Oh, how I wish I never left Alabama.” Cynthia’s eyes glazed over, lost in a wistful daydream. Memories of hot summer nights and sweet, carefree days danced in her mind, each moment a cherished relic when life was simple.

Twisting her body towards her mama, she smiled. “We can go back to Alabama. I don’t even remember it anymore.”

“Hunny, ain’t nothing in Alabama for you. You need a big city and a big city man. Like that boy. What’s his name?”

“Qamar.”

“Mhm.” Cynthia chewed on her lip. “He looks like a Qamar.”

Siasia snickered. “Ma,” she groaned.

“Girl, I’m serious. I am leaving soon, and we’ll be happy again. Until then, enjoy the life you have because in the blink of an eye, you won’t even recognize what used to be.”

Cynthia turned her ear to the window. “I think your friend just pulled up. You know she blasts that music like she going deaf.”

Siasia sat at a sun-drenched table in the corner of the bustling restaurant, the light filtering through the large windows casting a warm glow on her skin. The air was filled with the tantalizing aroma of spices and grilled meats, a feast for the senses that momentarily distracted her from the tension simmering beneath the surface. Her friend, Ally, animatedly recounted a story, her laughter ringing like music, but

Siasia's attention drifted, her gaze flickering toward Champ, who sat across from them with a sneaky smile plastered on her face.

Siasia was trying her hardest to swallow the look of disgust on her face. She was surprised to see Champ when she went outside to get in the car with Ally. Had she known, she would've rather sat at home allowing the TV to watch her and her mama. Champ was beautifully annoying. Her brown skin illuminated under the sunlight that cast a false glow of happiness on their table. Every now and then Champ would pull the conversation back to gossip blogs that had been having a field day with Qamar and his pick of baby mamas.

As she stirred her salad, the crisp greens and vibrant tomatoes seemed to mirror her mixed emotions—fresh yet tangled. She forced a smile, nodding along as Ally gushed about some recent sexcapade, but inside, Siasia felt a knot of frustration tighten.

“Right? Like bitch please.” Ally playfully rolled her eyes, turning to Siasia, her eyes sparkling with excitement. Siasia plastered on a smile, but her thoughts were elsewhere, wrestling with the annoyance that Champ's presence brought. Yet, as the sunlight streamed in, illuminating the laughter and camaraderie around her, she couldn't help but feel a flicker of warmth. Maybe, just maybe, this lunch could be more than just a test of her patience.

“But look at this.” Champ pushed her phone in their faces. Of course it was an image of Qamar, Janay, and his new baby. “The fans be on Ken Barbie's neck about how she seem to only post good shit about that family. I heard she's Javen's side bitch or something like that.”

With one leg kicked from under the plush yet lightweight covers, Qamar lay on his back with his eyes closed, teetering on the edge of wakefulness and dreams. The night had been long, filled with Belinay's tears and playful babbles. She was seven weeks old, and they were all in Lynn Beach—him, Janay, and their precious little girl.

"Qamar!" Janay's voice pierced the morning silence, causing him to groan. He could hear her bare feet patter across the hardwood floor, down the hall, and into his room as she aggressively pushed the door open.

"I know you ain't still sleep. Get up so you can get her. I have class in..." She glanced at the watch on her wrist. "...thirty minutes."

"Why you can't get ready earlier and drop her off at daycare?" He looked up at her with tired eyes, barely able to keep them open.

"Because what she got a daddy for?" Janay's neck snaked as she retorted.

The tension between them was palpable. They were in a strange place—she was still pissed about what had happened over a month ago, and he walked around like he'd lost his best friend. Janay still tried her hand at seducing him, attempting to show him that being together was better for Belinay, but Qamar wasn't trying to hear any of that.

He still hadn't talked to Siasia, and Luna had been on his head about what went down

with him and Solar. It felt like a tectonic plate had shifted in his world, leaving him disoriented and unsure of how to get things back on track. The weight of unresolved issues hung heavy in the air, and Qamar couldn't shake the feeling that he was standing on the precipice of something monumental, yet he had no idea how to navigate the landscape of his fractured life.

Qamar squeezed his eyes together while pinching the bridge of his nose to stop the not so nice things that wanted to come out of his mouth. Janay had been moving like her end goal was to stress him out. Like she was trying to get some payback for him not choosing her when she should've been easy going seeing as Belinay wasn't his seed biologically. No matter how bad she pissed him off, he wasn't going to throw that fact up in her face.

Instead of saying all the shit he wanted to say, he stretched his hands out to receive his happy baby. Belinay didn't look like him but felt like his every time she was in his arms. Over the last few weeks, she'd gotten her weight up and was a short and juicy baby with fat jaws that he loved to kiss.

"Hey, Daddy baby," he cooed, nuzzling his nose into her fat neck. She whined a little. "I know. That's your mama always making all that noise early in the morning."

Janay tightened her lips. "That's cause your daddy always trying to play on my top," she said, pulling out her phone to snap a picture of Qamar holding Belinay on his bare chest.

"I thought you had class," Qamar called her bluff.

He'd noticed how many pictures Janay took and how much she posted them on her social media. He wasn't into social media like that and only got on to post every now and then because of his NIL deals. Lately, he'd been on there to stalk Siasia's page where she only posted her work. Anything else he wanted to know about her, he had

to get it out of Noodle.

“I do and I’m leaving. Please get her there in a timely manner. Ain’t no need to be paying all that money for the daycare just for her not to be there.”

“Are you paying it?” Qamar gave her a deadpan stare.

Janay only rolled her eyes before stomping off. He had been so difficult since she’d been back in Lynn Beach. If she had it her way, she wouldn’t finish college and go on to be a kept baby mama to a professional soccer player. However, her mama nor Qamar weren’t trying to hear that.

As soon as his front door shut, his phone rung which annoyed him even more. Seeing it was Luna calling, he answered knowing if he didn’t she’d hop on the jet and be at his house.

“Yea?” he answered, rolling over to lay Belinay down since she’d dozed off.

“Don’t answer the phone like that,” Luna fussed. “What you doing anyway?”

“Still in the bed. Belinay right here.”

“Mm,” she huffed. “So that’s why your coach been calling me saying you ain’t been to practice or call... what’s going on with you, Qamar?”

Qamar exhaled heavily, regretting answering her call. “Luna, I just ain’t been feeling it.”

“Yea, your spirit all fucked-up. You gotta make shit right with your sister and French.”



“I don’t think one has anything to do with the other.”

“Clearly, you don’t know how to think because if you did you’d have your ass in class and at practice. What you think gone happen if you just let everything fall to the wayside?” Luna asked, hoping he’d think about her question before spewing something crazy. He’d been unhinged lately and she hated that for him.

Listening to Luna made his head ache. Qamar was tired of everyone telling him to man up then turn around and treat him like a child. “Look, what you need, Luna?” he asked, feeling like the conversation wasn’t going anywhere.

“What I need?” Her voice rose a few octaves. “What I need is for you to not waste all that money I’ve spent for you to go to one of the top colleges with a soccer program. I need for you to pull your head out of your ass and handle your business. If you want to give it all up, don’t beat around the bush, just fuckin’ do it!”

“What you think I’m trying to do?” he yelled, startling Belinay into a cry. Immediately, he went to sooth her. Qamar rubbed his temples, feeling the weight of Luna’s words pressing down on him. His mind raced, thinking about the countless nights he’d spent on the field, the sacrifices, the dreams they both had. He knew she was right, but the pressure felt insurmountable. “Luna, it’s not that simple. Everything’s just... it’s too much right now.”

“You really so love struck over that damn girl that you’re ready to give everything up because she don’t want you?” Luna couldn’t believe the audacity of him.

She’d taken care of him, made a better life for him, and he was ready to throw everything down the drain because his heart got broken.

Luna's tone softened slightly, sensing his struggle. “I get it, Qamar. Life’s throwing you curveballs, but you gotta swing back. You’re stronger than this. And you’re not

alone. We all want to see you succeed, but you gotta want it too.”

He sighed, feeling a mix of frustration and gratitude. “I hear you, Luna. I do. I just need some time to figure things out.”

“Time’s ticking, Qamar. But I believe in you. Just remember that,” Luna said, her voice filled with a blend of concern and hope.

“Thanks, sis. I’ll try to get my head straight,” he replied, feeling a small spark of determination ignite within him.

“Good. Now go take care of Belinay and get your ass to practice,” she said, her tone lightening up.

“Will do,” Qamar said, ending the call. He looked down at his sleeping daughter, feeling a renewed sense of purpose. It was time to get his life back on track, for his kids and for himself.

Qamar checked the time on his phone, knowing he promised Coach he’d come in to talk to him. No matter how in over his head he got, he never wanted to waste people’s time. It was the one thing you couldn’t get back. Yet, rolling out of bed was easier said than done.

“God, I don’t know what you got in store for me, but I’m ready,” he announced with his eyes closed and his heart vulnerable.

Once he’d done his hygiene, he got Belinay ready before dropping her off at daycare. His next stop was the student athlete center where he knew Coach was going to get in his ass. Qamar knew he deserved it and wouldn’t give much pushback when he told him off.

Qamar, tall in stature and with a scowl etched deeply on his face, trekked the halls of the athletic building with heavy steps. His heart pounded in his chest, each beat echoing his worry about what his coach was going to say. He'd missed almost a week's worth of practice since he'd been back in Lynn Beach. After he dropped Siasia and Noodle off, he hopped back on the jet to take his ass home, where he hid away in his mama's house, seeking solace in familiar surroundings. Now, it was time for him to face the music.

The fluorescent lights overhead flickered slightly, casting an unforgiving glare on the polished floors. Qamar's mind raced, replaying the moments he spent at home, the conversations with his mom, and the quiet nights where he tried to drown his thoughts in anything but soccer. He couldn't avoid this confrontation forever. The weight of his absence bore heavily on him, not just for his team but for himself.

As he approached the coach's office, the murmurs of his teammates practicing in the gym echoed through the corridor, a stark reminder of what he'd been missing. He paused for a moment, taking a deep breath, trying to steady the turmoil inside him. The door loomed large and imposing, a barrier between his current state of disarray and the disciplined athlete he once was. He raised his hand, hesitating for just a second before knocking firmly. It was time to own up to his actions and find a way to get back on track.

"Qamar Moony," Coach Daniels announced Qamar as he wasn't familiar with his own name. "You kept your word," he said, surprised.

"Always," Qamar mumbled before helping himself to the empty seat at the front of Coach's desk.

His office was a testament of teams hard work, success, and dedication. The walls were covered with framed pictures of picture-perfect moments captured at the height of the team's success. Championship banners hung with pride, each one representing

a season of the best team in the league. There had once been a time when Qamar's eyes grew with pride when looking at the accomplishments. He even had a spot on the wall.

Coach Daniels' wooden desk seemed larger than Qamar last remembered, and it swallowed him whole as he looked across it, trying to read Coach's facial expressions. On the surface was a stack of paper that he glanced at and saw his name on one while Coach Daniel continued to type on the laptop that sat in front of him.

Qamar massaged the back of his head, giving his eyes time to look around the office more. The white board on wheels that Coach used to write out plays during practice was off to the side covered in diagrams, notes, Xs and Os that represented each player. The sound of Coach Daniel clearing his throat pulled Qamar's eyes across the cherry wood desk that seemed larger than the sea.

"I take it that was your last championship with us?" He turned his head to look at the picture that showcased Qamar holding a trophy with a huge smile on his face.

Qamar shifted his weight in the chair, his fingers tapping an erratic rhythm against his thighs. His eyes darted around the room, avoiding eye contact as he swallowed hard, the sound seeming loud in the space that was both massive and too damn small. The air he'd told Siasia he sometimes struggled to breathe in became diluted with self-destruction and doubt. He opened his mouth to respond but nothing came out.

"You ready to go pro. I can see it in your eyes—I've saw it in your eyes the first day you walked into practice."

Finding his voice after he'd wet his lips, Qamar made eye contact with his coach. "I'm trying to do the right thing but I got two kids and my family stay on me about growing up while ordering my every step like a fuckin' child." Relief washed over him as the words spilled out. "I know I'm good—better than a lot of pro soccer

players, all I need is to go up for the draft.”

Daniels leaned back in his leather executive office chair. The corners of his mouth lifted. “I’m going to miss you but I know you’re going to do great things. I entered you into the draft and have a buddy who wants to come check you out—Arkansas Arrows. Now, this guy runs a tight ship—likes his players to not be in the limelight. Real lowkey type of shit, if you know what I’m saying.”

Qamar’s head nodded, reading between the lines. “Thank you, Coach.”

“Don’t thank me, some fella named French called in that favor. Now, I know you’re excited to go pro, but I need you to still show up to every practice and class until further notice, Qamar,” Coach added stipulations.

“I gotcha.” He reached out to slap hands with his coach before trekking out the room with renewed motivation.

His family wasn’t going to agree with his moves but at the same time, like Siasia told him, it was his life to live however he saw fit.

Siasia.

He missed her so much. And if everything went the way he wanted it to go, he’d only have her to thank for seeing him deeper than anyone else ever had. He’d thank her for being vulnerable with him even when she thought her shit was just too dark for him to witness.

In a Siasia induced daze, he walked into the gym where his teammates were.

“King Qamar,” Drake called out, rushing him with a dap that ended in a brotherly hug. “New baby almost took you out, didn’t it?” he joked.

“Man, life almost took me out of it.” Qamar looked around, nodding to the others who spoke to him.

The gym used to give him a sense of peace but now, it was just a reminder that he wasn’t doing what he felt was right. Of course, he had to keep his body in check but the school gym was no longer the sanctuary it once was.

Drake looked around before pulling Qamar off to the side. “Aye, you heard what happened with your friend?”

“What friend?” Qamar asked perplexed. Drake was always clowning so he didn’t know if this was one of his jokes or what.

“Uh, ol’ girl from the party.”

“Nigga, what girl from the party? Look, Drake you my boy and all but I really ain’t in the mood for this shit right now.” Qamar stared him in the face, warning him to get to the point or move the fuck around. It was no hard feelings but like he’d stated he just wasn’t in the mood.

Drake cocked his head to the side. “Nigga, ol’ girl form the party that night. The pretty, thick, chick who Brenden was all over until you went and swoop her up.”

As if a light bulb went off in his head, Qamar knew exactly who Drake was talking about. He’d been so wrapped up in Siasia that he never disclosed her name to his friend—which was probably a good thing. Drake was cool but he gossiped a little too much for Qamar’s liking.

“Nah, what happened?” he asked.

Drake whistled for dramatic effects. “I don’t know all the details but I heard Brenden

told his pops some shit so now she can't even enroll here—like never ,” Drake put emphasis on the word never.

“Nigga, what?” Qamar’s face bunched. He was confused and no understanding what his friend was telling him. “How the hell Brenden stop somebody from enrolling?”

“That boy pops is the dean, Qamar... bruh you really need to stay in school.”

Dean Bolden being Brenden’s father must’ve slipped through his orientation packet because he didn’t know that. Maybe because before now, the details didn’t matter to him. But when it came to Siasia, everything mattered. He dug in his shorts for his phone to dial her number. The phone trilled but there wasn’t an answer. Next, he went to his Find My app to locate her. Ever since the night of Noodle not being able to get in touch with her, he activated the location since they were still on his phone plan.

“Damn, she’s here,” he blurted, taking off to her location but before he could get out of the athletic center fast enough, he heard her voice.

“ Y ou nasty cracker!” Siasia yelled, spittle flying out of her mouth as she charged at Brenden, ready to knock the smug smirk off his face.

Dodging her like the athlete he was, Brenden laughed to his friends. “What’s wrong, baby?” he taunted.

One of the players held Siasia back. “Move!” She tried to get around him. “Brenden you little dick bastard!” she hollered, only seeing red as she started swinging on whoever was trying their best to keep her from knocking Brenden’s head off his shoulder.

Brenden was a pitcher for the baseball team that was comprised mostly of white boys which didn’t make the situation better. As the guy held her all she could see was a million different versions of the white-faced boy taunting her—dangling her future in her face.

Brenden continued to laugh and mock her by calling her baby and grabbing himself. “Oh its little?” He humped the air, gaining more laughter.

Siasia’s blood boiled like the hot water her mama always told her boil before mopping the floor. One time she even burned her finger by testing its temperature. Now she wished she had some to throw on him and all the minion versions of him.

With blonde hair and blue eyes, Brenden wasn’t a slouch in the looks department but he carried an air of entitlement around as if it were a personality trait. In hindsight,



Siasia now knew it very much was all his personality was based off.

“Let her go, Zack, so I can shove this little dick down her throat for old times’ sake,” Brenden laughed, pulling a deep dark vile taste from her belly to her throat.

“What did I do to you! Why would you tell your daddy to deny my admission indefinitely?” Siasia had gone to the financial building to use Qamar’s card to pay for her tuition for the next three years. The way she saw it, he had broken her heart and was galivanting around with his new baby and her mama the least he could do was pay for her schooling. But just like before, God snatched away her happiness. She had no idea what she did to piss him off. Or maybe it was the ancestors she’d made mad when she laid down with a wet dog like Brenden.

Imagine her surprise when Ms. Aaliyah told her she had a refund check with her name on it for the tuition she’d already paid and a letter of refusal.

“I have been trying to get in touch with you, but the number on file is no longer in service.”

“Okay, what’s up Ms. Rucker?” Siasia was confused by the look on the financial aid’s face.

Rucker directed her through the doors to her office that was small but perfect for her. “Have a seat, Siasia.”

“Um, you’re scaring me. What happened?” Siasia’s leg bounced and she heard her heart beating in her ears.

“I don’t know how to say this but ? —”

“Just say it.”

“Siasia, your admission has been denied.”

“For what?!” Siasia jumped up with rage. “I haven’t done anything.”

“I know.” She stood to try to get Siasia to sit back down and lower her voice. “I know but Mr. Bolden has denied you admission indefinitely.”

The memory felt like a sick dream as she replayed in her head over and over. Each time, seeing more red. Now, she was out for blood. Zack wasn’t trying to hear anything his team captain said. No matter how much he wanted to stay on Brenden’s good side, he wasn’t going to let a man hit on a woman. That was too close to home for Zack’s liking.

“Just chill, bro.”

“Oh, you trying to be nice, hoping to get some of that sweet pink between her legs?” Brenden continued his mocking.

Siasia was furious at being so vulnerable to him. Like he was a king and she was nothing but a peasant begging for scraps. Her nostrils flared with fury, heat and rage coating her skin—burning her from the inside out.

“But why?” she croaked, her anger turning into pain. “What did I do to you?”

“You denied me, don’t you remember?” The sight of her cracking and tears brimming her slanted eyes did nothing to make Brenden feel bad. His feelings were quite the opposite.

Brenden’s chest pushed out and his head rose to the sky. “There’s only one way you can fix this, baby.” He tsked.

Desperate and broken she looked at him, her eyes asking what she needed to do because Siasia really wanted to be the best photographer in the world and didn't feel she could do that without school and the connections that came with it.

