



# Bodyguard My Heart (The Bodyguard #2)

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**Category:** Urban

**Description:** Above all protect each others heart, and love will live.

Love. Samara London has lived her entire life seeking it. Being the daughter of a cartel king who often had little time for her, she has learned how to be self-sufficient in anything she does, including her love life. Not that she has one, anyway. An arrangement she made six years ago out of loyalty to her brother Royale has derailed her plans for love. She wants to be in control to protect her heart, but you cant control who you love.

Loyalty. Demetrius "Meechie" Augustine lives by it. He rewards loyalty with loyalty. When the most loyal thing he could do happens to also be the most disloyal, he finds himself stuck in love with his best friends little sister and questioning his loyalty to the very cartel he runs in the name of love.

Samara wants to love but has built up so many defenses its hard to let herself fall. Will she find that you cant guard your heart against love because the only way to truly keep it safe is to open it?

**Total Pages (Source):** 19

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S ix Years Later

Samara

“Well, since we dropping secrets, I’ve been secretly dating Demetrius. Tell him I said hi.” I stood from the loveseat and exited my brother’s office before he could say anything further. My heart was pounding in my damn chest.

“I can’t believe you just did that, Samara!” I scolded myself as I headed down the hallway and into the reception area. I was lucky Royale had too much going on to follow behind me. If he hadn’t, he would surely be on my heels, demanding I explain the bomb I’d just dropped in his lap.

“Rebecca, I’m taking my lunch break early.” I notified the medical assistant at the front desk on my way out the door.

“Okay, how long should I say in case Royale asks?” Rebecca and I had become close since working together at Royale’s plastic surgery clinic. My girl was already used to my shenanigans. She knew I took full advantage of working for my brother, and so did she.

“Just an hour today!” I yelled back, making my way to my car. I wasn’t going to be gone long today since we were busy. I just needed to take a minute to clear my head. This day had already been way too much for me to handle.

First, it was everything this day represented. Add to it the rude visitors that decided to show up today and finding out that Royale had married some strange woman, and I was overwhelmed. My brain needed to reset. As a nurse, I would not be good to anyone if I wasn't mentally okay.

I walked briskly through the parking lot. The closer I got to my car, the more irritated I became. Seeing two dozen long-stem pink roses sitting on my windshield caused me to roll my eyes. Quickly, I snatched up the bouquet and climbed into the driver-side of my vehicle.

I didn't need to look at the card. I already knew who they were from. Tossing them aside, I started my car and peeled out of the parking lot toward my favorite sushi lunch spot. I wasn't halfway down the street before my phone rang through my car speakers. Checking the caller ID was pointless. After what I'd just done, I was expecting Demetrius to call. Still, I glanced down at the caller ID, turning my nose up at the private call.

Knowing it was my father, I swiped decline. There was nothing we needed to discuss. I'd long ago stopped speaking to my father. He wanted to have more of a relationship now that he was behind bars than he ever did when he was a free man, and I just wasn't interested. He was too late. No sooner than I rejected the call, my phone rang again. This time, I was right about the caller. I wanted to decline his ass, too, but that would warrant a pop-up visit, and I didn't want to see him today.

"Yes, Demetrius," I answered, as if I hadn't just blown up both our spots.

"You real funny, Samara. Why you just tell Ro we fucking?" His husky voice sailed through the car. My body instantly reacted to him. He was heated for apparent reasons, but I didn't care. This thing between us had gone on secretly for far too long and had slowly spiraled out of control.

“Are we not fucking, Demetrius?”

“Samara, stop fucking playing with me,” he demanded.

“For your information, I never told him we were fucking. I said we were dating.”

“We dating, Samara?” I could hear the smirk on his face through his voice. I’d fallen right into that one. “You gon’ finally let a nigga take you out on a date?”

“Well, no... no... but—”

“If you were gon’ tell him something, why not tell the truth?” He interrupted me, rendering me speechless. “All you did was create another lie.”

Sighing, I pulled my car into an empty parking space at the sushi spot. Telling my brother the truth had been on the tip of my tongue, but I freaked out at the last minute, and a partial truth escaped my mouth instead.

“I don’t know,” I managed to say.