Brenden licked his thin, pink lips. His devilish blue eyes turned to slits as his hands panned out to his team. "Seeing that I am the captain of this team it's only right that I treat my boys to some of the finest pussy in the city."

Siasia fell to the floor unable to stand any longer. Feeling lower than she ever felt, she looked up at him. Then, she swung her eyes around the room, taking in their smirks and grins. Some of the boys were even rubbing their dicks through their athletic clothes. She went to speak but was cut off by his voice. The voice connected to the eyes that told her he had all the answers.

"Get up!" Qamar's voice boomed through the room.

Lynn Beach was a huge campus with a lot of high price donors, so the athletic building was big enough for each sport to have their own workout rooms. It didn't take him long to track her exact location.

Slowly and seeing red, Qamar stepped closer to Siasia while his teammates followed behind him. "Get up, mama." His voice calm and low while his hand stretched to hers to lift her up.

"Oh, y'all want some of her too?" Brenden smirked. "I guess I could be a good host and let you get the leftovers."

As the words left his mouth, his head hit the floor, bouncing like a ball.

"Qamar!" Siasia snapped too, trying to grab him away from Brenden knowing what the consequences were. "Stop!" she screamed.

Qamar let loose on Brenden before looking around and free picking another one of the baseball players.

“Help me!” She looked at the soccer players who’d barged in with Qamar. “Don’t let him do this,” she continued to yell, trying her hardest to get Qamar off his third victim.

It was no use because he was in hell, doing the devil’s bidding.

Before she knew what was happening, there was a full-on brawl happening with Brenden still laid out on the floor barely moving. The gym echoed with chaos as the sounds of sneakers squeaking against the polished floor and the thud of bodies colliding filled the air. Qamar’s heart raced, fueled by adrenaline and a fierce protectiveness that surged through him like wildfire. He had always been the calm one, but seeing Brenden sprawled on the ground, knocked out cold, ignited a fire within him that he couldn’t contain.

Siasia looked around for anyone to help her contain Qamar. He was her only concern at the moment.

“Get up, Brenden!” Qamar shouted, his voice a mix of rage and desperation, as he pushed through the throng of students gathered around the brawl. The soccer and baseball teams were locked in a furious clash, fists flying and tempers flaring, but all he could focus on was the disrespect Brenden had thrown at Siasia.

With all her might, she grabbed onto Qamar. “Stop, Qamar! Please!” she cried.

Just then, the school security burst through the doors, their authoritative shouts cutting through the din. “Break it up! Now!” They moved swiftly, grabbing hold of students and separating the combatants, but Qamar wasn’t finished. He pushed past a security guard, his eyes locked on Brenden, who was just beginning to stir. “You

think you can talk to her like that and get away with it?”

As the security team worked to restore order, Qamar’s fists clenched, his heart still pounding with the need to protect Siasia. The gym, once a place of camaraderie and teamwork, had turned into a battlefield, and he wasn’t backing down until he made it clear that disrespecting her was not an option.

With all her strength, Siasia jumped on him, wrapping her legs around his waist and her arms around his neck. “Look at me, Qamar,” she pleaded, seeing the eyes she’d loved looking into while they had late night conversations flicker with anger. “Daddy,” she hummed the word, pulling him back to her. “Calm down. I’m okay.”

As his heart started to slow and sync with hers, he was yanked by security. “Hands behind your back, Qamar.”

“Wait, please.” She tried to hold on to him.

“Get down, ma’am, or you’re going too,” the officer threatened.

Nodding with her orbs still locked on Qamar, she released him and watched the officer’s every move. Thankfully, the man was gentle and not on a power trip. When he started to walk Qamar out, she scanned the gym seeing others on their bellies and Brenden being checked out by someone with his father hovering over. She knew nothing good would come from this and hated Qamar had gotten involved.

The atmosphere in the dean's office was thick with tension as Qamar stood before Brenden’s father, the imposing figure of the dean of Lynn Beach University. The walls, lined with degrees and accolades, seemed to close in on him, amplifying the gravity of the moment. Qamar’s heart raced, a mix of defiance and dread coursing through him as he met the dean’s steely gaze. His body ached from the brawl but all he wanted to do was get the meeting over so he could go check on Siasia.

The school wasted no time with having him in the dean's office. The brawl had just happened and after only a few hours of being in cuffs to calm the situation, everyone was let go with Qamar being ordered to see the dean immediately. Qamar was thankful the school didn't press criminal charges on him and were handling the infraction swift and in house. He wasn't worried since he already had plans on entering the draft and going pro.

On the other hand, he knew his family wouldn't take the news lightly.

As a young Black man, he knew dealing with the police could've gone completely wrong had his Black skin not been covered in green from his family's wealth and influence. Just thinking about what could've happened sent chills down his spine.

"Qamar, do you understand the severity of your actions?" Dean Bolden's voice was calm but laced with disappointment, echoing in the quiet room.

Qamar clenched his fists, the memory of the brawl still fresh in his mind. He had acted out of passion, out of a need to defend Siasia, and nothing anyone said would make him regret that decision.

"I was doing what I was taught to do as a man when it came to defending women," Qamar replied, his voice steady, though he could feel the heat rising in his cheeks. "Some shit your son needs a lesson in."

The dean leaned back in his chair; his expression unreadable. "Don't speak on my boy." He scoffed. "You put yourself and others at risk. This isn't just about you; it's about the reputation of this institution."

"But your son using your power to use and abuse women isn't? You sound dumb."

"Excuse me?" Dean Bolden sat up in his seat.

Qamar fanned him off. “You heard me.” He leaned in. “Ask yourself what’s going to happen when your son does to another girl what he did to Siasia—another girl from a family that has more power and pull than you—another girl who will bury your family and the Bolden last name all because you raised a spoiled little boy who was never taught how to play nice, be fair, or to respect women. Imagine if your son fucks over a girl who’s loved by a man that has a family with a name so fuckin’ big that you lose everything.”

“Are you threatening me?” Dean Bolden asked, finally connecting some of the dots Qamar laid out for him so eloquently.

Now that he had his attention, Qamar sat back in his seat, folded his arms over his chest, and smiled. “What is the punishment, Dean Bolden?”

“You’re expelled but—” His voice shook.

Qamar used his hand as a stop sign to stop Bolden. “I don’t want to stay so let’s allow the expulsion to stick.”

“I can readmit Ms...” He looked down at the name on the paperwork. “Ms. Ford.”

“She’s good.” Qamar got up to stand. “Have the day you deserve, Dean. And tell your son to ice his fuckin’ face.”

He knew making a drastic decision that would affect Siasia wasn’t the reasonable thing for him to do but if he was going to leave Lynn Beach University, then so was she. The school’s photography program wasn’t elite. Qamar felt Siasia would fare better at a more exclusive school that had a better network of industry professionals. Qamar had a plan for them. Or maybe he was just being selfish with the decision. Regardless, when it came to how he felt about Siasia, she could only be where he was and Lynn Beach wasn’t it.

Siasia's heart raced as she paced the dimly lit hall outside Dean Bolden's office. The sound of her vintage loafers clunked against the polished floor, echoing in the tense silence. Each step felt heavier than the last, a physical manifestation of her anxiety. She glanced at the closed door, her mind swirling with thoughts of Qamar—his fierce determination to defend her against the vile words that threatened to unravel her life.

What if he lost everything? The thought clenched her stomach, and she stopped to lean against the cool wall, closing her eyes for a moment. Memories of their laughter, the way he held her hand as if he could shield her from the world, flooded her mind. She could almost hear his voice, steady and reassuring, urging her to believe in herself. But this was different. This was a battle that could cost him dearly.

Taking deep breaths, she opened her eyes, determination mingling with fear. She couldn't let him face this alone. Siasia straightened, her resolve hardening. If he was willing to risk it all for her, then she had to be strong enough to fight for both of them. She resumed her pacing, each step a silent promise that she would stand by him, no matter the outcome.

With his head held high, Qamar closed the door behind him after he walked out of the room. Turning the corner, he was met with Siasia pacing the floor. “Mama,” he called out to her.

Siasia took off to jump into his arms. “Qamar, what happened? I’m so sorry?” her words and questions ran on.

“Shh.” He kissed her lips. “Let me get you out of here, then I’ll tell you all about a fine ass girl that got me expelled from school.”

“Daddy,” Siasia crooned, digging her nails into Qamar’s back.

For the last few hours he’d been getting reacquainted with her body while punishing



her for ducking out on him. Naked as the day he was born, Qamar's back flexed as he circled his hips, making sure to hit every corner in Siasia's pussy. Aggressively . Because he was mad—pissed that she'd left him when all he wanted was her by his side.

“Ugh, Qamar!” she shrieked as another tingling orgasm ripped through her core.

His larger hand gipped her neck applying just enough pressure. “Take this dick, mama—all of it. I gotta remind you who yo belong to. You've belonged to me ever since I saw your fine ass dancing at the party.”

“I'm yours,” she agreed, hoping he'd give her a moment to breathe. “I'm yours, forever, Qamar. Just?—”

“Just what?” He applied a little more pressure to her neck before smashing his lips into hers. “Just what, Siasia?” Qamar looked her in the eyes.

Her tongue jutted across her lips because Qamar was draining her off all her moisture. Her pussy was leaking. “I'm just afraid—afraid to see what's past the moon.”

“Us. We're past the moon.” He growled, sucking her lips into his mouth as he released his semen on her stomach.

Both spent but in bliss, Qamar laid his body on top of hers.

“You know you're heavy, right?” Siasia grunted, wiggling her body under his.

He laid another kiss on her lips, the warmth of his affection lingering as he rolled over to lay beside her. The silence enveloped them like a soft, protective cocoon, as if they were two mermaids who'd just exchanged their human legs for fins, ready to

dive into a new world free from the chaos that had plagued their lives. The air was thick with unspoken thoughts, both of their minds swirling around the same question— what now?

“What—” Siasia began, her voice barely above a whisper.

“I—” Qamar cut in, their words colliding in a delightful mess that sparked laughter between them, a momentary reprieve from the weight of their realities.

“I’m sorry, Qamar. I really am. Like, your family already hates me... I can only imagine what they’ll be saying about me now in the family group chat,” she confessed, a hint of worry threading through her tone.

Pulling her closer, Qamar pressed a tender kiss against her neck, his breath warm against her skin. “I don’t give a fuck what nobody has to say. This is my life, and someone told me to start living it my own way. Besides, they’re not that bad, for real.”

“I can’t tell,” she mumbled, her brow furrowing as she searched his eyes for reassurance.

With a gentle shift, Qamar climbed over her, positioning himself so he could meet her gaze directly. “My family ain’t really like that. They love hard. Luna is the type of girl to cuss me out for doing another girl wrong. Solar? Well, she’s a little more... expressive. Her issue ain’t with you; it’s with me. I’ll handle my family. They will love you, I promise.”

“And if they don’t?” she asked, a flicker of doubt creeping into her voice.

“Then Christmas will be smaller than I’m used to,” he joked, attempting to lighten the mood, but Siasia couldn’t find humor in it. The pounding on the door jolted them

both, their eyes widening in alarm.

“Qamar!” Janay’s voice rang out, sharp and insistent. “I know you’re in here. I saw your car in the garage. Open the damn door!”

Siasia rolled her eyes, a wave of frustration washing over her. She already regretted her decision to be part of the baby mama club. While she had no issues with Malaysia, she was grouped in automatically because she shared a child with Qamar. A weight Siasia wasn’t sure she was ready to bare. The tension in the room shifted, and as Qamar’s expression turned serious, Siasia couldn’t shake the feeling that their moment of peace was about to be shattered.

Siasia's heart raced as the reality of the situation crashed down on her. The pounding on the door was relentless, and the tension in the air thickened. She glanced at Qamar, his expression a mix of determination and concern.

“You should probably handle that. She’s not going away, Qamar.” She sighed before rolling out the bead, heading to the bathroom. “And put on some damn pants!” she yelled.

Qamar laughed but did as he was told.

The walk to the door seemed shorter than ever before. He glanced into Esmeray’s room. Qamar concluded he needed a bigger house. A bigger place since his family was expanding. Where would he lay down his roots? He had no clue but Arkansas would have to be the start of something fresh and new. Thoughts of signing with the Arkansas Arrows was the only thing keeping him sane because the way he’d just blown up any plan B—it had to work. Clearing his throat, Qamar braced himself before he pulled the door open.

Locs thrown over her head, Janay glared at him with Belinay on her hip. “Are you out

of your fuckin' mind?" she asked, pushing past him to get in the house.

"What's up, Janay?"

"What's up? Qamar, imagine my surprise when my friend tells me about the newest school gossip."

"Okay, they always gossiping," he baited, pretending he didn't have a clue as to what she was talking about.

Her head snapped towards him, wiping the thin smile off his face. "Don't bullshit me, Qamar. Did you really get expelled behind a bitch that sells pussy? Oh, yes, I just got a whole earful of that little hoe that takes pictures by day and sucks and fucks niggas by night. Are you really that fuckin' lost that you'd sabotage everything your family has worked for? Are you crying out for that much attention? Do they not love you enough? What is it? Qamar?!"

The padding of feet pulled her attention to the hall. Siasia wiggled her finger in a taunting wave.

"Un-fuckin'-believable," Janay groaned. "Then you brought her to the house our baby sleeps in."

"Oh, shut up." Siasia rolled her head as she delivered her words. "Me being here ain't bothering you because your baby be here."

"I'm not talking to you." Janay bounced Belinay on her hip while turning her back to Siasia to focus on Qamar. "This is some privileged shit little white boys do when they didn't get enough of Mommy and Daddy's attention because they were too busy making sure he can be a fuckin' nepo baby."

“Watch yourself, Janay.” Qamar glared down at her.

“Or what?” she challenged, stepping up to him. “What are you going to do? Show out in front of your new flavor of the week?” She focused her attention back on Siasia. Looking her up and down she tried to see what it was in the basic bitch that had Qamar willing and ready to throw everything away. What was between Siasia’s legs to give her more power than a girl who gave him another baby—the semantics of Belinay’s paternity was neither here nor there because on paper and in his heart, she was his. All of that made accepting that he really gave his love and heart to another hard on her. Hard because hope sat in her belly when he decided to love Belinay in spite of. Now, she had to become the baby mama from hell.

“Flavor of the week, real original,” Siasia taunted with laughter in her tone.

“Bitch, fuck you!” Janay yelled.

“You doing too much in front of my baby.” Qamar reached for Belinay but Jany slapped his hand down.

“No!” Janay’s voice shook. “You need to clean up this mess you’ve created. Until then you can kiss Belinay goodbye.”

“You doing too much, now.”

“Siasia, just—” Qamar’s hands rested on his head. “Just chill for a second.”

“Me?!” Siasia pointed at herself. “I didn’t do anything but you know what?” She didn’t say anything else as she went back into the room prepared to put her clothes on. The room felt charged, and she could sense the storm brewing between them. She wanted no parts and didn’t feel like it was her place any longer. The baby was involved and although her heart told her she’d known Qamar in another lifetime, they

were still very new.

That put a sadistic thin-lipped smile on Janay's face.

"See, you haven't lost your damn mind. If you want to be a father, you focus on that. There's no time to be out here making new babies." Satisfied, she took a seat on the couch.

Trying to weight out all his options, Qamar looked from the empty hall Siasia casually strolled down to Janay who had a look of a champion. Right and wrong sat on his shoulders, both pleading their case on what his next move should be.

"I think you should go," he whispered, hoping she didn't take offense.

Her eyes doubled in size. "I should go? Are you really putting me and your baby out? What type of drugs that girl got you on?"

"Janay, come on." He let out a frustrated breath. "I'm not putting you and my baby out but you don't live here."

"Since the fuck when?" she yelled. "Me and Belinay stay here from time to time, so don't act dumb now."

"Janay!" Qamar hollered. "I'll come get my baby tomorrow before you have to go to class. Just—" his hand wiped down his face, showing how confused and annoyed he was. There was no handbook on this shit he was currently dealing with but Janay trying to hint at them being something they weren't, wasn't sitting right with him. Then for her to threaten to keep Belinay away from him—she had some nerve.

Nodding as she stood, she mumbled under her breath. "You done lost your damn mind but trust I will always get the last laugh. Don't worry about getting her

tomorrow or any other day. I can handle her by my-damn-self.” She stormed out of the house, snatching away when he tried to stop her.

On cue, Siasia came out the room fully dressed.

“Where you going?” he asked, exhausted from the day’s events and the sun hadn’t even gone down yet. His phone had been ringing out of control then the blow up between him and Janay had his battery needing a charge. He wasn’t in the mood to argue with Siasia.

“Home.” Her response was short.

“Go take them fuckin’ clothes off and get your ass back in the bed.” He ripped out his words impatiently. “Every time I get you back in my life, you take off behind any little infraction. We ain’t doing that shit no more. It’s us. Now and forever, mama.”

“It’s shit like that that has me running. One minute it’s us in a world where nothing or no one else matters. The next minute, I’m reminded that your world involves other people. Other people who love you that don’t seem to think I’m worthy to be in your world.”

His hands rested on her cheeks. “Shh,” he hushed her. “And that’s my fault for allowing you to think it’s just us. It’s not, mama. You have Noodle and I have Esmeray and Belinay.”

“And a whole rich and famous—judgmental ass other family, too.” Siasia’s eyes sagged. “I feel like I’m ruining you, Qamar. Everything was good until you couldn’t stop looking at my ass in a party full of girls better suited for your pursuit.”

His thumbs swiped away her tears. “I was so lost until you found me in a party.”

“Um, you found me.” She laughed, still looking in his eyes and waiting for him to fix everything like only he could. He was her Superman.

“Wrong again, mama. You found me . The version of me that sat in solitude overthinking every little detail—the version of me that felt like the weight of expectations was holding me down and holding me back. I never felt good enough until you opened your mouth and told me your name. Siasia . I don’t know what it means, but for me it means home.”

“But...” Siasia gripped her stomach.

“No buts, mama. Stop running from me. Please.”

Siasia's heart raced as she listened to Qamar's desperate plea, each word cutting through her like a knife. The tears streaming down her face were a mix of longing and fear, a silent battle raging within her. She felt an overwhelming desire to reach out to him, to bridge the gap that had grown between them, but the fear of vulnerability held her back.

Her chest tightened as she realized how deeply she cared for him, how much she wanted to step forward and embrace the love that was blossoming in her heart, but the weight of uncertainty felt suffocating. What if she admitted her feelings and it all fell apart?

As she stood there, torn between her emotions and the fear of rejection, Siasia's tears reflected the turmoil within. The love she felt for Qamar was undeniable, yet the fear of what it meant to truly let him in paralyzed her. She wanted to scream, to tell him everything, but all she could do was stand there, caught in the moment, wishing for the courage to take that leap.

“I know you’re scared but I swear I’ll love for the both of us. Just let me love you,



mama.”

“Love?” her tear-smothered voice whispered. Siasia tried to look away but his hands stayed firm on her face keeping in place.

“Feel this.” Qamar placed her hand over his heart, his warm skin pulsing beneath her palm like a steady drumbeat. “This is love. You hear it?”

Swallowing back the well of tears threatening to spill over, Siasia's eyes searched his face, desperate for any sign of vulnerability, any crack in the facade he so carefully maintained. The strength in his gaze was unwavering, an impenetrable fortress that both comforted and frightened her.

“I love you,” Qamar spoke slowly, each word deliberate and heavy with meaning. “I am in love with you.” The weight of his confession hung in the air, wrapping around them like a warm embrace.

Siasia felt her heart swell, a mixture of joy and fear colliding within her. The sincerity in his voice ignited a flicker of hope, yet the walls she had built around her heart trembled at the thought of letting him in completely. As she stood there, hand resting over his heart, the rhythm of his love resonated through her, a powerful melody that called to her soul. In that moment, she realized that to let him love her was to take a leap into the unknown, to trust in a future that could be filled with both light and shadows. Though the fear lingered, the warmth of his love melted away her doubts, inviting her to step forward into the possibility of a shared life.

“I love you too,” she confessed, falling into a fit of laughter when he lifted her into his arms.

“Say it again,” he coaxed.

“I love you!” she laughed louder, her scared tears turning into joyous ones. “I love you, Qamar Moony.”

Passionately, Qamar’s lips smashed into her. His tongue explored her mouth, vowing to make that his home too. “I love you more, mama. Always more, never less.”

“Beyond the stars?”

“Hell yea,” he hyped, loving that they were finally on the same page ready to embark on the journey.

“Luna been out here before?” Qamar asked Jay, his voice echoing slightly in the vastness of his sprawling estate, the sun casting long shadows across the lush green lawn. The air was thick with the scent of blooming magnolias and freshly cut grass, a perfect backdrop for their conversation.

Jay scratched the back of his head, a nervous habit that revealed the weight of unspoken memories. “Nah,” he replied, glancing away as if the truth were hiding in the distance.

Qamar’s eyes shot to Jay with the quickness, a flicker of concern crossing his face. He knew that beneath Jay’s casual tone lay a deeper story—one that intertwined their lives in ways that were both complicated and profound. Jay had once loved his sister, and the unfulfilled echoes of that affection lingered in the air. The revelation that Luna had never set foot on his estate felt like a crack in the surface, hinting at emotions that had yet to be fully explored.

“Damn,” Qamar surmised, the word escaping his lips like a whisper of realization.

“It wasn’t like that.” Jay laughed, a nervous chuckle that didn’t quite reach his eyes. “Candi just?—”

“The one. I get it,” Qamar interjected, his gaze drifting toward the girls, who were doubled over in laughter, their joy a stark contrast to the tension that hung between the two men.

Jay gripped Qamar's shoulders, his touch firm and reassuring. "I know that look. You ready to be all in, ain't it?" His southern accent rolled off his tongue like honey, sweet and smooth.

"Hell yea." They both laughed, the sound ringing out like a celebration of the moment. Love had a way of making everything feel lighter, even when the world around them was crumbling.

In that instant, Qamar felt an undeniable truth settle in his heart. His world might've been falling apart, but none of that mattered as long as Siasia was by his side. Where some men would've placed the blame on their woman, he held on to the notion that finding her would bring him profound knowledge. He'd watched it happen to the men around him, those who had found strength and wisdom in their love. Growing up surrounded by Black men who cherished Black women had given him an edge, a perspective that shaped his understanding of love and resilience. As they stood there, laughter echoing around them, Qamar knew he was ready to embrace whatever came next. As long as it included his mama .

He and Siasia had touched down in Alabama a little over two hours ago.

Qamar was blown away when Jay insisted on taking him to the back where his little sister, Meechie, grew his marijuana. To make things more legal, they started growing out in Colorado as well and seven years later, the business was doing well and thriving better than any of them could have anticipated.

The girls were sitting in the grass blowing trees all lady like. A sight, Qamar could get used to seeing Siasia in. She seemed carefree and living in the moment. He loved that for her.

"Qamar," Siasia called out, waving him over because she was ready to get back in his skin. Knowing he was close but not close enough left a longing in her.

“Yea, baby ‘boy bout to be a man,” Jay jested.

Qamar cut his eyes at him. “Been a man, nigga.”

“Nah, you got kids and take care of them but when you find a woman—like a real woman—beautifully flawed and somehow perfect because you only see the good in them—then you become a man. Vowing to protect them at all costs. Even the older flawed version of them you couldn’t get to fast enough to save. Yea, baby boy, you’ll be a real man then. Standing on big business and thriving in everything you touch. Watch how your life unfolds just for her to come in and clean house, showing you, you ain’t even know shit.” Jay stood with relaxed posture, shoulders slightly apart, exuding a sense of calm and authority. He laid his hand on Qamar’s shoulder, patting it slightly yet firmly in a loving way.

Qamar could only stare at Siasia, concluding that her brown skin under the sun had to be the best thing he’d ever witnessed. More artistic than the Mona Lisa. Warmth covered her skin and filled her smile when her head fell back from whatever had been said.

“I gotta figure this shit out ‘cause I want to give her the world. If she wants a fuckin’ ranch with horses like this, I want to give it to her without question,” Qamar confessed.

“And you will. Let’s not act like you out here down bad, Qamar. I know the assets your people set up before your balls dropped.”

“Aye, Candi, come get your husband!” Qamar yelled side eyeing Jay with laughter in his voice.

The two men walked over to the girls where they fell into a natural rotation of the blunts being passed around. The feel of the exotic strain of bud entering their system

had all of them in love and floating on a damn cloud.

Qamar pulled Siasia into his lap while Jay and Candi looked like they were ready to head in and do nasty things. Their kids were in the house with Jay's father who said he'd look after them in case Jay and Candi wanted to show Qamar and Siasia a night out in the country.

"So, do y'all want to go out?" Candi asked, chewing on her lip. Any chance she got to hang at the hole in the wall down the road, she was game.

Siasia looked back at Qamar for permission. When he nodded, she squealed. "Yes, boo. Show me what that country life really about."

"Oh, baby you ain't even ready. You ever rode on a four-wheeler?" Candi asked, ready to be young for the night with her new youthful friend.

Jay and Candi were in their early thirties but loved on each other like teenagers.

Siasia only wished for that type of love. "They so cute, ain't they?" she commented with hearts in her eyes.

Qamar pulled her face towards him, swiping his tongue across her bottom lip. "We cute too, mama."

Siasia felt a rush of warmth creep up her cheeks as Qamar leaned in closer, his playful words wrapping around her like a sweet melody. His smile was infectious, and the way he looked at her made her heart flutter. She could feel her skin heat up, a telltale sign of her shyness as he complimented her laughter, saying it was the best sound he'd ever heard.

Wanting to taste him on her lips, she sucked her lip into her mouth, sucking all his

essence off. “How cute are we?” Her tone came out like a growl and very lusty.

“If you suck on your lip like that again, we won’t be in nobody’s juke joint tonight, mama. What you trying to do?” His light brown orbs had a fire in them.

“Can I do both?” Siasia inquired.

“Mama, you can have any and everything when it comes to me. All you gotta do is ask.” He shoved his tongue between her slightly parted lips. An animalistic growl shook stomach and coated her skin with buttons that begged to be pressed by him.

“Oh, no.” Candi yanked Siasia out of his lap. “See, uh un. We going out, so let’s get ready.” She pouted, already knowing the effects of their good weed and serene estate that made everyone want to get high and fuck.

“I’m just gone sample it right quick.” Qamar laughed, chasing behind Siasia, swooping her into his arms once he caught up with her.

Candi and Jay watched them with big smiles on their faces. Candi could see so much of herself in Siasia that she wanted to build something meaningful with her. She could see herself taking her under her wing and just loving on her like she wished she’d been loved on as a young girl. It was why she went tooth and nail up against Black Excellence Magazine when they tried to demand she use their photographer. If Siasia couldn’t do the shoot then it wasn’t happening.

As the four-wheeler rumbled down the dark country road, the night wrapped around Siasia and Qamar like a cozy blanket. The air was thick with humidity, a typical Alabama May night, and the scent of blooming magnolias lingered in the warm breeze. Siasia felt the vibration of the engine beneath her, a steady pulse that matched the rhythm of her excitement.

Qamar drove with a relaxed ease, his laughter mixing with the soft hum of the tires against the gravel. Siasia leaned back against him, her heart racing not just from the thrill of the ride but from the closeness they shared. The moonlight danced on the trees, casting playful shadows that flickered like memories of the past. Of a life they shared in an alternate universe.

In the distance, she saw the glow of the juke joint, a beacon promising a night filled with music and laughter. She was ready to shake her ass and let loose after dealing with the hand she and Qamar had recently been dealt. He didn't seem to waiver while she could only think about what his next move was going to be. He told her about Arkansas, but something in her gut told her that wasn't going to happen.

Candi and Jay were ahead, their voices floating back to them, filled with playful banter that made Siasia smile. She felt Qamar's warmth beside her, his presence grounding yet electrifying, as they prepared to lose themselves in the night. As they approached the juke joint, Siasia's anticipation grew and it all felt familiar. The promise of good times and even better company hung in the air, and she couldn't wait to dance under the stars, losing herself in the rhythm of life and love.

Country people were so welcoming. Everyone they passed, spoke to them with some even offering hugs that Siasia happily accepted. Siasia wrecked her brain, trying to figure out why the setting looked like something she seen before. The image hit her like a ton of bricks. Her mama had a picture of her teen years posing in front of a building that looked just like that. She couldn't wait to ask her mom what part of Alabama she was from.

The music blasted through the dimly lit building, shocking the hell out of the two of them. When they thought of a juke joint, they thought it would be filled with old people listening to old ass music. So far, their assumptions had been wrong. It was filled with old and young people while Pretty P rapped her raunchy lyrics about swallowing some nigga's kids.



Siasia's head bobbed as she held onto Qamar who followed behind their gracious hosts. In the corner there was a man that looked like he was Jay's twin.

Jay leaned over to them. "This my brother, Nard. Nard, this Qamar and his girl, Siasia. He's Luna's little brother," he added just to see the look on his brother's face.

Siasia didn't want to stare too hard, but Nard was fine. He was the prettier version of Jay, and Jay was the type of fine you lost your mind over. Then, he was a country boy and sweet on his girl. She knew so many hearts were broken when Candi claimed him as her own. Siasia didn't understand how Qamar's sister, Luna, let his sexy, polite, and paid ass go.

"Get fucked up," Qamar gritted in her ear, making her giggle.

Her man was no slacker in the looks department either. Qamar was more her speed with medium length locs and those pretty light brown eyes surrounded by thick brows that matched his perfect beard and kissable lips.

Nard greeted them then told them to get whatever they liked. He had a few different liquors on the table, and they were told to tell one of the bartenders what kind of juice they wanted.

Jay grabbed a bottle with a horse on the cap that intrigued Qamar. "Aye, what you drinking?" he asked over the loud music that Siasia had already started bouncing her ass to.

"Oh, this Blanton, baby boy. This some of the best whisky in the world, right here. Get you a cup and sip slow." Jay nodded to one of the empty cups on the table. "This for the get money niggas."

"Then, pour me up." Qamar rubbed his hands together before grabbing a cup and

tilting it for Jay to pour him up. Inhaling it, he noticed it smelled like it had been aged in a barrel. Next, he took a sip. The brown liquor was smooth with hints of caramel.

Eyeing the liquid go down his throat, Jay nodded with a knowing smile on his face. “Good ain’t it?”

“Yes,” Qamar’s head fell into the same rhythm as Jay’s. “Hell yea,” he doubled down, taking the rest to the head.

Siasia didn’t get a drink, instead, she allowed the weed to flow through her body as the music kept her ass popping. Bending over, she made her ass clap in front of Qamar who used both hands to rub all over her, making sure to show her fat pussy some attention too. The leather biker shorts she had on gave him the perfect view of her goodies when she bent over for him.

Qamar slapped her ass as Siasia grabbed her ankles and rolled her body, creating a circle on his crouch. He looked just as good in a pair of denim jeans with blinged out appliques on them. He pair it with a baseball jersey that he left open to show his sculpted abs and to spice it up, he wore timberland boots with the tongue hanging. Siasia matched his fly with her leather shorts and the same baseball jersey tied under her full breasts with a throwback pair of Manolo Blahnik’s that she’d thrifted years ago.

“Work that nigga, sis!” Candi yelled, loving when couples danced in the club. Because one thing she was always going to do was dance and sing to her man off key.

Siasia’s tongue wagged as she did her big one, showing out was an understatement. People couldn’t help but to look at the way her curvy body moved like water. The DJ switched up the music, causing Qamar’s hands to go up in the air when the beat dropped. Drake’s Legend blasted through the speaker and by his reaction, Siasia knew she needed to pull her phone out to capture the moment.

“If I die, all I know is I’m a muthafuckin’ legend, it’s too late for my city, I’m the youngest nigga repping. Oh, my god if I die I’m legend.” He opened his shirt while rapping every word as if he’d written the lyrics himself.

“Yea! Oh!” Siasia became his hype man while capturing every move.

The tattoos on his chest glistened from the body lotion he made sure to put on and every time he opened his mouth, his bottom grill shined.

“I got this shit mapped out strong,” Qamar crooned, reminding her that he could really sing.

In her mind, he could do everything and the way he hadn’t failed at anything, was all the confirmation she needed. His energy amplified everyone around him, to do the same and play the part. When it was time to call it a night, they agreed that a time was had. Jay and Candi’s house was so massive in size that they were able to stay the night and be able to get to business tomorrow. So far, the trip to country ass Alabama was what their souls needed. The good food, country air, and better people was just what the doctor ordered. The ride back to the Black Estate was chaotic but so much fun. Now, Siasia was stumbling in the room, trying her best not to make too much noise or wake up the kids.

“Take them clothes off, mama,” Qamar ordered as he closed and locked the door.

Siasia’s body shivered from the slur and gruff in his voice. “Make me,” she challenged, trying to play hard to get knowing full well her pussy was leaking and begging to suck his big dick inside and ride it until the sun came up.

While unbuckling his pants, he eyed her, his eyes sitting low and driving her wild. “Stop playing with me. Take them clothes off and open that pussy up for me.”

She chewed on her bottom lip, a nervous tremor coursing through her knees as anticipation built in the air around them. With a teasing glint in her cat-like eyes, she slowly peeled off her shirt, revealing her full breasts, their hardened nipples standing proudly against the warm air. The fabric slipped from her fingers, pooling at her feet, and her heart raced as she stepped out of her bottoms, the soft fabric gliding down her legs. She tossed her soaked thong playfully at Qamar, a mischievous smile dancing on her lips.

Qamar caught the thong mid-air, a smirk playing on his lips as he brought it to his nose, inhaling deeply, savoring the intoxicating scent of her arousal. A flush crept up her cheeks, heat radiating through her body.

Oh my—” she squealed, laughter bubbling up as he tackled her onto the bed, his lips finding hers in a flurry of wild kisses that ignited her senses.

With a gentle yet firm grip, he pinned her hands above her head, his gaze softening as he took in every detail of her—her flushed cheeks, the way her chest rose and fell with each breath, the sparkle of mischief in her eyes.

“ Home ,” he declared, his voice a low rumble that sent shivers down her spine, before trailing kisses down her body, his fingers teasingly tweaking her nipples. Her back arched off the bed, lost in a euphoric bliss that enveloped her, leaving her breathless and craving more.

Another deep inhale came when he was face to face with her throbbing pussy. Qamar used his middle and index finger to spread her fluffy bottom lips a part. “Pretty and pink,” he detailed out loud, making her whimper.

Headfirst, he devoured her, making sure to lick every nook and cranny. Her body shook as he pulled nut after nut out of her with his fingers and mouth before he fucked her down so good, she snored like a baby for the rest of the night and into the

afternoon.

The sun hung low in the sky, over the bustling city as Siasia stood behind her camera, heart racing with anticipation. This was it—her first professional photoshoot for a high-end magazine, and the weight of the moment pressed against her chest. The air was electric, filled with the hum of creativity and the promise of something extraordinary.

Siasia wished she'd been a part of the evolution of Candi. There was something so special about the feminine energy behind her eyes. Of course, Candi told her a little but there was never enough time to run it all down, play by play. However, Siasia longed for the tangible place in which Candi currently resided in, more than she ever knew. The longing came to her when Qamar first opened his mouth and again when she met Candi in The Jig, looking like she didn't belong.

Jay and Candi, the dynamic duo and their four kids, were the stars of the campaign—celebrating Black entrepreneurs who had carved their paths to success before turning forty. They exuded confidence, their laughter ringing out like music as they playfully posed against the backdrop of a vibrant mural that celebrated their heritage and triumphs.

Siasia adjusted her lens, capturing the way the sunlight danced off Candi's radiant skin, illuminating her features like a goddess. Candi's smile was infectious, a blend of warmth and determination that radiated through the frame. Jay, with his sharp jawline and charismatic presence, leaned in closer, their chemistry palpable. The way they interacted was a beautiful dance, a testament to their partnership both in business and in life.

“Just be yourselves,” Siasia encouraged, her voice steady despite the fluttering in her stomach. “Let the world see your story.”

As they moved effortlessly, Siasia snapped away, each click of the shutter capturing not just their images but the essence of their journey—struggles, victories, and the unbreakable bond they shared. The sun dipped lower, casting long shadows that intertwined with their silhouettes, creating a mesmerizing tableau of ambition and love.

In that moment, Siasia felt a swell of pride. This was more than just a job; it was a celebration of resilience and the beauty of Black excellence. She was honored to be the one to tell their story, to immortalize their achievements through her lens. Each photograph was a testament to their hard work, a reminder that dreams could be realized with passion and perseverance.

“Look this way, Cup and Cake,” she directed their twin girls who were thirteen now and little ladies. They were adopted young and although they still lived in Texas with their adoptive parents, they spent a lot of time with their biological mother.

You could tell Candi loved her children by the way she looked at them. Then there was Jayshun Black II who was only five followed by their three-year-old daughter, Confection. Candi was clearly on her rich people shit when she named her baby girl that. It was cute though. They were cute and Black love in physical form.

As the shoot wrapped up, Jay and Candi exchanged a knowing glance, their eyes sparkling with gratitude. Siasia felt a rush of joy, knowing she had captured not just their images but the very spirit of who they were. This was just the beginning, and she couldn't wait to see where her journey as a photographer would take her next.

“It's so damn nice out here,” Siasia commented, taking in the beautiful gardens of the Black Estate. Her heart danced with joy after she wrapped up the photoshoot. The golden sunlight filtered through the leaves of the garden, casting a warm glow on them.

“Thank you, boo. You can come back anytime.” Candi’s eyes told her the invitation was real. It wasn’t the one when people offered to be nice, knowing damn well they never wanted to see you again. Candi was sincere.

Qamar locked his finger into Siasia’s under the table. “You really keep trying to steal my girl.”

“Told you, I used to swing both ways.” Candi cackled when Jay glared at her.