“You don’t know?” he mimicked. Not too many things stressed Demetrius out the way I did. He had been on my bumper every day about telling Royale the truth. The truth, however, was complicated, and I wasn’t ready for the backlash it might cause. Well, some days I was, and some days I wasn’t.

“I don’t know. It felt like the right thing to say. Ro was talking about his marriage and... I don’t know. Was he mad?” I’d left before I could get a reaction.

“He asked questions I ain’t know how to answer, Samara. The shit caught me off guard. He got too much going on right now to process our shit. I’m sure he’ll be bringing it up again.”

“What did you tell him?”

“The truth.”

“The truth!” I gasped.

“Yeah, I’m trying to pursue you, and you are playing games, baby girl.”

My mouth fell open at his statement. Of everything I expected him to say to Ro, telling him he was trying to pursue me wasn’t on the list.

“Another partial truth, huh?” I shrugged as if he could see me.

“I guess so. I’m just playing yo’ game, baby girl,” he replied, making me blush and fume at the same time. Wasn’t nobody playing games with Demetrius. He was the one playing games with me.

“You the one playing the games, Demetrius!” I hoped he could hear the anger in my voice. “I’m about to go order my lunch. I’ll call—”

“Somebody should bring your order out in a few minutes.” He interrupted me. Taking my hand off my car door, I sat back in my seat. Why did he always have to do that? Demetrius knew where I was before I knew where I was going.

“I wish you wouldn’t clock my every move.”

“You’re the wife of a very dangerous man. You’re always going to be tracked.”

I looked around, spotting the old-school Tahoe on the corner. The windows were tinted, but I knew it was full of masked-up shooters and people waiting to swarm if anyone tried anything. It was the thing I hated about being married and attached to

Demetrius, no matter how he tried to hide the security or dress it up. My life was in danger twenty-four-seven, and that was a lifestyle I didn't want to live forever.

"Did you get the flowers?" he asked. My eyes looked at the pile of roses sitting on the passenger seat. A happy anniversary ribbon dangled from the stems.

"I got them," I sang sarcastically.

"Happy anniversary, baby girl," Demetrius stated. Nothing was happy about being forced to stay married to someone you wanted nothing to do with.

"I take it you haven't signed the divorce papers yet," I responded.

Year five had come and gone, and we were still married. Demetrius refused to grant me a divorce. He had this crazy idea of staying married and starting a real relationship. I guess somewhere down the line, he'd caught feelings. It could have had something to do with the countless slip-ups we'd had over the years, but I thought we both understood that was just sex.

"Let this be the last time I tell your hardheaded ass. Ain't no divorce. I don't care how many papers you leave in my mailbox."

"Demetrius, we can't stay married forever. That was not the agreement." I reminded him.

"The agreement was dead the moment you hopped your lil ass on this dick. You are my wife, and the quicker you accept it, the sooner we can bring this shit to Ro and stop hiding."

"The only thing that needs to stop is your delusional behavior, Demetrius."

“The only person acting delusional is you, wife. Now I have to handle some shit with Ro tonight and tomorrow, but we can celebrate when I get back. Enjoy your lunch.” He hung up before I could get another word in.

“Ugh!” I let out a frustrated grunt. Did I have feelings for Demetrius? Yes, but we couldn’t happen the way he wanted for so many reasons. Demetrius represented everything my brother had warned me to stay away from. I’d spent most of my life fighting to be free of my father and his precious cartel, but somehow, I’d been tied to the one man who controlled it all.

“Ugh!” I let out another frustrated grunt as a loud knocking on my car window startled me.

“Miss, your food!” the restaurant worker shouted, holding up a white, plastic bag.

Quickly, I rolled down my window and took the takeout bag from the worker.

“Thank you,” I replied as I checked out the contents. Everything was there, just the way I liked it. A smile appeared as I watched the worker return to the restaurant. I wanted to call Demetrius back and thank him, but that would only lead to him thinking we were more than what we were. This day was dragging. I would take the rest of the day off if we weren’t swamped. Placing my takeout bag on the passenger seat next to the roses, I reversed and headed back to work. Happy sixth wedding anniversary, Samara! I thought to myself.