They settled around a rustic wooden table adorned with colorful dishes, the aroma of grilled vegetables and spiced chicken wafting through the air, filling them with a sense of contentment. The clinking of glasses and the sound of their playful banter created a symphony of happiness that wrapped around the table like a cozy blanket.

“Buy me one of these,” Siasia joked with Qamar.

He chewed his chicken before asking, “You serious?”

Her head fell back. “I wouldn’t know what to do with all this damn land. It’s nice to visit, but I ain’t no country girl, for real. My mama from Alabama so it might be in my blood.”

“For real, what part?” Jay asked.

“I don’t know. She left and I ain’t been back since I was about six or seven. We don’t talk to family or go to family reunions.” She shrugged her shoulder like it was no big deal.

“What’s her last name?”

“Ford,” Siasia retorted with the quickness. If someone could put her in touch with

some family, she was all for it.

Jay rested his chin on his hand. “I don’t think I know any Fords.”

“Hell, me either,” she joked, and they all laughed to lighten the mood.

Just as she leaned back, savoring the moment, her phone buzzed on the table, breaking the spell. It was Ally. Siasia hesitated, memories of their last encounter flooding her mind—the awkwardness of the failed lunch date, the unspoken words hanging heavy in the air.

With a deep breath, she answered, her smile fading as Ally’s voice trembled through the line.

“Siasia, I... I don’t know how to say this,” Ally’s voice cracked, and Siasia’s heart dropped, sensing the weight of tragedy behind her words. “Your mother was murdered... by Stacy. He... he turned the gun on himself after. She was just cooking when the argument started, and then... the gas caught the trailer on fire.”

The phone fell from Siasia’s hands. Her body shook in shock.

“Mama, what’s wrong?” Qamar asked. “Siasia.” He shook her body after seeing her face go blank.

Tears filled her eyes. Gasping for air, Siasia held onto the table.

“Siasia, what’s wrong?” Candi went to her side while Qamar tried to get her to talk.

He looked down at her phone and picked it up. “Hello?”

“Um, this Siasia’s friend. Her mama was just killed by her husband,” Ally revealed,



sounding just as shook up.

Without much that was deemed newsworthy happening in Lynn Beach, the murder slash suicide was all over every news channel and radio. When Ally heard the news, she connected with a few people from the trailer park through social media to figure out where Noodle and Siasia was. It was how she knew to call her to inform her on what had happened. Ally loved Siasia in a weird way and the lack of communication over the last few weeks wasn't enough to stop her from reaching out.

“Where is Noodle?”

“At a neighbor's house. She got out the house but left her iPad in there.”

Coating his lips with his saliva, he thanked Ally before pulling Siasia from the table. As soon as he got her out her chair, she broke down.

“Mama.” Siasia's stomach coiled as she wailed for her mother. “Oh, Mama,” she sobbed, breaking everyone's heart.

How could it be that every time she felt a sliver of happiness, He slapped her back to reality? Siasia couldn't live like this. The fear of success came with the fear of losing and she was tired of losing.

Siasia stood at the window, the dim light of dusk seeping through the curtains, casting shadows that danced across the room like her swirling emotions. Days blurred into nights, and the relentless passage of time felt like a cruel joke as she struggled to find her footing in a world that had suddenly become so foreign. The weight of her grief pressed down on her chest, making it hard to breathe, each inhale a reminder of the void her mother had left behind.

As she gazed out, the vibrant colors of the sunset felt like a mocking reminder of the joy that had been stripped away. She thought of the countless conversations they would never have, the words left unspoken hanging heavily in the air. Siasia clenched her fists, fighting back the tears that threatened to spill over. It was a battle she fought daily, trying to be strong for Noodle, but inside, she felt like a ship lost at sea, tossed by waves of sorrow and longing.

The whispers of society echoed in her mind, telling her she had no right to grieve a mother who had been deemed unworthy, but Siasia's heart rebelled against those judgments. She knew the truth—the love Cynthia had given was flawed yet fierce, shaped by her own struggles and the weight of a world that had told her she needed a man to be whole.

In defiance, Siasia whispered to the empty room, “You don’t understand.” Her voice trembled with the intensity of her love and loss, as she wrapped her arms around herself, seeking comfort in the memories that lingered like ghosts in the corners of her mind.

The trailer that she hated was now gone so she'd found refuge in Qamar's spacious apartment. It was weird because all she wanted was to go back into the two-by-two single wide trailer and share a room with Noodle.

She wanted to wake up and see her mother sitting in the living in a daze while the local news watched her. She'd go back to all of the things she so desperately wanted to leave if she could. However, life and death didn't work that way and the way God had been snatching any and everything away from her, she knew she couldn't ask Him for a miracle.

Her first professional shoot turned out beautifully. Too bad she couldn't celebrate it. All of her emotions and thoughts were with her mother.

"Oh, God," Siasia cried out, grief swallowing her whole. "Please," she begged. "Just give me a break." Her hoarse voice came out in a whisper.

Cynthia's homegoing service was beautiful thanks to Qamar. He spared no expense when it came to laying her mother to rest. She'd forever be indebted to him for all of the love and patience he'd shown to her during the hardest part of her life. Despite his own hardships, he gave her all of him the best way he knew how. He took care of Noodle during the day and her at night. He was truly a godsend. In her mind, it was the least God could do when he was dead set on giving her a hard time in every other aspect of her life.

They said He gave His toughest battles to His strongest soldiers, but that couldn't have been true. Siasia's flesh was weak—had been weak all of her life. Whatever strength He thought was there, He had clearly misread.

The sound of keys jingling in the door made Siasia wipe her face and take a seat on the couch. She didn't want Noodle to see her in distress.

“Is she sad?” she heard Esmeray’s voice that was too old for her.

“Yes, baby. That’s why we have to be quiet and really nice,” Malaysia cooed in a low tone.

Siasia chuckled, lightly.

“I’m always nice, Mama,” Esmeray lied. She was hardly ever nice and reserved all of her nice qualities for her father, granny, grandpa, and Noodle. Anyone else, good luck.

“These the groceries y’all went to get?” Siasia joked. Qamar and Noodle were supposed to be going out to restock the house but clearly that had been a fabrication since they come back with Malaysia and Esmeray and no groceries.

Qamar stood with a goofy grin on his handsome face. Noodle sat beside her, laying her head on her shoulder while Esmeray curled up into Siasia’s lap like a kitten. Siasia’s heart swelled from the feel of their warmth encompassing her. When Malaysia sat on the opposite side of her, she wrapped her arms around Siasia, opening the floodgates she’d tried so hard to keep closed when her sister was around.

“We got you,” Malaysia assured, wiping away at her own tears. She was a crier. When people around her shed tears, so did she.

Qamar stood, just taking the image in. It was beautiful. Beautiful brown girls sharing a moment and allowing each other to cry. The four of his girls sat in a comforting silence. He pulled out his phone to snap a few pictures because the sight was worthy of remembrance. There was only one thing missing—his Belinay. Janay was still being petty by keeping her away no matter how much he begged for her. She was playing a dangerous game since another man in his situation would take it as a sign to bow out. However, he stood on his word and would be in Belinay’s life.

Thinking about his baby, he shot Janay a text asking her to drop the baby off. Now that he was a father to two, having one child without the other didn't sit right with him.

Text bubbles popped up before disappearing again. Janay knew how to irk his damn nerves.

Qamar gave one last glance at his girls before deciding to take a nap. He had been tired since the funeral and that was almost two weeks ago.

"Y'all good?" he asked before he walked away.

Siasia forced a thin smile. "Mhm."

"I got them, go get some sleep," Malaysia assured.

Before he walked away, Qamar lingered for a moment, his heart heavy with the weight of unspoken words. He turned back, allowing his gaze to lock onto Siasia's, drawing her attention as if by an invisible thread. Her sad, slanted eyes reflected a world of pain and loss, mirroring the anguish that twisted in his own chest. In that fleeting moment, he wished desperately to take away her suffering, to somehow lighten the burden she carried so silently.

If he could speed up her healing process, he would have done anything—moved mountains, crossed oceans, or even faced the fiercest storms. Grief was a complex tapestry, woven with threads of love and sorrow, and he knew that no matter how much he longed to carry her pain, it was something she had to navigate alone. Instead, he resolved to be her steadfast support, a shoulder for her to lean on when the weight of her emotions threatened to overwhelm her. He would stand by her side, ready to catch her when she faltered, offering solace in the silence that enveloped them both. As he turned to leave, the unspoken promise hung in the air, a vow of

unwavering presence in the midst of her turmoil.

Qamar must've been more tired than he thought. As his eyes opened, he realized he wasn't in the bed by himself anymore. Siasia was tucked to his right, while Esmeray was curled into his left. Noodle was sprawled out beside Siasia. How the four of them fit in his king-sized bed was a mystery and he'd have it no other way. Doing his best not to wake them, he maneuvered out of the bed and grabbed his phone off the nightstand. He had at least fifty missed calls and a dozen unread text messages. At the time, only Janay's message mattered.

Reading her text, he sighed a sigh of relief seeing she agreed to bring Belinay over when she got out of class and picked her up from daycare. Next, he went to his mama's text thread. The most recent message had a video attached. Clicking on the link, his heart sank at what was displayed on the screen. The Arkansas Arrows had rescinded his draft offer when they hadn't even made it public from the jump.

“While we recognize Qamar's talent on the field, we must also consider the impact of his behavior off the field. The Arkansas Arrows are committed to fostering a positive environment for our players, fans, and families. We believe that every player should embody the ideals of respect, integrity, and sportsmanship.”

He took a deep breath, his expression firm. “Therefore, we have made the difficult decision not to draft Qamar. We wish him the best in his future endeavors, but we cannot align ourselves with actions that do not reflect our morals and beliefs as a franchise.”

The weight of the news crashed down on him, a stark contrast to the warmth of the bodies in his bed. He felt a mix of anger and disbelief, the kind that churned in his stomach like a storm brewing on the horizon. How could they pull such a move? He had worked tirelessly, sacrificed so much, and now it felt like everything was slipping through his fingers.

Of course God wasn't done with him—Janay's loud mouth echoed through the house creating a pit in his stomach while pushing the devastating blow of his career to the back of his mind. Qamar scampered down the hall, making use of his long legs.

"Lower your fuckin' voice," Malaysia gritted, her lips twisted in annoyance.

Janay shook her head. "Girl, fuck you and whoever sleeping in here. Like, why would he tell me to bring my baby over here knowing I don't want her around that girl." She huffed.

"You really need to get over yourself, Janay. That boy don't want you but he wants to be a good father, just give him some slack."

"She ain't gone do that 'cause she selfish," Qamar spoke up, bringing three set of eyes to his shirtless body.

Belinay blew spit bubbles at the sight of her daddy.

"Hey, my baby." He walked up, not giving a damn about Janay's mug on her face.

Tired of doing the parent thing on her own, Janay didn't put up a fight when he grabbed Belinay out of her arms.

"You getting so chunky, Ma-Ma," Qamar cooed, kissing all over her face while she slobbered on his.

Malaysia pursed her lips with her hand on her hips. "And to think you was really trying to keep him from his daughter."

Janay glared at her, rolling her eyes. "Excuse me if I don't want to be a sister wife."

“As if you could,” Malaysia sassed, turning back to the food she’d been cooking when Janay first knocked on the door.

Instead of going back and forth with her, Janay crossed her legs and grabbed the remote control. As soon as she turned the TV on, her mouth dropped.

“Breaking news, the country’s most promising collegiate soccer player seems to be taking hit after hit. The Arrows announced today they would not be offering him a spot on the team. This news comes after Lynn Beach University dropped him from the roster. I mean, I don’t know, Steve—do you think the league should allow this once in a lifetime talent to slip through the cracks because of some locker room brawl?” Kimmy asked her cohost.

“We know what this is really about. I have a buddy up there at Lynn Beach and he’s saying its more to the story than that. All I know is, someone better pick this young man up if they want a championship team for the next decade.” Steve cuffed his hands on top of the desk before sitting back in his seat like he’d said all that needed to be said.

The room fell into a suffocating silence, so intense that you could almost hear a pin drop. With Belinay cradled in his arms, Qamar leaned his head back against the plush cushion of the sectional, the weight of the world pressing down on him. An exasperated sigh escaped his lips, a sound heavy with the burdens he carried. The tension coiled in his neck and tightened around the back of his head, a physical manifestation of the chaos swirling in his life.

“Qamar,” Siasia hummed, her voice laced with the familiarity of having heard the entire segment before the hosts awkwardly switched topics.

Janay huffed, rolling her eyes dramatically. “If it isn’t the other sister wife.”



“Shut the fuck up, Janay!” Qamar snapped, frustration boiling over as he was fed up with her relentless mouth and antics. He just needed a moment of peace, but of course, she wouldn’t be the one to ease up, as if he didn’t deserve just a little grace.

To add onto the intense moment, the sound of his phone ringing added to the chaos that his life had turned into over the last few years.

“Fuck!” He gripped his forehead.

Malaysia came around the island in the kitchen with her hands out to receive Belinay. “Here, hand her to me.”

“Um, her mama right here.” Janay waved her hand in the air.

Malaysia chewed on her lip, trying to stop every disrespectful word she wanted to spew. “If you wanted her, you would’ve got her. You too busy worried about the wrong shit, though.”

Shooing her away, Janay leaned back before crossing her legs.

“Qamar,” Siasia called out to him again. “I know you say it ain’t my fault but I can’t help but think it is. Like, before me, your life was just fine.”

“It wasn’t though, mama.”

Janay kissed her teeth.

Qamar wrapped his arms around her, feeling the peace only she could bring him. Siasia had no idea how much his heart had expanded since he laid eyes on her. She didn’t understand how with her, his self-doubt vanished. She made him believe he could be the man everyone thought he could be. One look at her and his soul was fed,

his heart beat harder, his mind grew stronger. Qamar had no doubt that he could be everything Siasia needed. Imposter syndrome didn't dwell in the space between them. It was just them floating in the stars. Beyond the stars, if she truly decided to let go.

"What God has for me, I believe is for me and mama, he ain't done with me. Or you." The huskiness she loved lingered in his voice. His eyes were compelling and magnetic.

She traced the outline of his face with her eyes, wishing on a star that if God gave her a son, he'd look just like Qamar with superpower eyes and a big and loving heart to match. Of course, she wanted him to have the physical attributes of Qamar but it was the inside she wanted for him the most.

Beauty was definitely in the eyes of the beholder. But beauty that ran skin deep was that of the maker. Fluid and free.

"Do you trust me?" he asked, swiping his thumb over her juicy lips that he loved so much. "Tell me you trust me," his tone husky and low, creating a world where only they existed. Qamar, Siasia, Noodle, Esmeray, and Belinay.

He no longer had to make the lineup clear to her.

Siasia knew.

She felt it when he wrapped his arms around her every night.

"I trust you," she confessed.

Amidst the turmoil enveloping both Qamar and Siasia, there was a flicker of hope; God was in the process of wiping their slates clean. He was preparing them for a fresh start, needing their palates cleared for the abundance he was about to bestow.

He wanted their bellies empty and their minds hungry, ready to embrace the new beginnings that awaited them.

A serene feeling washed over her. “With our life.”

Janay wiped at a tear that fell while she eavesdropped on their private conversation. It hurt her soul to hear Qamar talk to Siasia the way he spoke to her. He was gentle and reassuring. All the things he’d never been to her. Their relationship wasn’t toxic or filled with disrespect either but he’d never been so soft with her. It was like for the first time, Janay was witnessing she’d never own Qamar’s heart. Looking over her shoulder, she locked eyes with Malaysia, who for the first time seemed to be sympathetic for her.

Janay eased off the couch in hopes of Qamar or Siasia seeing her tawny face lightly covered in tears. Sniffing, she made her way to Malaysia who had rocked Belinay to sleep by rocking her body in a smooth pattern.

“I got her.” Malaysia forced a tiny smile.

With a curt head nod, Janay thanked her after placing her diaper bag on the island in the kitchen, damn near running out of the apartment. She needed to clear her head and some fresh air.

Siasia sat on the floor, her legs crossed beneath her, the soft glow of her laptop casting a warm light that danced across the room. Outside, the stars twinkled like distant diamonds through the massive window, a stark contrast to the cozy sanctuary she had created. She had relieved Malaysia for the night, tucking herself into the corner while Belinay slept peacefully in her bassinet nearby. The decision to roll her into the living room had been a desperate one, born from the restless night that had gripped her.

Janay had left and hadn't returned, leaving Siasia feeling a mix of concern and relief. She had called Qamar to ensure it was alright for Belinay to stay, and naturally, he had agreed. It had been three days now, and with everything swirling around them, Siasia knew having both his babies close brought him a sense of relief, a momentary escape from the chaos. Now, with her mind racing like the stars above, she found herself lost in a digital treasure trove of memories—every image of Qamar that had captured her heart. Her cheeks ached from the smiles that danced across her face as her fingers traced the contours of his handsome features on the screen.

Over the course of their relationship, she had snapped candid shots of him in all walks of life, each one telling a story. Her favorites were of that magical night at the park with Esmeray or the playful race between him, Malaysia, Noodle, and Esmeray that had filled the air with laughter. Yet, one image stood out among the rest. It was a candid shot of Esmeray and Noodle gazing up at him with wide, trusting eyes, as if he held every answer to their innocent questions. A lump formed in Siasia's throat, a bittersweet ache that reminded her of the profound safety Qamar brought into her life. With him, the shadows of the dark faded away, and the monsters under the bed were

nothing more than figments of imagination. He made her feel seen, cherished, and she knew that no words could ever repay him for that gift. What she could do was show the world just how incredible he truly was, how many different hats he wore with grace and love, illuminating the lives of everyone around him.

Belinay whined her in sleep, prompting Siasia to wrap up her video. All she needed to do was find the perfect song. Only then would she present it to the world. Her social media followers tripled after her shoot with Candi and Jay was published. In the corner on the last page of the three-page spread was her picture with all of her contact information. The shoot had been so beautiful and professional, Black Excellence Magazine asked if she was open to be contacted for more. Of course, she said yes.

Another coo from Belinay had her saving the video and closing her laptop.

On her feet, she stretched her arms high and wide to relieve the ache of sitting on the floor. Easing over to the bassinet, she smiled at how juicy Belinay and the fact she was wide eyed looking into her.

“Hey, juicy baby. You ain’t gone sleep for long, huh?” she whispered to her while lifting her into her arms. She didn’t see Qamar in her but she’d never deny she was his. If it was his will to take on the role and responsibility, she would never be a bitch and suggest otherwise.

Her heart melted when Belinay sucked on her own tiny fist. “Your fat ass hungry, ain’t you?” She laughed before kissing her chunky cheeks. “I know you are. Let’s warm you up a bottle, greedy girl.”

“I got it,” Qamar popped up, scaring the hell out of her.

Siasia laughed while calming her racing heart. “You can’t be popping up on us like

that, boy.” She continued her trek to the kitchen. “Why you up anyway?”

“Man, they sleep so damn wild.” He laughed, talking about Noodle and Esmeray.

“I woke up with Es’s foot in my face. I was like hell no.” She snickered, placing the bottle in the warmer.

Belinay could hear her daddy and tried to find his face. “Oh uh un, don’t switch up on me for your ugly ass daddy, Fat Ma.”

“Ugly?” He pushed his face into Belinay. “She know I ain’t never been ugly, ma-ma. Ain’t that right,” he cooed in baby talk.

As if she was agreeing with her daddy, she blew spit bubbles.

“Oh, I’m ‘bout to hand you to your daddy since you want to act brand new with me,” she joked, still holding her in her arms.

Once the bottle was warmed and tested on her hand, she cradled it gently, her heart swelling as she settled onto the couch. Qamar trailed behind, his gaze softening at the sight of Siasia with his children. It filled him with a sense of reassurance; he knew he had chosen wisely. Her gentle touch and inherent kindness shone through, even amidst the shadows of her struggles with Janay.

“You want kids?” he asked, his voice low, allowing the stars to illuminate her pretty, blemish-free face. She had let her hair flow freely, a wild cascade that framed her features, and he found her irresistibly sexy in her natural state.

Her shoulders hunched slightly, a flicker of uncertainty crossing her face. “I don’t know... I didn’t.”

“But?” His bushy brows rose, curiosity piqued.

“When I look at you, I envision a little boy that looks just like you.”

“Oh really?” A smirk danced on his lips as he pulled her bare feet into his lap, his calloused hands kneading into the soft soles. A soft moan escaped her lips, the sensation drawing her deeper into the moment.

Siasia's head nestled into the crook of the couch, surrendering to the euphoric bliss of his impromptu foot massage. “Mhm,” she hummed, lost in the comfort of his touch.

“And what else do you see in our future?” he pressed, his tone teasing yet earnest.

“You so sure you’re in my future?” she challenged, a playful glint in her eyes.

“It’s the only thing I’m sure of. With all this shit hanging over my head, the one thing I know is that you’ll be there seeing me through whatever my next phase of life is.”

“Because we’re going beyond the stars?”

“Now, you get it. It was always supposed to be you. It’s why I’ve been so scared all my life to push myself beyond the limit. They say you don’t understand your purpose until the right person comes into your life. You my person, mama.” His voice was low, laced with conviction, as if the words were a divine promise, echoing with certainty that he would bet it all, knowing he’d win it back tenfold.

“How are you so perfect?”

His head fell forward with a laugh. “When I look in the mirror, I don’t see perfect,” he confessed.

“That’s ‘cause you don’t see you the way we see you. We see you like the second coming of Jesus... God forgive me.” She snickered looking into the sky, before getting serious. “When I look at you, I see everything my mama wanted to feel. It makes me feel a little guilty because this is the type of love I wanted her to witness—want my kids to witness. Now, she ain’t here to see any of it. The man or the kids.” Siasia sniffled, hating the way her emotions went from cool to scorching hot in the matter of seconds. She’d never stop grieving her mama but looked forward to when she found some understanding in it all.

“I think she’ll be a witness to the good nigga I am.” His boyish face lit up.

A part of her reveled in his open admiration of her. She’d never felt anything close to what Qamar made her feel. And she knew she never would again.

A comfortable silence fell over them as she burped Belinay who was already dozing off again.

“I let them down,” he blurted, allowing his heart and mind to speak for once. She didn’t say anything, just allowed him to sit in whatever he needed to sit in as he found the words to express himself. “Like, we ain’t always had a good life, you know? Then, when they all find themselves and create something so magical—something that is the epitome of Black excellence, I fuck it up like a scared little boy.”

“I think they love you regardless. You running from them when all they trying to do is help you.”

His face soured. “I know, mama. I’m just?—”

“Scared. You can say it, Qamar. You will never be less of a man to me. If anything it makes you so much more of a man. I always knew a man that could sit inside himself was what God created when he created Adam. You are my Adam—just for me,” she



declared.

“You gone have a nigga crying... you trying to make me cry, mama?”

“If you need to cry, here go my shoulder. I mean, Belinay big but I’m sure she’ll scoot over for her daddy.” She winked.

His heart skipped a beat. “Damn.” He sucked in air. “You look at me like I’m the special one when you’re the one shaking shit up in my world... in a good way. Where have you been all my life?”

“Probably on the pole.”

“Aww, look at my juicy grandbaby,” Stephanie cooed, her voice softening as she stood over Siasia and Belinay, who were nestled together in a peaceful slumber. The room was filled with a gentle hush, a stark contrast to the lively chaos that had surrounded them. They must’ve been exhausted, wrapped in their dreams, completely unfazed by the world around them.

“I don’t like not seeing my grandbabies every day, Qamar,” she complained, hands firmly planted on her hips, her brow furrowed in playful frustration.

Griff wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her close. “You gotta let baby boy leave the nest, baby,” he said gently, trying to soothe her.

“I ain’t trying to hear none of that,” she declared, playfully mushed her husband away. “Wake them up!”

Qamar chuckled, shaking his head, a grin spreading across his face. “Hell no, Ma. I ain’t bout to get cussed out. Belinay kept her up all night. Let my lady sleep.”

“Your lady?” Stephanie's eyebrow shot up, surprise dancing in her eyes. “Ooh, this one special, special.”

Just as Qamar settled back into his thoughts earlier that morning, he heard the unmistakable sound of his mama and stepdad at his door. He had been dodging them since the news broke, anxious about their reactions. But as they crowded into his apartment, he felt a warmth wash over him—he'd missed them.

Rubbing his hands together, he flashed a big grin. “Yea, Ma. Siasia, the one.”

“Hell, I knew that when you brought her into my house at God knows what hour, knowing damn well you just had a newborn with Janay. I can't lie, I was pissed, but Griff calmed me down and explained that although unconventional, your heart was in the right place. Then, on the ride to Jade City, Ms. Siasia laid it all out for me. I'm proud of you, baby—even if it don't feel like I am.” Stephanie's words flowed with a mix of love and understanding, wrapping around Qamar like a comforting embrace, making the weight of his worries feel just a bit lighter.

“Me too, baby boy.” Griff pulled Qamar into a loving hug.

The closest thing Qamar ever had to a father was Lunar, French, and Javen. Then when Maverick came into their lives, he became a sounding board for him as well. He was grateful to Griff for not only loving his mama but for also stepping in and loving her kids as well. When he looked over his life, even when shit was all bad, he could still find gratitude for the small pockets of love he often found.

His family was full of unconditional love which reminded him he needed to make shit right with his sister. He had yet to reach out to her and only had a small conversation with French over the last month and a half.

As if his mama could read his mind, she announced, “You better get your lady up

because the rest of your family is on the way.”

That pulled a smile on his face that touched his ears.

Qamar got on his knees in front of the couch and just stared at Siasia and Belinay. They were so content in one another's arms that he almost didn't want to wake them. However, he wanted to give her time to get herself together before his rambunctious bunch came in like a hurricane on a sunny day.

“Mama,” he hummed, kissing on her face. “Get up, baby.”

Siasia stirred, her sleep feeling too good to wake up from.

“Come on, baby. My mama here,” he threw in, knowing that would get her attention.

Her eyebrows shot to her hairline before squeezing closed again when she noticed Stephanie standing close enough to see her. “I am going to kill you, Qamar,” she said through gritted teeth, gaining a few laughs from those around.

Qamar looked up at his mama. “Told you, Ma.”

Qamar admired the woman he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. She was gently, serenely wise, and so damn beautiful.

She was home.

“Don't be threatening my baby, Ms. Siasia,” Stephanie fake fussed with humor in her tone.

As Siasia lifted her body, Qamar took Belinay from her which made his baby girl whine. She'd been loving being glued to Siasia which would give her mama a stroke

if she found out.

“Good morning.” Her eyes smiled at Stephanie and Griff. “I would’ve been up if I knew y’all was coming.”

“Oh, he ain’t know we was coming. Nigga had been dodging everybody calls. I’m sorry about your mama.” Stephanie gave a gentle smile. She wanted to say more, wanted to fuss because she offered to attend the service but Qamar told her Siasia didn’t want anyone but her, Qamar, and Noodle there.

All she could hope for now was to build a relationship with the pretty girl that held her baby boy’s heart in her hands.

“Thank you.” The reality of her mama being gone still took a toll on her. “Um. I’m going to get me and Fat Ma, dressed. Where the girls and Malysia?” she finally asked when she didn’t hear or see them.

“Malysia took them to the nail shop,” Qamar explained.

She gave one last nod before taking Belinay back from him and padding off to the room.

“My baby in love,” Stephanie said dramatically while falling on the couch, making the three of them cackle.

Everyone sat around looking at each other, hoping the next person broke the ice. The apartment that used to feel so big to Siasia felt tight and cramped. Not only had all of Qamar's siblings shown up but their children as well. The walls, once adorned with laughter and warmth, now echoed with the weight of unspoken grief of vile words and a broken family.

Siasia cleared her throat and picked at the hem of her dress, trying to gather her thoughts amidst the tension that hung in the air. "Well—" she began, but before she could finish, Stephanie shot her a look, raising her hand as if to physically block whatever was about to come out of Siasia's mouth.

"Uh un," Stephanie said firmly, her tone leaving no room for argument. "Not you." She pointed decisively at Siasia. "You." She glared at Qamar, who was leaned back against the couch, his long legs crossed at a perfect right angle, exuding an air of casual defiance.

"Oop." Siasia snapped her mouth shut, a nervous giggle escaping her lips, which made everyone else chuckle as well, breaking the ice just a little. The laughter felt like a fragile thread connecting them, but when Qamar didn't open his mouth, Siasia elbowed him in the side, urging him to speak.

His brown eyes flicked to hers for a brief moment before shifting to Solar, who sat with her arms crossed, a stony expression on her face. "Man," Qamar finally said, running a hand over his mouth, the weight of the moment settling on his shoulders. "Um, first let me just say, I love all y'all."

“But?” Luna interjected, sitting up straight, her eyes narrowing as she prepared for whatever Qamar was about to unleash.

“Let him cook, baby,” Javen whispered, wrapping his arm around her as if to ground her. Luna kissed her teeth in annoyance but settled back into her husband’s embrace, her body language still tense.

Qamar stared at Luna for a few seconds, the silence stretching uncomfortably before he turned his gaze back to Solar. The tension in the room thickened as he spoke again. “Solar, I’m sorry for that shit I said to you. I was out of line, and I know it don’t mean nothing right now, but I really didn’t mean it. I was pissed and already in a fucked-up headspace and took that shit out on you.” Qamar’s words not only put a damper on their relationship but also caused a rift in the one she shared with French.

“Mhm,” Solar responded, her head nodding but her leg bouncing nervously, a clear sign that she was still grappling with her own emotions.

“Now, Solar,” Stephanie interjected, trying to play the mediator in this emotional tug-of-war, careful not to take a side.

Solar’s head swung to Siasia, her expression shifting. “My only apology is to you. I don’t know you from a can of paint and judged you when like my brother said, I didn’t have any room to do so. If you’re open, I would like to get to know you since it seems you’re going to be around,” she said, her voice steady yet laced with an underlying vulnerability.

The room fell silent again, the weight of Solar’s words hanging in the air like an uninvited guest. Siasia felt the sting of that statement, the sharpness of it cutting through the layers of grief that had settled over them all. The flicker of pain in Solar’s eyes was a reflection of the chaos swirling beneath the surface.

“It's okay,” Siasia finally said, her voice softer than she intended, trying to bridge the gap that had formed. “We’re all just trying to figure this out together.” The words felt like a balm, a small attempt to soothe the raw edges of their fractured relationships.

As the kids continued to run around, oblivious to the adult drama unfolding, Siasia realized that this was not just about apologies; it was about healing, about finding a way to move forward together despite the weight of their shared grief. In that moment, she hoped that maybe, just maybe, they could start to mend the rifts that had formed, one conversation at a time.

“And I think Qamar has more to say,” she spoke up again. Since the death of her mother, Siasia realized life was just too damn short to let ill feelings harbor. There was so much she’d wished she had said to Cynthia when she had the time. There had been so many missed opportunities for her to just bond with the only mother she was ever going to get.

The way her eyes pierced the side of his face, Qamar knew he needed to say something before Siasia put him in the doghouse. The wrong side of her love wasn’t a place he wanted to get familiar with.

“Even when I’m wrong, I still love the fuck out of you. We’ve been going at it since I was old enough to verbally spar with you, Solar. And I know that ain’t no excuse but I ain’t me without you. I ain’t tough. I ain’t charming. I ain’t that nigga on that field because when everyone else had other plans for me, you always told me to do something to stand out—something that could be mine and mine alone. You watched The World Cup with me, learned the game so you could teach me.” His chest tightened, thinking about life with his Solar—the beautifully flawed girl with mommy and daddy issues. “You always been my partner in crime, my fuckin’ keeper.” Qamar sucked in air, trying to keep his shit together. “You was my brother and sister,” he confessed, making Solar laugh as she wiped at her face. Memories of his time running around The Jig with Solar, covered him and made his mental smile.

Solar's lips cracked open, betraying the smile she was fighting to contain, a glimmer of mischief dancing in her eyes. "Keep going," she urged, her voice lilting with playful challenge, igniting laughter and howls from their family.

Standing to his full height, Qamar stepped to Solar with his arms outstretched like a bridge that would reconnect their hearts. Memories flooded back—how she had once been twice his size, effortlessly carrying him on her hip through the vibrant chaos of The Jig, her laughter a melody that still played in his mind. In that moment, he enveloped her in his embrace, their bodies molding together as if they were two pieces of a puzzle that fit perfectly, silencing the shadows of their earlier argument.

"I love you," he whispered, his voice thick with sincerity, the weight of their shared history hanging in the air.

"To the moon, baby," she replied, craning her neck to meet his gaze, her smile now breaking free like the sun bursting through clouds. The room filled with coos and chuckles. Their bond was a testament to the complex love that defined their sibling relationship—a dance of rivalry and unwavering support. It had never spiraled into anything irreparable; like everything in their family, even the toughest moments were woven into the fabric of their connection.

"Now, let's talk about you getting kicked out of school and losing an offer to be drafted," Luna interjected, her neck rolling playfully, the commanding presence of the real mother figure in their lives. She had raised them with a fierce love that rivaled any queen, and though they were grateful for Stephanie, it was Luna who wore the crown, her authority softened by the warmth of her nurturing spirit.

"Now that's the shit I came to talk about," Javen agreed, ready to tear into Qamar like only a big brother could do. He'd been hard on him but just maybe he started to slack off too soon.



Maverick agreed. “You fuckin’ up the family’s track record,” he jested, loving the place they allowed him to be a part of Lunar’s world.

Qamar looked at French, pleading with his eyes for him to chastise him—say something because French’s opinion of him held more weight than either of the men talking to him. Theirs was appreciated but French’s was needed .

“Please say something to your son.” Javen placed his hand on French’s back, slightly pushing him up, knowing Qamar needed to hear him say something. Anything .

Siasia held her breath knowing what Qamar’s heart needed. Noodle plopped beside her, feeling the tension in the air, looking up at Qamar. Ready to determine her like of French on whatever Qamar’s eyes said.

French stepped up with an unreadable expression. He had his own shit that needed to be hashed out but he could never not love Qamar. Qamar had a piece of his heart just like his children did. His love ran so deep for the kid he claimed as his first son that no matter how his feelings felt, he would always put the needs of his kids before his own.

Face to face, French kissed Qamar’s forehead before embracing him in a hug that almost broke the dam on both of their tears. The two months they’d gone without one another was far too long and felt like a decade.

“Damn, man,” Javen fussed, swiping away his own tears.

Luna, Javen, Solar, Tiny, French, and Qamar had all been through some shit. Their struggle and resilience to push through bonded them. The hardships of being unloved and overlooked kids in The Jig—created them.

“I’ll break your fuckin’ nose if you ever do that shit again,” French whispered in

Qamar's ear so only he could hear.

Javen scoffed. "French always trying to have side relationships with Qamar."

"You jealous, baby?" Luna lifted on her tip toes to pinch Javen's cheek.

"Hell yea," he confessed without shame. "You know I got attachment issues."

"You my favorite." Solar wrapped her small arms around Javen. Her eyes tangled with Siasia. "Get yo' good coochie ass over here." She opened her arm for Siasia to join in on her hug with Javen and Luna. "I know it's good. That's the only way a nigga check his family about his girl."

Siasia couldn't do anything but shake her head with a knowing smirk on her face. Solar seemed like a good time and hoped she got to know all of his family since they seemed to all be so close.

Stephanie cozied up beside Griff with Malaysia on her side. "Play To The Moon !" she hollered.

"Ma, you loud and wrong." Solar playfully cut her eyes. "Play our theme music, Aku," she directed her oldest daughter.

"They 'bout to start crying," Little Lunar commented, leaning against the couch near Noodle. "You know the song?" His handsome little dimples deepened every time he talked. He was the spitting image of his deceased father, Lunar.

Noodle shook her head. "Who it's by?"

"Beyonce." He huffed as if Beyonce wasn't the greatest artist alive.

Snickering, Noodle leaned back, crossing her legs. “I like her.”

“I knew you would... girls.” He sighed heavily, shaking his head.

As the horns of the music blared, everyone yelled in unison with Siasia laughing at how amped they all became.

“How many people you know can take it this far,” Stephanie sung off key.

“Please let Luna be the singer.” Malaysia cackled, dodging Stephanie’s playful slap.

“We gone take it to the moon, take it to the stars!” everyone sung in unison, jumping around the living room.

Qamar yanked Siasia into his arms while he rapped every verse word for word. She had no idea how a song could mend a family so easily but it worked.

“T-minus fifteen seconds,” Luna and Javen’s daughter, Jaci, mimicked word for word.

“Lift off,” Solar and French’s son yelled, tossing his tiny arms into the sky with a big smile on his face.

Esmeray climbed into Noodle’s lap to watch the production. She was used to it and would never get enough of it.

As the music faded out, Luna looked around at everyone with a content smile on her face. “You need to get a bigger house, Qamar. Where all us gone sleep at?”

“Better make a pallet like old times. Don’t act like you ain’t from the struggle,” Qamar teased her, still rocking Siasia in his arms.

Luna's hand went into the air to silence the brief moment of happiness. By the look on her face everyone stopped moving.

"Hello?" she answered the phone on speaker.

"Hey, Luna," Barbie greeted with dread of the news she was about to deliver in her voice.

Javen's eyes doubled. He hated the way Luna and Barbie were cordial enough to have one another's number. Barbie was an unofficial ex of his and was still a sore spot since he hated how she seemed to build a relationship with his wife.

"Talk to me, Barbie, because I know you didn't call me to ask me how I was doing," Luna directed the conversation, knowing nothing good was going to come from the impromptu phone call. It never did.

Barbie sighed before revealing the reason for her call. "You know my fans stay on me about not posting enough bad stuff about y'all... so, I just wanted to give you a heads-up that I was sent the video of Qamar and the college brawl that took place as well as a video of the girl it was about dancing on the pole."

Everyone's eyes seemed to dart towards Siasia who shrank under their judgment.