“You look thicker than a motherfucker in these pajamas, ma.”

I stared at Ashton and giggled as he poured me a glass of Moscato. My legs crossed to allow the fitted romper pajamas I had on to expose my thick thighs.

“I know, right?” I blushed as he snuggled in next to me on the sofa. “You look good

yourself.” I complimented him, admiring Ashton’s slim-built frame. He was my newest boyfriend. Well, he wasn’t my boyfriend. He was more like a guy I was dating and doing nasty shit with. He was tall, tattooed, and from what I’d seen, had a big dick.

“You ain’t even got the dick yet, and them hips already spreading, goddamn.” He placed his lips on my cheek, giving me a soft peck that caused my body to tingle. I liked Ashton. He was nice. He always paid for all our dates and had his own place and car, which seemed rare in this new generation of men. He was a social media influencer, and he made decent money off that.

“This setup is so cute. After today, I needed just a nice romantic chill evening. So, thank you.” I waved my hand around, taking in the setup. Ashton had dinner delivered and transformed his living room into a romantic movie night equipped with a fort and candlelight. Originally, we had no plans for tonight, but after venting to him about my stressful day, he didn’t hesitate to invite me over.

I didn’t know if he knew it yet, but his little gesture was going to earn him some pussy tonight. I needed to release my mental frustrations, and Ashton seemed to be able to do the job. We’d been dating for about four months, and while he’d tasted my pussy, he’d never been in it.

“I appreciate that ’cause a nigga was working hard for your ass,” he said playfully. “You sounded like you needed a pick me up.”

“I did.” I pointed the remote control at the TV and pretended to be interested in watching a movie, but in my mind, I was already lying flat on my back. “What movie are you trying to watch?”

“Whatever you put on, ma.” He threw his arm around my shoulder, and my eyes traveled to the bulge in his basketball shorts. I was long overdue for some dick. The



drama with Demetrius had virtually killed my dating life. Any man I got involved with, he threatened their life until they left me alone. Somehow, I'd dated Ashton without him meddling. It may have had something to do with Ashton living in my apartment complex. Before today, I thought maybe Demetrius had been coming to terms with the reality that there was no us and let me be. Now, I wasn't so sure. If Demetrius was going to ruin this thing with Ashton soon, I was going to get some dick at least before it happened.

Smirking, I lifted from the couch just enough to throw my leg over his lap and mount him.

"I'm trying to watch your dick disappear in my guts." I leaned forward, placing kisses on his neck.

"Damn, ma, that's what time we on? You gon' finally give a nigga some pussy?" He wrapped his arms around me and gripped my ass.

"Yes, it's your lucky—"

A loud boom from Ashton's front door opening cut me off.

"What the fuck?" I turned toward the sound, and instantly, my head pounded. Demetrius had just kicked this man's door in.

"Damn, baby girl. You up in this bitch entertaining a nigga on our anniversary!" His voice thundered as he walked into Ashton's apartment, a blunt perched on his thick lips. "You fucking other niggas now?"

I didn't respond. Instead, I just stared at him in disbelief. He was supposed to be out of town with my brother. I crawled off Ashton's lap as Demetrius ducked down and waltzed his big, six-eight fine ass into this man's apartment as if he was invited.

“Demetrius, get out!” I waved my hand toward the exit.

“You married, ma? This yo’ husband?” Ashton questioned. He looked confused and hurt at the same time.

“No, it’s not like that... it’s—”

“It’s just like that, nigga.” Demetrius interrupted my attempts to explain. My mouth opened and closed, but I couldn’t find the words. I didn’t know if I should try to salvage things with Ashton, go the fuck off on Demetrius, or try to de-escalate the situation altogether. Demetrius moved through the apartment, taking in the décor. His calm demeanor scared me. Demetrius was always on the go, so when he was calm, it usually meant someone was about to take a one-way ticket to hell. My eyes found Ashton. He wasn’t a street nigga. He probably didn’t even realize his life was in danger.

“You fucking my wife?” Demetrius sat down on the sofa.

“Don’t answer that, Ashton.” I held up my hand.