"I don't give a fuck," Qamar declared, already shutting down any negative talk about Siasia. He didn't care about her past and didn't want his family or the world judging her.

Smacking her lips, Barbie continued, "This is too good for me not to post it. Now, I know we have this unspoken bond so I'm just calling you to give you a heads-up."

"How much time?" Luna asked.

“Tomorrow.”

“And this why you should’ve whooped her ass when you had the chance.” Stephanie wagged her finger, pissed that Barbie was going to post bad things about her baby.

“It ain’t too late.” Solar sniffed with her fist balled at her side. She was fuming because her little brother didn’t deserve the bad press. Siasia either. People online liked to pretend their shit was perfect when it was usually the complete opposite.

Luna took a deep breath, her eyes narrowing as she stared at the phone. “Barbie, you know this is going to cause a lot of trouble. Is it really worth it?”

Barbie hesitated, the silence on the other end of the line stretching out uncomfortably. “I don’t want to do this, Luna. But you know how it is. My followers expect this kind of content.”

“Your followers can wait!” Luna snapped. “This isn’t just some gossip. This is our lives. Our family.”

Siasia’s eyes welled up with tears, her body trembling. Qamar wrapped his arm around her protectively, his jaw clenched.

“Luna, please,” Barbie’s voice softened. “I’m giving you a chance to prepare. That’s more than I’ve ever done for anyone else.”

Luna’s gaze shifted to Siasia, who was struggling to hold herself together. She knew what she had to do. “Fine, Barbie. Post it if you must. But know this – if you come for my family again, there will be consequences.”

Barbie sighed, a long, weary sound. “Well, let me get off the phone because I ain’t trying to go there with y’all. I always look out but I can’t ignore this one. I have a

business to run.”

The call ended, and the room fell into a heavy silence. Luna turned to face her family; her expression hard but her eyes filled with determination.

“That’s why you shouldn’t have paid for her schooling just for her to not even finish,” Javen pointed out the obvious.

If looks could kill, Javen would be dead from the look Luna gave him. “Shut the fuck up.”

“I ain’t worried ‘bout that shit, man.” Qamar waved it off, ready to put it behind him.

“You might not but any team that was thinking about signing you will care,” Siasia reminded him. “I mean, I can lay low to let it all die down.”

“Hell no! You too pretty to hide from the world,” Qamar fussed, his statement making her swoon. “Matter of fact, I’m taking you out tomorrow just to show niggas they ain’t stopping shit. It’s us, mama,” he said, pulling her into him and kissing her lips. “Besides, I owe you about twenty years’ worth of fancy ass dates filled with fancy ass drinks.”

That’s my baby right there... being a real man,” Stephanie cheered, lightening the mood of the just tense room.

Noodle sat close to the big window that offered an unobstructed view of the vast night sky, a canvas painted in deep indigos and blacks, dotted with shimmering stars that twinkled like tiny diamonds scattered across velvet. The dark waters of the ocean stretched endlessly before her, the gentle rhythm of the waves crashing against the shore, creating a soothing symphony that filled the room with a sense of peace. She loved the view in Qamar’s living room; it felt like a secret world where time stood

still, allowing her to lose herself in the beauty of the moment. As a Lynn Beach native, it was astonishing to her that she'd never been able to wake up and watch the ocean waves dance in the early morning light, a simple pleasure that felt just out of reach.

After a day filled with laughter and love, where the air had been thick with joy and the warmth of family, she felt a strange guilt settle in her chest. The echoes of their laughter still rang in her ears, the playful teasing and shared stories weaving a tapestry of connection that she cherished. Yet, beneath the surface of that happiness, there was an undercurrent of sorrow that refused to be silenced. She tried to compartmentalize her grief, to lock it away in a box marked "Deal with Later," but no matter how tightly she pressed her lips together in a smile or how brightly her laughter rang out, her heart still ached with the weight of unspoken words and unprocessed feelings.

With her little notepad and pen, Noodle hummed out a rhythm and jotted down some words. She continued the soul cleansing exercise, pouring out her young feelings leaving no room for fear on the paper. The floor creaked, pulling her eyes to Luna who almost blended in with the dark.

"Hey," Luna whispered, easing her way closer to Noodle. She'd watched the pretty little girl all day, catching small glimpses of her big and loving personality that paired well with a smile that stretched across her face and reddened her button nose.

Noodle smiled back. "Am I bothering you?" Her eyes swept across the open floor plan that housed a ton of blow-up mattresses covered in bodies.

Luna shook her head. "You okay, though?"

Skeptically, Noodle eyed Luna, trying to decipher if she was a friend or foe. Knowing that anyone Qamar loved had to be a friend, she decided to be open. "Is it okay, if I'm

not?”

Squatting down, Luna sat beside her on the floor. “I think you’re entitled to not feel okay. Does your sister know you’re a little sad?”

“I try not to be sad because I know if I’m sad it’ll make SiSi sadder. And I don’t want her to be sad. I just want her to be happy because— because I want to believe that being happy is real. The bones in her shoulders exposed by the pink tank top she wore lifted in the air before falling down.

“What makes you think happiness isn’t real?” Luna tried to keep a neutral expression but inside, her heart was breaking for Noodle. No child should need to see examples of happiness to know its real and attainable.

Her big eyes sparkled from the moisture sitting in her tear ducts. “My mama and daddy. They wasn’t happy. He yelled and she cried. But Qamar makes my sister happy. Me too.” She finally found something to smile about.

“Anything else make you happy?”

Her head bobbed, looking too heavy for her slim neck. “Music.” She cheesed.

Teasingly, Luna pursed her lips to the side. “What you know about music, Noodle?”

“I know you’re Moonlight,” she said with adoration in her adolescent voice. “I want to do music like you when I grow up.”

Luna looked at the notepad in Noodles hand. “That’s what you were doing when I heard you humming?”

Noodle nodded.



“It sounded so pretty,” she confessed. The sound of Noodle’s beautiful melody. “Can you sing too?”

Again, her head bounced this time with more excitement. “My sister taught me music,” Noodle revealed before humming so beautifully. “I write songs just for her. I ain’t never let her hear them but one day, I’ll write a whole album and dedicate it to my hero. Siasia is the best parts of the world. At least that’s what my mama said,” Noodle confessed, talking well beyond her years. An old soul live inside her.

Luna was captivated by the tiny version of herself. “Hopefully, one day I can show you how to record some music.”

Her eyes expanded. “Really?”

“Of course. You can be my little protege.” Luna gasped from the big hug Noodle gave her. And as she hugged her back, she heard the sniffles come from the little girl that felt so personal.

“I know you don’t know me, but thank you for loving Qamar.”

Luna sucked in as much air as possible to contain what bubbled in her stomach.

“Because if you didn’t love him, then he wouldn’t know how to love me and my sister. So, thank you, Luna.” Noodle squeezed her tighter as they both cried silently.

Siasia sat beside Qamar in the back of the SUV they were being driven in. For their first official date, Qamar pulled out all the stops. They had a private driver and even security with them. He was giving Siasia a taste of how her life would be from now on. It didn't take eyes to see she was nervous. The way her leg shook, everyone in the car could feel it.

"Chill, mama." Qamar gripped her exposed thigh that glistened under the passing streetlights. The sun had started to set beautifully, casting a warm, golden hue over the city, which meant the streetlights had come on to warn of the night.

The SUV glided smoothly through the streets, the cityscape transforming as twilight gave way to night. The hum of the engine and the soft murmur of the radio provided a steady backdrop. Siasia's heart raced, her mind swirling with thoughts of what lay ahead.

Qamar's touch was firm yet gentle, his thumb tracing soothing circles on her skin. His touch gave her a little reprieve from her nerves but not enough to fully make her heart stop beating rapidly.

The whole thing was new to her and frightening because there was a possibility that the news story broke on Ken Barbie's account, which meant they were walking into the lion's den. The thought alone made her blood boil. She wasn't ashamed of her life. Siasia just didn't think it was interesting enough to have strangers comment on it.

Outside, the city lights flickered to life, creating a mesmerizing dance of shadows and

light on the car windows. The atmosphere inside the SUV was a mix of anticipation and excitement, the air thick with unspoken words. Siasia took a deep breath, trying to steady her nerves.

Qamar felt it too. “We don’t have to go if you don’t want to but know I ain’t hiding you from no body and I will take you out and trick on you like the proper nigga I am.”

A smile burst across her face. “You so damn poetic.”

“Nah, I’m in love. Love make me say shit I mean even of its all jumbled up or comes out a little corny.”

His proposition didn’t sound too bad, but Siasia knew she couldn’t hide forever. In just under five months, her heart knew Qamar was who she wanted to be with, even if it scared her shitless. The warmth of his words and the sincerity in his eyes made her feel like she could face anything, even the prying eyes of strangers.

“Fuck them,” she sassed.

“That’s what I’m trying to tell you.” He smiled. “Ain’t nothing nobody can say to me that’ll make me switch up on you, mama.”

Contentment filled her as they finally pulled up to Steak 530 . It had been ranked number one for steak houses in Lynn Beach which was saying a lot. The upscale eateries in Lynn Beach were all top tier and people came far and wide to indulge.

All the confidence she had seconds prior started to twiddle down when she noticed the sidewalk filled with people holding their phones out and camera light on. The quiet place of Qamar’s room didn’t seem so bad after all. She missed it and although she wanted to be wined and dined by him, if it came with all this every time, she

would happily take a ran check.

“Don’t run, mama.”

“Huh?” Siasia licked her lips, her eyes empty since she was caught up in her own mind.

“I see you ready to leave me again. Not this time. I gave you an out, you didn’t take it. Let’s go.” Qamar cuffed his hand into hers.

It was now or never and based on the firm grip he had on her hand, Siasia knew it was now.

Qamar held Siasia's hand tightly as they stepped out of the back seat, the evening air cool and crisp. They were both dressed to impress with Qamar in a knit designer short-sleeved shirt, jeans that fit his thick and sculpted thighs to perfection, finishing it off with designer loafers and his jewelry. Siasia wore a shimmering silver dress that caught the light with every step, accentuating her juicy thighs with the split that seemed to outline her hourglass figure just right. Tonight was supposed to be special, a night where they could forget the chaos of the past and simply enjoy each other's company while making a statement of being together and not running from the tabloids. Two security guards hired by Luna flanked them, creating protection.

The flurry of camera flashes and shouted questions shattered all that. Paparazzi swarmed around them, their cameras clicking furiously. "Qamar, is it true you got expelled for fighting?" one shouted.

"Siasia, how do you respond to the rumors about you being a stripper?" another yelled.

Siasia's grip on Qamar's hand tightened, her heart pounding in her chest. “The fuck?”

Her face twisted. She had never experienced anything like this before. The questions were relentless, and the flashing lights were blinding.

Qamar, her Superman, wrapped an arm around her shoulders and guided her through the throng as his jaw set in determination. “Aye, back the fuck up!” he spoke through gritted teeth. He wasn’t new to being bombarded by reporters but it had been a while since it happened. When he was younger, anytime he was with someone from his family, it happened. Especially with Luna. His life was such a mystery to people that they loved getting a tiny glimpse into it.

They finally made it to the door, pushing it open to get away from the yells.

Inside, the ambiance was serene, a stark contrast to the chaos outside. Siasia took a deep breath, trying to steady her nerves.

Qamar looked at her with concern, his eyes softening. “You good, mama?” he asked gently.

Siasia nodded, though her voice wavered slightly. “I probably need to rethink my profession.” She laughed. “Like damn, they acting like thirsty zombies.”

“That shit gets annoying.” Qamar sighed. “But tonight is about us, let me spoil you and love on you.”

“You such a damn lover boy, Qamar.” She blushed.

Her hair was pulled back into a sleek ponytail that she did herself. With the hair away from her face, he saw her beauty more fluidly. Her makeup was lightly painted on her face only adding to the structure of her face—slanted eyes, upturned more with wispy lashes and her juicy lips glossed to perfection. Qamar would be in her skin if he could. To satisfy his hunger for her, he wrapped her in his arms, inhaling her clean

scent.

“Welcome to Steak 530, Mr. Moony.” The hostess smiled as she walked up to the hostess stand. Grabbing the drink menu only, she ushered them to their table.

As Qamar and Siasia followed behind her, they were greeted by a grand chandelier hanging from the ceiling, its crystal facets casting a warm and romantic glow across the room. The walls were adorned with tasteful artwork, each piece carefully selected to complement the luxurious decor.

The tables were draped in white linens, with flickering candlelight adding more romance to the atmosphere. Plush, high-backed chairs provided comfort and a sense of privacy, while the soft murmur of conversation and the gentle clinking of glassware created a soothing background ambiance. Siasia smiled at an older Black couple as they passed them.

In the center of the room, a grand piano played soft, melodic tunes, adding to the sophisticated vibe. The waitstaff moved gracefully between the tables, attending to each guest with care.

Siasia smirked at him when the hostess took them to the table next to the window. “You love a damn window.” She snickered.

“Hell yea.” He smiled, showing off his bottom grill. Qamar put that shit on everyday but he really took it up a notch for their date. He also spared no expense when it came to Siasia’s outfit as well. The only thing she did was her own hair and makeup which he offered to pay for that as well.

The restaurant's large windows offered a stunning view of the city’s skyline, the lights twinkling like stars in the distance. The entire setting exuded an air of exclusivity and refinement, making it the perfect backdrop for a special

evening—their first official date.

The hostess placed their drink menus on the table before announcing, “Your waitress will be over shortly for your drink orders. The chef has already started preparing your meals for the night.”

“Oh, we don’t get to order here?” Siasia’s brows dipped.

The hostess laughed. “Girl, yes but your date here has ordered everything so you can taste it all.”

That filled Siasia with pride. The saying if he wanted to, he would played over in her head because she’d never had a man let alone one that wanted to . “You showing out, tonight.”

“Trying to tell you, I’m going to show out every night when it comes to you and my kids. That includes Noodle.”

She loved the way he always included her sister. That gesture alone was enough to steal her heart but Qamar never stopped at what seemed to be easy to him. He applied pressure, turning her into the rarest, most exquisite diamond known to man. That was how he made her feel. Worthy. Expensive. Black excellence.

Neither of them were twenty-one yet, with Qamar’s birthday coming around the corner but with money, no one really carded them. It was no different when the waitress came to take their drink order.

“You didn’t have to order all the damn lemon drops.” Siasia laughed, taking a sip from the strawberry lemon drop that seemed to be her favorite.

Qamar sipped his own brown liquor. “I told you I was going to take you one of the

fancy restaurants and get you a cute, girly drink. I mean ain't nothing wrong with drinking beer but my wife gotta have taste."

"You just be talking... wife?" Her eyes gazed at him from over the rim of the fancy, thin glass.

"Name a time, I said some shit that I didn't back up?" He waited a few seconds for her to name one. "Just like I thought, you can't."

"Oh, puh-lese," she huffed.

The two of them fell into natural conversation. They were so into each other that the prior events and getting swarmed with intrusive questions no longer seemed relevant.

When the food came, she danced in her seat at how good it was. The tables was full, so they had to pull up another one to accommodate all the food and drinks. Qamar ordered everything from steak to lobsters and every fixing in between.

As they sat at the table with full bellies, Qamar, with a mischievous glint in his eye, pulled out his phone and scrolled through his playlist. He found the perfect song and hit play, not giving a damn about the patrons around them. He wanted to make every moment between them memorable and fun. They were young and although the restaurant was nice, he felt the date needed to be turned up a notch.

Siasia looked up, curious. "What you doing?" she asked with a nervous smile.

Qamar stood up and extended his hand to her. "Dance with me, mama," he whispered. His height and hood looks had all eyes on him. That and how fine he was.

Butta Love started to play and Siasia almost fell out form laughing. "What you know 'bout this?" Tears misted her eyes, thinking about her mama and how she knew all



the old stuff from Cynthia.

“You’re like my homie, my shorty, you’ve shown me so many things,” he crooned.

A few women in the restaurant started to hoot in a low tone when they realized he could really sing.

She hesitated for a moment, glancing around at the other diners, but his infectious grin melted her reservations. She took his hand and stood up, feeling a rush of excitement.

“Don’t make me beat all these old hoes up in here.”

“I’ll help you,” he declared, resting his hand on the small of her back.

“You better ‘cause a few of them look like they might know how to tussle.”

As they swayed to the music, Qamar pulled her close, his voice soft and warm as he sang the lyrics into her ear. “You got the love that I want. You got the love that I need.”

The world around them seemed to fade away, leaving just the two of them in their own little bubble—the universe he said he’d create for them.

"You always know how to make me feel special," Siasia murmured, her heart fluttering.

Qamar smiled, his eyes never leaving hers. "That's because you are special," he spoke sincerely. “You deserve to be happy. When people ask how you feel, I want the first answer to be happy.”

She wiped away at the tear, thinking about her mama and how she never got to know what true happiness felt like.

“She want you to be happy more than anyone on this earth or in the afterlife, mama. You made her happy. That was enough for her.” Qamar kept his tone low, making their moment even more private.

Her wet slanted eyes looked up into his. The answers were there but she just had to ask. “How you know?”

“She told me, mama. I talked to Cynthia a few times when you called yourself leaving me.”

Her sorrow turned into laughter. “I should’ve known by the way she was damn near rooting for you the last time we really talked. I miss her so much, Daddy.”

“I know but you gotta wake up every day, choosing to not let your grief overtake you. I felt that shit when my big brother was killed then again when Papa passed. That shit hurt like hell but we all kept living, making all their sacrifices not be in vain.” His thumb ran across her lips, wiping away a tear. “I got you but I can’t be your only source of happiness. You gotta find that shit inside of you. I’ll help you along the way but you gotta do the work too, mama. Anything you want to do, consider it done. If you want to go back to school, I got that shit too. Anything.”

Sniffling, Siasia nodded still looking in his brown eyes. “How you so perfect?”

“Shit, I ain’t. I’m a young nigga with two kids, two baby mamas, trying to wife up another girl. I’m far from perfect but you make me want to get as close to it as possible. When I’m with you, I be the closest to it ‘cause you perfect, mama.” Qamar didn’t want to hear anything from her so he snaked his tongue into her mouth, taking her breath away while feeding her his.

They continued to dance as more old school slow jams played from his phone.

A few other couples decided to join them, making the night even more special. Of course, some had to pull their phones out, which Siasia didn't mind. In that moment, as they danced in the middle of the fancy restaurant, Siasia felt like the luckiest woman in the world. The way Qamar held her, the sound of his voice, and the warmth of his presence made her swoon, and she was exactly where she was meant to be.

“ Y ou sound like you’re in good spirits,” Candi acknowledged through the phone, her voice bright and full of energy as they stayed connected via FaceTime since Siasia had left the house. “Look cute too,” she added, wiggling her brows playfully, causing Noodle to giggle in the backseat, her laughter a sweet melody that filled the car.

The sound of her little sister laughing filled her chest. Siasia had been worried about Noodle and how she was taking the death.

“Don’t encourage her, Noodle,” Siasia replied, casting a quick glance at her sister through the rearview mirror, a smirk tugging at her lips. Her mind went to the post Ken Barbie put up that was going viral.

The air in the apartment was thick with tension and the need to speak what was on their heart, but Siasia was being stubborn, and Qamar allowed it—stifling every unspoken word.

Siasia sat on the edge of the couch, her body coiled tight, the flickering sun battling with the clouds, casting shadows that danced across her face and revealing the struggle within her. She wanted to voice the turmoil that churned in her heart, the fears and insecurities that clawed at her, but pride held her tongue captive.

Qamar, on the other hand, watched her with a mix of yearning and pain. His heart aching to bridge the distance between them. He understood the weight of her silence. It was a silence filled with longing and unresolved emotions, each moment stretching into eternity. Sex couldn't sure this one no matter how much they fucked all over the house the night prior. They were in the big leagues now—only words would suffice. In the big leagues, love wasn't the star. Love was the coach while compromise and communication were the big two. They got paid the big bucks to score all the points and bring the win home.

He always wanted to give Siasia what she wanted, even if it meant enduring the sharp sting of his own heartache. It was a bittersweet sacrifice, knowing that sometimes love meant standing back and allowing her to wrestle with her demons alone. Qamar felt the sharp edges of his own vulnerability pressing against his chest. The fear of losing her gnawed at him like a relentless tide. Yet, he remained steadfast, a silent sentinel in the storm of her emotions, willing to bear the burden of her stubbornness if it meant she could find her way to the truth.

The room pulsed with unspoken words, a longing for connection that hung in the air, begging for release. Each glance exchanged was heavy with meaning, every sigh a testament to the love that tethered them, even in the moments when they felt worlds apart.

“Talk to me, mama.” His resolve breaking down because this time, he couldn’t give her what she wanted. This time his needs were more important, and life without her wasn’t an option. So, as the man, he had to force her to bring compromise and communication off the bench. They didn’t belong there anyway.

“What do you want me to say? I just want my sister back. Anything else is irrelevant!” she snapped, the bite in her voice showing off her canines.

Qamar didn’t like the tone or dismissiveness in her voice. She was ready to fight about who’s problem was more important when the truth was, they both were equally as important and if they handled shit like adults—as a force, everything could be easily resolved.

“You’re fuckin’ selfish, Siasia. You know that? Of course you do.” He snorted out an unamused laugh. “You’re selfish but mask it as since life dealt you a bad hand, it’s not really selfishness. In your selfish ass mind it’s survival.”

“It is survival!” she yelled. “Newsflash, Qamar while you’ve been living, I’ve been surviving. I can’t deal with this right now.” Siasia stood from the couch, ready to get in her raggedy car and take off. She was ready to run. Her legs itched for the feel of wind whipping past her as she ran. She was a runner.

“‘Cause God fuckin’ forbid, I need you sometimes to make my shit better like I’ve been doing for you since the day I met you.” His stomach churned at the thought of Siasia running. Again.

“I didn’t ask you too though.” Her hands flailed in the air.

His feet moved quick like he was making a play on the field. In her face, he glared down at her. “You never had to! One look in your eyes at the party— I saw you. The you that thought cute clothes, dope hairstyles, and fire pussy could hide from the world. One look in your tight eyes, and I saw me. I saw home . Not the big house you see today, but the home I came from. The broken home in The Jig that my sister made feel warm. The tiny home I was so eager to cramp up in to be close to the only granddaddy I ever had.” His throat tightened, thinking about Javen’s grandfather, Jason, who had a hand in raising all of them in one way or another. “Those fuckin’ eyes,” he pushed his finger into the side of her head. “Those damn eyes called out to me in a forgotten language that only the real ones could hear. Shit was like a trance, and I just had to get close to you. I just had to feel you. It wasn’t your body that pulled my eyes to you that night. It was those fuckin’ eyes I can’t get out of my head.” He turned away with his hands in his locs that were in desperate need of a retwist. Even his line-up had grown out.

“Just don’t walk away from me, mama. Please,” he begged. Qamar was so out of himself that he didn’t even have the energy to wipe away his tears. “I know this ain’t animal life. I got two kids and sometimes I get in my head too bad that I doubt the shit that should be easy.” He punched his hand. “But when I’m with you, I don’t doubt shit. Ain’t no pressure sitting on my chest suffocating me because I don’t think I’m good enough. You give me purpose. Your love gives me strength.”

“Qamar,” Siasia sobbed.

“Man come on.” He wiped away her tears. “Don’t cry ‘cause that shit hurt me too. I’m just asking you... begging you to not walk away from me, mama. What I’m gone do when shit gets too tough? How I’m gone go home if it ain’t there no more?” Qamar poured out his heart, leaving his chest hollow. “Name a song.”

She licked her lips, torn up at the idea of him being torn up. “Crash.”

“Man, what?” He looked her upside the head.

She laughed through turmoil. “No, that’s the name of the song. Crash by Kehlani.” Siasia cleared her throat. “You kiss me like you want to make love to all my fuckin’ demons. And I don’t want to wake up. Baby just lie here and crash, land your love on me.”

His cognac eyes brightened. “What that mean, Mama? You gotta say it.” He bounced on his toes like a kid, waiting for the prize his mama promised him if he did good in school for the week.

“I love you, so much, Daddy. I might be home, but you’re the land I sit on. Ain’t no me without you.”

“And when the world comes for us... when this shit gets tough, ‘cause it will. What then?”

With pride in her eyes, she lifted her head. “I will follow you to the ends of this universe and the next. I will stand beside you, in front of you, and behind you. What you have done for me... what you have given me, makes me trust you with my life. Qamar, I don’t give a fuck about the world when it comes to you.”

“Then make this shit right, Mama. Make our family whole. I’ll handle the big shit.”

Siasia's video was a heartfelt tapestry woven with moments that captured the essence of Qamar—the man behind the fame and the big family name. The montage began with a gentle fade-in, showing Qamar in his element on the soccer field, the sun shining bright over his determined face, showing off those pretty brown eyes she couldn’t get enough of. Each clip displayed not just his athletic prowess but the joy



that radiated from him, a joy that spilled over into every interaction with his kids, their laughter echoing like sweet music as they played in the park and their smiles a mirror of his own.

As the music swelled, the scenes shifted to intimate family gatherings, where Qamar was the anchor, surrounded by loved ones. There were candid shots of him laughing with his siblings, arms thrown around each other in a brotherly embrace, and moments of him deep in conversation with his mother, their bond palpable and full of warmth. Each image was a testament to his roots, a reminder that beneath the accolades and achievements lay a heart that beat for family.

One of her favorite still shots had to be of that damn tattoo on his back. The moon that represented where it all started. When Siasia thought about it, maybe the moon had always been a metaphor for what The Jig felt like for them. The names of all those he loved inked into his brown skin, dipping and gliding over his back muscles, gave her chills.

Then came the quiet moments—still images of Qamar lost in thought during their trip to Alabama, the serene landscape behind him as he gazed into the distance, contemplating life and love. These were the moments that Siasia cherished, capturing the vulnerability that made him human, a stark contrast to the superstar image the world often saw—he was more than that, he was Superman.

With each transition, Siasia's voiceover narrated her love for him, her words flowing like a river, painting a picture of a man who was not just a soccer star but a devoted father, a loyal brother, and a loving partner. “This is my Superman,” she said, her voice filled with pride. “This is Qamar—real, raw, and undeniably extraordinary.”

As the video drew to a close, the screen filled with a collage of their happiest memories together, a vibrant explosion of color and emotion. The final frame read "Beyond the Stars" encapsulating their journey and the infinite love they shared. It

was a tribute that resonated deeply, destined to go viral as it unveiled the true Qamar to the world—a man whose heart was as big as his dreams.

She prayed he saw it and felt as grand and as loved as he was. She hoped he didn't get in his head and feel unworthy because on some real shit, he deserved that plus more.

Closing her laptop, she sighed, content and full.

“Fix, this shit, Mama,” rang in her ears. Siasia knew what she needed to do. The open love letter to him was just the start. It was time she accepted that she was big mama and played her part. It was time she loved him through words and actions like he'd done for her.

With dread, Siasia pulled up to Janay's house. She'd gotten the address from Malaysia after jokingly sparring with her about why she needed it. Now, as she sat in the parking lot of the cute and quaint townhouses complex that was secured by a fence and a guard who let her in just by her fluttering her lashes, she no longer felt as confident. Still, the visit had to take place. If Qamar had to handle the big shit, then she could manage the small things. The situation with Janay was important but it was small.

From the outside, everything looked nice and clean. Siasia knew the bills were footed by Qamar and after sitting with that reality for a few seconds, she was okay with that. It was how he moved as a man, and she needed to have thick enough skin to understand that as a man with the means to do so, he would never allow his kids' mothers to live below his means. If it was in his means to make a way, that was what he did. Qamar would foot the bills for his children which meant for their mothers as well.

The weight on her chest started to lift, letting her know she was doing the right thing.

Stepping out the car, a light breeze swept across her face, tickling her soul. She told herself it was her mother walking with her, guarding her and covering her in love. Pushing her head up, Siasia walked up the sidewalk with her head held high, ready for anything. Siasia tapped on the neutral-colored door while taking in the cute little flowers that gave the townhouse a touch of girly curb appeal.

“Who is it?” Janay called out, sounding like she was a good distance from the door.

Nervously, Siasia cleared her throat. “Siasia,” she called out, pushing her face closer as if that would make her voice louder.

Janay pulled the door open in shock. “Qamar doesn’t live here.”

“I know,” Siasia said like, duh. “I’m here for you.”

“Okay?” Janay rested her hand on her hip. Her long locs flowed to her round butt. If she wasn’t such a pain in Siasia’s ass, she would’ve told her she was beautiful because she was.

“You ain’t gonna let me in?” Siasia asked, looking behind Janay inside her home.

When the door first opened, the scent of lemon wafted out, making the outside feel like a sunny day even though it was gloomy with a forecast of rain in the next hours.

Kissing her teeth while rolling her eyes, Janay stepped to the side to allow Siasia in.

“Excuse my house. Since I’m a single mother I don’t always have time to clean up.” She twisted her mouth.

Siasia cocked her eyes. “Janay, cut the bullshit. You ain’t a single mother because Belinay’s daddy is very much present.”

“Look around, do you see him anywhere? Newsflash, you’re not gonna,” Janay joked and had it not been about her man, Siasia would’ve laughed.

“Cute.” Siasia crinkled her nose. “Where is Belinay?”

“At daycare.”

“That her daddy pays for?”

Janay faked a laugh. “As he should. She didn’t ask to be here.”

“She ain’t his,” Siasia blurted, cutting straight to the chase, by passing all the bullshit she felt Janay was ready to be on.

“He told you that?” Janay was on her feet pacing with a look of disbelief. Her eyes went from worry to anger because Qamar told her he would never tell anyone that. “So what now? You here to tell me he changed his mind and he ain’t gonna be Belinay’s daddy anymore?”

“Calm down, Janay.”

“I can’t!” Janay yelled. “What—what happened? Tell him I’ll chill out on us being a family. Tell him he ain’t gotta give me money anymore. Just don’t take him away from Belinay. You—you can have him.” She was flustered.

“First, calm down. Second, you can’t give me what’s already mine, love.” Siasia didn’t raise her voice. “Let’s start there. Qamar will love you. Not in a romantic way. He will love you because he loves Belinay. I’m here because I need you to understand that.” She crossed her legs at the ankles. “I need you to not misconstrue that.”

Janay swallowed, hating the way Siasia's words felt in her gut. Was she in love with Qamar? Janay knew she could be but from what his girlfriend was relaying to her, he wouldn't love her back. At least not in the way that her daddy loved her mama. Qamar would love her in the way of being a united front for Belinay and supporting Belinay's mom in whatever she wanted to pursue.

Qamar wouldn't love her though.

Siasia watched Janay's face take her through a range of emotions. When it settled on understanding, she continued, "Janay, I will never deter Qamar from loving and providing for Belinay. No matter what. As far as the three of us know, she is his. This secret will never get out. Even if you piss me off or make me mad. Even if me and Qamar don't work out. I will never tell that secret because the truth is, she is his daughter."

"Thank you," Janay whispered, her voice barely above a murmur, but Siasia could hear the sincerity woven into those two simple words.

Siasia nodded, gratitude swelling in her chest. "I need you to move forward with all of this like you got some damn sense. All that messy baby mama drama you want to be with, kill all that. We are not enemies. I am an ally. I love your daughter and would never try to take her or turn her away from you." The room felt charged with a newfound energy. The tension between them transformed into an unspoken pact; a bridge built on mutual respect and understanding.

Janay allowed everything Siasia said to her to sink in like a stone dropped into still water, rippling through her thoughts. At first, the truth stung sharply, but as the seconds passed, reality settled like a heavy blanket. It didn't matter if Qamar had met Siasia or not; he still wouldn't have chosen Janay. Swallowing hard, she acknowledged that painful acceptance.

“Thank you, for real, Siasia. It takes a special person to do this, which lets me know that my daughter will be well taken care of while in your presence. But she won’t be calling you Mommy.” Her fight to not smile lost as an organic one stretched across of face.

Siasia burst into laughter. She held her stomach, the joy of the moment breaking through the heaviness that had lingered. “I wouldn’t have it any other way.” They both realized that they were navigating this unconventional web together, forging a path that would allow them to coexist for the sake of Belinay.

Qamar pulled up to Noodle’s mama’s house. The engine of his shiny blacked-out SUV purring as he parked on the cracked pavement. He stuck out like a sore thumb. Nosey neighbors peeked from their windows or stopped what they were doing to see who he was and where he was going. The sky hung low, a blanket of gray clouds threatening to spill their contents at any moment. The air was thick with the scent of rain, mingling with the faint aroma of fried food wafting from a nearby window, a reminder of The Jig.

He stepped out, the humidity biting at his skin, and made his way to the front door, each step heavy with the weight of what he was about to do. The paint on the house was peeling, the yard overgrown—no place for his princess to be. And no place his queen would want her.

As he knocked, the sound echoed in the silence, and his heart raced.

Jackie opened the door, her expression a mix of surprise and wariness. “What do you want and who are you?” she asked, crossing her arms defensively.

Noodle stood off to the side but rushed to the door when she heard his voice. “Qamar!” she said with excitement. Her eyes grew a tad bit sad when she looked for Siasia but didn’t see her. The two days of being away from her sister had been tough

on her. Jackie tried to be nice but had no patience for a kid.

He took a breath, steadying himself. "I'm here to talk about Noodle." He looked at his princess and smiled. "I want to offer you some money to sign over your rights to Siasia."

Jackie's brows furrowed. The tension was palpable. "You think you can just waltz in here and buy her? She's my daughter!" The words were sharp, but beneath them laid a current of desperation.

"Was she your daughter when you handed her over fresh out the pussy to Stacy? Huh, was she you daughter then?" Qamar challenged. "Noodle, go wait in the back."

When Qamar spoke, Noodle listened because he knew everything and all the answers. Without hesitating, she ran off to the kitchen that sat in the back of the one-bedroom home that reeked of cigarettes, beer, and fried bologna.

Jackie's nose flared. "You can't come over here telling me or my daughter what to do, nigga. I knew a man just like you," she sneered, stepping onto the porch to get in his face. "He dead, would you like to join him?"

"Cut the bullshit, Jackie. Noodle gone, now." He paid her anger no mind. Qamar was only there for one thing and he wasn't leaving without it. He couldn't go home without Noodle. He had to handle the big shit.

Her big, almond eyes that reminded him of his Noodle bounced around. "How much?" she whispered.

"I'm like Progressive, name your price?" His charming eyes sparkled when without the sun being on his side. Clasp his hands in front of him, he rocked, waiting for Jackie to name a number she felt would break him. There wasn't a number she could

come up with that would break him. His pockets had been deep since his family started making real money. Even without going pro, Qamar was good. His children would be good. However, he would allow the woman with Noodle's whole face try her best.

"I don't have all day."

After what felt like an eternity, Jackie's resolve began to waver. "Fifty... no a hundred," she whispered, praying her daughter didn't hear her. It was bad enough that she allowed Stacy to take her baby to be raised by another woman all while still sleeping with him whenever he decided he didn't love Cynthia anymore. Now, she was willing to put a price on her daughter. She was disgusted with herself but needed the money and in only two days, she realized she wasn't good at being a mother.

"Done." Qamar smirked.

The thought of Noodle thriving with Siasia, surrounded by love and stability, tugged at her heart. Finally, with a heavy sigh, she relented, "And this isn't just about money. You take care of her." She wagged her finger with tears sitting at the rim of her eyes.

"That's a given. My princess will thrive because she is royalty," Qamar declared, pulling out the paperwork he had Elle, his family's attorney draw up, a pen, and a blank check. Handing it all over to Jackie, he watched her fill out the documents as the breath he'd been holding eased out of him.

"Will I be able to ever see her again?" Jackie asked, handing the papers over to him.

"Reach out to Siasia. If you got your shit together I don't see why not." Qamar cupped his hand around his mouth, "Princess!" he called out to Noodle.

Running at full speed with sad eyes, she looked up at him when she got to the door.



“Give Jackie a hug and lets go,” he revealed, watching the sadness vanish from her eyes immediately.

Only the sound of Noodle humming was heard as Qamar drove them to the other side of town. Lynn Beach was a peculiar place—the college side was affluent with malls, shops, and high-end restaurants while the other side was worn and lacked basic necessities. It reminded Qamar of The Jig except there was no other side. Yes, Sapphire City had a side of town that was better than the ghetto but it wasn’t a drastic change from one side to the other.

“Qamar is it bad if I want to maybe still see my real mom?” Noodle kept her focus on the scenery outside, afraid of what he might say. Scared to look at him and see disappointment in his eyes.

“Nah, Princess, I don’t think it’s bad but you might want to ask yourself why you think it’s bad.”

“Um, probably because she tried to take me from SiSi.” Noodle’s brain tried to rationalize all the reasons she shouldn’t like Jackie.

Qamar kept his eyes on the road when he spoke. “That don’t matter because you’re going back with Siasia. Do you want a relationship with Jackie?”

Noodle twisted her mouth to the side of her face, thinking on the question she already had the answers to. “I know it was only two days but Jackie wasn’t mean to me or anything. It felt like she could be okay if I had to live with her forever... and I don’t have a mama anymore so...” Her shoulders hiked before falling just as fast.

“I think you should get to know your mama, Princess. I know what it feels like to be mad at the woman who birthed you and at the same time loving them so much it should’ve been criminal. I support whatever you want to do, and I know Siasia will

too.” He peeked in on her through the mirror, smiling when he saw her lips curl.

Noodle was content with his support and a ball of energy when they pulled up to Qamar’s apartment that had easily become her and Siasia’s home.

“Qamar?”

“Yea?”

“Name a song.” She smiled, unable to contain her big smile. Being with Qamar was almost better than being with Siasia and Esmeray.

“Hmm.” He tapped his chin, pretending to think. “You like Beyonce, right?” Twisting his neck, he peered at her. They were in the parking lot just sitting in the car.