“Stay out of this, Samara.” He reached into his pants and pulled out a gun. Ashton’s eyes bulged as Demetrius laid his gun on the coffee table in front of us. “You thought you were going to get some pussy tonight, huh?”

“Demetrius, you made your point. Let’s go.” I stood from the couch, grabbing his hand and attempting to pull his big ass up. If I didn’t get him out of there fast, this was bound to end badly, and I didn’t want to have Ashton’s blood on my hands.

“Naw, this setup is nice. Real romantic. Sit down, baby girl.” Demetrius ignored me while aggressively pulling me down into his lap.

“Look, man, I ain’t know she was married. She ain’t tell me shit like that. Y’all can both get out for real.” Ashton put his hands up in the air and surrendered.

“Naw, I like this spot. Nigga, you get out,” Demetrius barked.

“Demetrius!” I called once again, attempting to pull him up from the couch. The disconnected gaze in his eyes told me he was about to trip.

“Nigga, this my crib—” Ashton didn’t get to finish his statement before Demetrius had his face slamming into the table.

“Meechie!” I screamed as Ashton yelped in pain.

“In the flesh.” He looked at me and then back at Ashton. “I ain’t trying to hurt you, lil nigga. I peeped yo’ page. I like that lil dancing shit you be doing. I need to holla at my wife, though. It’s our anniversary, and I’m just trying to spend some one-on-one time with her.”

I stared at Demetrius. My mouth was practically on the damn floor. This man was out of his mind.

“Here, take this for your trouble.” Demetrius pulled out two hundred-dollar bills and shoved them at Ashton. Embarrassment settled in as Ashton stared at me.

“Sorry,” I whispered. There was nothing left to say that wouldn’t have him on the news as an unidentified person. Ashton hopped up without another word and walked out of the house.

“Don’t come back until morning, nigga!” Demetrius shouted behind him.

“Was all that necessary? I liked him!” I shouted as soon as the dangling door shut.

“Yeah, and he likes a thousand other bitches. Have you seen that nigga comment section?”

There was nothing left for me to say. The sight of his smug ass sitting here like this was normal was pissing me off. Had I known six years ago this was where our arrangement would end up, I would have never brought him the idea. Standing, I looked around for my purse and keys.

“Where you going, Samara? Sit down!”

“Away from you,” I replied. “You can’t keep doing this, Demetrius! This shit is not normal!” I was pissed, and it went beyond this thing with Ashton.

“Stop making me do it, Samara. You’re my wife. Start fucking acting like it.” The seriousness in his voice made me stop moving and stare at him.

“Your fake wife, Demetrius. This was never supposed to be real. I hate we crossed that line and made it physical, but this can’t happen.” I pleaded with him to let me go. Demetrius stood from the couch and approached me, his size making me back up against the wall.

“You’re right. We were never supposed to be real. But you can’t tell me this doesn’t feel real, baby girl.” His hand ran up my thigh as his hard body pressed against mine.

“Move, Demetrius.” I placed my hand on his chest and attempted to put some space between us, but it was useless. Demetrius was over two hundred and eighty pounds. He wasn’t going anywhere.

“Tell me you don’t feel it in your heart every time I make this pussy squirt.”

I was speechless as my juices leaked onto the seat of my pajamas. I hated the way my

body had betrayed me for him. Demetrius's scent sailed through my nose, lighting all my suppressed emotions. My eyes took him in. His tall, stocky build towered over me like a giant, chocolate teddy bear. The designer T-shirt he wore hugged his wide shoulders and muscled arms just right. It reminded me of all the times he'd held me in place while he feasted between my thighs.

"Demetrius," I whimpered, trying to slide out of his grasp, but his big arms prevented it. This was the problem, the reason the lines of our agreement had blurred. I had no restraint around him. I was putty in his hands, and he knew it. I shook my head in protest of what he was doing to me as one of his hands made its way inside my romper. The other one pulled at the buttons that went down my chest until they popped and my breasts were exposed.

"No panties or bra. You were trying to end that nigga life." His fingers parted my soaking wet lips and strummed my clit.