“You know I do.” She rolled her eyes playfully.

“ Bigger . How it go?”

“Life is your birthright, they hid that in the fine print... you’re part of something way bigger.” Veins popped out of Noodle’s slim neck as she sung like a woman twice her age.

Siasia hadn’t even heard her sing before but Qamar and Luna knew. They knew she would be special. Noodle was part of something way bigger. They’d told her that and had shown her that.

Just as Noodle climbed from the backseat to wrap her arms around Qamar, Siasia’s worn down car pulled up. They heard it before they saw her and that made them laugh.

“I gotta get Mama a new car.”

“Please.” Noodle rolled her neck in a circle.

Qamar ruffled her hair. “Don’t do my baby like that. Come on, so she can gone ahead and cry.”

He didn’t have to tell Noodle twice. Just as eager to cry and hug her sister because two days was too damn long, she pushed the front door opened, catching Siasia by surprise.

“No.” In shock Siasia fell to her knees. “Are you really here?” she asked when Noodle fell into her. Examining her hair and her face, Siasia needed to be sure it was all real.

“It’s me, SiSi. I’m back forever.” She turned to Qamar to make sure it was forever. When he nodded, she snuggled her head into her big sister more.

“Ooh,” Siasia couldn’t hold in her happiness. It spilled out of her pores—dripped from her eyes. Her Noodle was back and it was all thanks to the boy whose eyes had all the answers.

As they all reunited, the sky opened. The rain began to fall, a cleansing downpour that washed away the past and heralded a new beginning for them. Drenched just that fast, Qamar lifted them up to embrace the both of them in his arms. All he needed was for his other two girls to be there. In due time, they would all be together. Qamar was certain.

His phone vibrated in his pockets. When he dug it out, he didn’t recognize the number but decided to answer it while the three of them stood in the pouring rain in no hurry to retreat to shelter.

“Hello?”

“Qamar Moony, I’ve been trying to reach you. This Three , the owner of The Emerald City Kings. You ready?”

“Um, what you mean?” Qamar scratched at the back of his head. His line-up was severely grown out.

“I said are you ready, nigga?” Three was a Black man and the only Black owner of an MLS team.

Qamar laughed at the way the man talked to him like they were familiar. “I mean, what you offering?”

“Everything a Black man deserves. Come see me,” Three suggested with confidence.

“Send over the details.” Qamar nodded, feeling good about it. So good, his heart almost burst out of his chest.

“Say less. Sending now. Enjoy the rest of your day, Qamar,” Three said before ending the call.

“I knew you had all the answers.” Siasia craned her neck to look him in his eyes. Her personal Superman. Every time she looked at him she felt assured, assured that he would defeat all the bad guys in her universe.

Days later, Siasia sat on a rock watching the sun set and the waves crash onto the sand. Her eyes were bloody red from the downpour of tears that didn't seem to end. To give herself a break from trying to hide it, she decided to sit at the beach that was merely feet away from Qamar's condo.

As she sat there, she wondered why it had taken her so long to take advantage of being in a high-rise that sat on the beach. It was calming and peaceful—made her feel closer to her mom since she wasn't able to officially bury her.

Cynthia's body was burned to a crisp and all they had were some bullshit ashes that was probably more of the trailer than her actual mom. To make matters worse, she knew Stacy was probably mixed in too. That didn't matter because Qamar paid for her mama to be sent home in style. With just the three of them and a pastor, it turned out beautifully. Cynthia would've loved it.

Now, after so much had gone on around her, Siasia was finally able to process and grieve. The grieving seemed to have a vendetta with her by the way water poured from her eyes. Not only did she not want Qamar to worry, but she also didn't want Noodle to be sad. It was why she had made the executive decision to take her ass outside to cry as much as she wanted, hoping the tears would run into the ocean without leaving any evidence of her broken heart.

“Oh, mama,” she cried. “I wish you could see the way this man loves me.” Siasia wiped her face as her chest shook. “I was scared at first, and I kept running because your version of love was all I knew, and I didn't want that. Hell, for you or me.” She

laughed just a little, thinking about all the times she told her mama Stacy didn't love her. "Now I understand how dumb and blind love can make you." A breeze swept across her face. Siasia knew it had to be her mama hugging her. "Ma, I went to this man's baby mama's house. Chile, I just knew she was going to be ready to fight but love carried me there and love gave me patience." Snickering, she looked off into the sky, seeing the seagulls flying in a circle.

A deep sigh deflated her chest. "I just miss you. I know you're somewhere in heaven dancing with the other angels and you've found peace. That's all I wanted for you because I've found it too."

Talking to her mama was better than talking to God. It aided in her search for understanding. As her tears settled, relieving her of the pain in her chest, tiny hands caused her to jump.

"You okay, SiSi?" Noodle asked, looking back to make eye contact with Qamar who'd walked her down after they saw Siasia sitting on the beach.

Siasia reached out her arms to lift Noodle onto the rock with her. "I'm okay, now. What about you? I know I haven't been feeding your feelings, and I apologize for that."

"I think I'm okay. I know what dying is but maybe I don't all the way understand how I should feel. I loved my daddy and mama, and I'm sad a little but I'm happy that I still have you," she confessed, looking up into her big sister's eyes. "And Qamar. He has been the best since he came into my life."

Siasia nodded, understanding how Noodle felt about Qamar because she had the same feelings. Her life became better the day he wrapped his arm around her mid-section at that party.

“Well I want you to know I’m here for you and if you want to cry, you can cry until your heart is content.”

“What about if I want to get to know Jackie?” Noodle eased her eyes back up to Siasia. She’d always known of Jackie but Cynthia was her mother no matter what DNA said.

Siasia swallowed the bile that threatened to spill. “Um, that’s okay too, Noodle.”

Her mind said it was okay but her heart told her to take her sister and get her brain erased. The thought of having to be cordial with Jackie didn’t sit right with her but the speech of being dumb in love with her mama replayed in her mind. Just like she was in love with Qamar, she was also in love with Noodle and when love was involved you often tossed ill feelings to the side.

Noodle hugged her. “I’m so happy I still got you, SiSi.”

“Me, too.” Siasia returned the gesture, kissing her on the head. “It’s us forever.”

“Beyond the stars.” Noodle snickered.

“You really like that little saying, don’t you?” She peered down at Noodle in her arms.

“I like how it makes me feel.” The corners of Noodle’s mouth perked up.

“How does it make you feel?” Siasia asked.

Noodle shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know how to say it. Ask me again when I’m older.”

The statement caused Siasia to laugh. She loved the way Noodle was certain Qamar would still be in her life as they grew older.

The flash of a camera almost ruined their peaceful moment but Siasia decided to ignore it. If they were going to be in Qamar's life, they had to get used to the paparazzi invading their privacy. It all took her back to she and Qamar spending time in his room away from the world. If only they could go back to that place and hide out.

Since the beginning, so much had changed in a hurry. Her mama was gone. Qamar had been expelled from school. Siasia had gained two step children, and Noodle was almost taken away from her. However, none of that compared to her being wrapped in love by a man who would travel the universe for her.

A smile settled on her face as her phone continued to vibrate in her pocket. When she posted the collage video of Qamar, her social media had been buzzing. So many people had so much to say yet Siasia wasn't bothered by any of it.

Qamar's gourmand flavored skin wafted into her nose, alerting her that he was close. The sound of sand shuffling between his feet became music to her ears. Her smile grew wider when his arms encompassed her from the back.

"Is girl time over?" he asked, nuzzling his chin into Siasia's neck, making her squeal with laughter.

"If it wasn't?" Noodle playfully rolled her eyes.

Qamar mushed her head and she cackled too. "You see them over there?" His eyes went to the men off to the side, snapping pictures of the private moment.

"I didn't at first." Siasia waved at them with a forced grin on her face.



“Yea, I need to get y’all to Emerald City. They don’t do all this there.”

“Yes!” Noodle jumped from the rock to do a little dance. “I get to be around my family,” she expressed, pulling on her sister’s heart even more.

Seeing how Noodle embraced Qamar’s family made Siasia want to open her heart to them as well. They never had a strong family unit, and she could tell Noodle really looked forward to it.

Noodle was worth that.

And so was Qamar.

Because the truth was, if it wasn’t him then it wasn’t anybody. No one could fix her life, make her whole, and love her the way Qamar did. In his presence she felt protected. So, she would embrace his family, praying they could love her like she was willing to learn to love them.

Kissing the side of Siasia’s lips, Qamar asked, “Another yes day?”

“Yes!” Noodle’s arms went up in the air.

“Whatever the princess wants, she gets.”

“And what about me?” Siasia chewed the corner of her lip.

“What you want, Mama?” Qamar’s love filled eyes gazed at her in anticipation. “Done,” he blurted when she opened her mouth, never giving her time to actually request anything.

Noodle snickered. “Qamar, you gotta let her talk.”

“Thank you,” Siasia spoke to Noodle before cutting her eyes back at Qamar.

His beautiful eyes always put her in a trance. Qamar just had to own the sky by the way it always seemed to make his eyes twinkle more. Day or night, it never mattered.

“Tell Daddy what you want, Mama,” he said before pecking the side of her face with a series of gentle reminders that he would do anything for her.

“I want to go to school.”

“I’ll sign you up tomorrow. What else?”

“Um.” Siasia looked down at Noodle who gave her a subtle head nod. “I want my own studio.”

“Too fuckin’ easy. You gotta put some pressure on me, Mama,” Qamar challenged. “I’m putting you through school, buying you a massive studio so you can design as many sets as you want. I’m going to put you and Noodle up in a big ass house, love both of y’all like my life depends on it because my life does depend on it. I’m going to make you my wife and give you my son. What else Do. You. Want?”

Siasia’s heart threatened to burst out of her chest. Instead of speaking, she pulled him into her arms before snaking her tongue in his mouth. “Close your eyes, Noodle,” she pulled away long enough to say. “I love you, Qamar.”

“I’m going to love you with so much love your mama gone feel it in heaven because God took her back before she could fully experience this. But know, you are her and she is you. It’s beyond the stars for Cynthia too.”

Siasia would never get over how Qamar could always read her like a book. It took him no time to figure out how guilty she felt for having him when her mama wasn’t

so lucky. Another round of tears slid across her face. This time they were tears of joy.

“Can I open my eyes now, dang?” Noodle reminded them they weren’t alone, making them pull away from each other.

“Don’t be a hater, Noodle,” Siasia teased as the three of them made their way back to the condo.

“I’m not. I’m just trying to get my yes day started.” Noodle rolled her neck.

They cackled.

### A YEAR LATER

As the sun began to set over the Emerald City Stadium, casting an amber light across the field, Qamar felt a rush of adrenaline coursing through him. It was finally here—his first professional game as a central midfielder for the Emerald City Kings. After a grueling season spent on the bench, he was determined to make every moment count. The stands were packed with fans, their cheers echoing like a heartbeat, and Siasia and his daughters waved excitedly from the sidelines.

The call Jay had been desperate to get to him was the invitation from his friend that owned the Emerald City Kings. The owner, Three, didn't need to see anything. The offer was his if he wanted it. The only thing that stood in his way was the fact that the draft was officially over for the season. To go around that, Three made him a sub that sat on the bench for the past season. Now, he was suited up and ready to show the world how they slept on him. Now he was woke—the beast they all knew he would be on the field. One of the best they'd seen in a long time.

The whistle blew, and the game kicked off. Qamar quickly found his rhythm, moving fluidly across the pitch. He intercepted a pass from the opposing team, highlighting the skills he had honed during countless hours of practice. With a deft touch, he dribbled past an opponent, his confidence soaring as he made his way toward the goal. The crowd erupted as he delivered a perfectly timed pass to his forward, who slotted it into the net.

Qamar's heart raced with joy; he had assisted in his very first professional goal.

As the game progressed, Qamar's presence on the field became more pronounced. He

orchestrated plays, communicated with his teammates, and even took a shot that narrowly missed. The final whistle blew, and the Kings emerged victorious with a score of 3-1. The stadium erupted in cheers, and Qamar couldn't help but smile, feeling the weight of the past lift off his shoulders.

After the game, Qamar stood in front of the camera for a post-match interview, still buzzing from the victory. "It feels amazing to finally be out there," he said, his voice steady but filled with emotion. "I've worked hard for this moment, and I couldn't have done it without my teammates and the support of my family. This win is for all of us. This for The Jig. This for my kids and it's for Lunar." His hand went to the sky, blowing a kiss.

As he wrapped up the interview, Qamar spotted Siasia and their daughters making their way toward him. Esmeray, her little face beaming with pride, ran up and threw her arms around his waist. "Daddy, you were awesome!" she exclaimed, her eyes sparkling.

Belinay, still a bit wobbly on her feet, clapped her hands and giggled, while Noodle, with her ever-curious gaze, looked on, her admiration evident. His eyes zeroed in on his three-month-old namesake who was the spitting image of him. A little boy with his daddy's looks and beautiful spirit. All that Siasia had dreamed of.

Siasia approached, her smile radiant, and he felt his heart swell. They had come so far together by mending past relationships and building a beautiful family. She had come to an understanding with Janay and although they weren't close like she and Malaysia, they were in a better place than ever before. Siasia still grieved her mother but she had found solace in her work, and Qamar was proud of her resilience.

As they stood together, Qamar wrapped his arms around Siasia and their children, feeling an overwhelming sense of gratitude. "This is just the beginning," he whispered to Siasia, his eyes shining with love. "Our forever journey is just starting, and I can't wait to explore it with you—beyond the stars."

In that moment, surrounded by his family, Qamar knew he had everything he had ever dreamed of, and the future looked brighter than ever, but his performance wasn't over. The cameras panned to the emerging editorial photographer that was making her mark and showing the world what true Black girl magic was. After the shoot with Candi and Jay, she'd been booked and busy working with brands she'd only dreamed of working with. Life was good.

The lights in the stadium dimmed, confusing Siasia until a voice she'd only heard when she snuck a peek into her room filled the stadium.

"I'll love you today and hate you tomorrow. You keep me safe and bottle my sorrow." Noodle's sweet and soft voice melted her heart. "When there's nothing to say, just always know," she belted the note while crooning the word, shocking Siasia into tears. "Beyond the stars, is where you are. Beyond the stars, is where our love lies. When you can't find the joy of tomorrow. Look for me in the stars where our love is, beyond the stars and further than our eyes go."

Luna joined in, adlibbing while the lyrics pulled on the heart of everyone in the stadium. There wasn't a dry eye on that day. Siasia was so caught up with the big voice coming from her little sister that she didn't notice the rest of the family, including Candi and Jay, surrounding her. When French went to remove Qamar Jr from her arms, she broke down after seeing Qamar on his knees.

"Yes!" she screamed, jumping up and down before pinching herself to make sure it was real.

Qamar wiped his face of tears. "Mama, you gotta let me ask you."

"Why when I know what I'm going to say?"

"Come on, Mama. Let me do this the right way," he pleaded, his eyes twinkling under the bright lights.

“Then hurry up,” she fussed, making them laugh.

“Siasia, will you do me the honor of allowing me to fulfill the promise of forever? Marry me, Mama.”

“I already said yes,” she reminded while stretching her hand out for him to place the beautiful rock on her hands. “You did good, Daddy.” She laughed, admiring the work of art on her hand. It went beautifully with her latest ink on her hand that read art is life .

Qamar hugged her tight before announcing to the world, “She said, yes.”

“Duh, nigga.” Solar snickered, loving that her baby brother had found his way, in his own way.

Siasia kissed all over him, beaming with pride. Her heart was content. Loving Qamar, in a weird way was Siasia’s way of healing her mama’s unloved heart. Through Siasia, Cynthia felt the love she’d always deserved. Through Siasia, Noodle would know what love was supposed to look like.

Everyone congregated around Qamar and Siasia’s new estate. It wasn’t in the countryside of Emerald City and she didn’t have a horse yet, but it was hers. He’d taken everything into consideration on what she wanted, where she wanted it, and how she wanted it. The home was massive and sat on ten acres, but it was filled with love and family and she wouldn’t have it any other way.

“Beyond the stars, huh?” French stood beside Qamar. The two of them were lost in love watching the loves of their lives and their family celebrate how amazing the day had been. Qamar playing in his first MLS game and winning. Then, he proposed to Siasia, deciding that forever wasn’t long enough but all he could ask of her at the time.

Qamar smiled; his brown eyes low from the bud they'd smoked on. "Man, I had to find myself, make an identity that was my own. While on that journey, I found her and she planted the seed of taking it beyond the stars. I ain't never understood what it meant when niggas said shit like find a wife and you'll find a good thing. Now, I do. Siasia completes me."

"I can tell." French beamed with pride. "What you've done, I know this Lunar's greatest accomplishment."

"I love Lunar, he laid the foundation, but this you. This Luna and it's for damn sure Solar. The cup gotta be spread around because all y'all poured into me. Javen, put that fire under me. Showed me it could be done. The Jig created me, but y'all raised me. Tiny and Mav, too. Siasia gave me a rebirth." Even the way he spoke was that of a renewed man. It was the transformation of a boy into a man.

"How you and Solar doing?"

French looked at the only girl he's ever loved and smiled, placing his hand over his heart. "We gone make it." He nodded. "Gotta make it," his tone pleaded.

Clearing his throat, French eased his lanky legs over to Solar. Her jet-black pixie cut popped against her tawny skin and youthful looks. Holding onto her hands and looking into her eyes, he kissed her.

"Loving someone with intention. That's the real shit no one talks about. Like, love can be a fairytale but what happens when the prince done put the shoe on Cinderella? What happens when it's just y'all— the quest to find each other has ended? That's when you love your person with intention. Intentions to love, to cherish, to fight, to stand beside, to stand behind, to stand in front of— love ain't always as pretty as we want to believe it is. Love ain't masculine or feminine. Love is nothing but pure intent. Love is God. Love is Solar, Aku, Apollo, and Frenchy. Love got me standing right here in front of you, telling you, if it's a lifetime of good shit that you want, then



I'm your man. If it's a lifetime of adventure that you want, I'm that nigga, too. You loved me on Venus, now let me show you what it's like to wake up on Mars."

Solar with tears in her eyes, nodded, eager to wake up on Mars with French. "I love you so much, French," she confessed before his lips were on hers.

"Ma!" Frenchy tapped her leg, hating the way his daddy seemed to be sucking the life out of his mama.

Stephanie bent down to pick him up. "Y'all should've been some damn astronauts with all this space shit. We done been to the moon and beyond the stars. Now you telling me we going from Venus and waking up on Mars." She placed her hand on her head. "Lord, I need a damn drink and an oxygen mask."

The room erupted in laughter at how dramatic Stephanie could be. But who said that The 8 Wonders of The World could only be earth side? When Black children fed their souls, they went beyond the universe. Black children weren't of this world. They were magical. They owned this shit. The whole fuckin' Universe!

Woke Up On Mars is a book box exclusive. There is a limited quantity of boxes and quite a few were purchased before Beyond The Stars came out. Go to my website if you would like to grab your exclusive book box. There will be some amazing goodies that makes this box so worth the price.