"Ooh... shit!" I was trying to control my breathing and think of a million ways to get out of this. The more he stroked me with his fingers, the less I cared, and soon, my body was overtaking my mind. I'd missed his touch, and when I was truly being honest with myself, I had been craving it. Demetrius slipped his fingers inside me, massaging my insides.

"I love you, Samara. Tell me you don't love me. Tell me you don't feel anything."

He littered kisses down my neck. My heart sped up. Demetrius had never uttered those words before. My heart stopped. He loves me. I didn't know how to respond to that. I loved Demetrius with everything in me, but I couldn't admit that to him. Loving him would mean I had to accept his lifestyle... Be okay with security watching my every move twenty-four hours a day.

Loving Demetrius meant being okay with snipers on rooftops. I would have to be

okay with his late hours and early mornings. Be okay with possibly losing him to the streets or jail. Admitting my love for him meant bandaging wounds, hiding guns, burning clothes, and possibly raising kids that would repeat the cycle.

As bad as I wanted to, I couldn't utter those words. I didn't want to live my life being married to a Capo. I'd suffered enough being raised by one.

"I... I... ooh." He was tapping my G-spot so effortlessly. I could feel my pussy walls tighten around his digits.

"Tell me you love me, Samara." He quickened his pace as he sucked one of my titties into his mouth.

"There you go, come undone for me."

"Oh my... fuck!"

"Tell me you don't feel that shit right here." He tapped his hand against my chest.

"I'm right there. I'm cumming!" I screamed as I released my juices all over his hand.

"Tell me you don't love me, Samara, and I'll let you go." His body stayed pressed into mine. It was calling me. I should have thrown caution to the wind and told him the truth. Instead, I exhaled a deep breath and lied.

"I don't love you, Demetrius. I probably never will."

Demetrius pulled his fingers out of me and slowly backed away. I couldn't read him. His handsome face was void of emotions.

"The divorce papers will be to you when I return from handling business with Ro. I

wish you the best.” He made his way to the front door.

I should have stopped him. I wanted to stop him, but a voice deep inside me said this was for the best.

“Samara!” He took one last look at me. “Divorce or not, if I catch you entertaining that dancing ass nigga, I’m gon’ put two to his head. Something not right about that nigga.” He chunked the deuces before leaving Ashton’s apartment. Tears instantly cascaded down my face as I plopped down on the floor. If I’d made the right choice, why did I feel so horrible?

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## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 5:14 pm*

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Demetrius “Meechie” Augustine

“You want me to send someone to fix the door, Meechie?” my cousin Fabian questioned as soon as I entered the hallway. I glanced at the broken hinges, barely keeping the door upright, and shook my head.

“Nah, fuck that nigga and this door!” I secured my gun at my waist before taking off toward the elevator. As far as I was concerned, he should have chosen somebody else’s wife to play with.

“Ou fou, kouzin. You crazy.” Fabian joked in Haitian as he fell in step with me.

I stopped by Samara’s apartment complex because I didn’t feel right not seeing her on our anniversary. I wanted to give her some gifts and dig her guts out before meeting Royale to debrief him on the information I’d gathered on his new wife’s ex-fiancé. His ass had snatched up somebody’s girl. I didn’t agree with it at first because of who she was attached to, but Royale was my best friend. He was my brother. He’d had my back more times than I could count. It was because of him that I was even in this position. Not to mention the guilt I held for what Samara and I had done. I would always ride with him first and ask questions later. I owed him that.

Stopping by Samara’s was supposed to be a quick detour. I ain’t expect her ass to not be at home, especially when her location pinged from her apartment complex. One call to her security and I was informed she had been spending a lot of time in an apartment that wasn’t hers with a nigga that wasn’t me. That shit had my skin boiling.



We weren't in an official relationship, and our marriage was only an arrangement, but Samara knew she was mine. She knew I didn't play that entertaining other niggas shit.

"Samara not joining us tonight?" Fabian questioned. His head glanced toward the door.

"Nope."

"Should I make sure she gets home safe?"

"Yeah, she will probably go to Rebecca's, though. Let me know when she's made it."

We stepped onto the elevator. If Samara was mad at me, she wouldn't go straight home. She needed to go somewhere she could talk shit about me. Fabian got on his phone to coordinate with Samara's security. He was my driver but doubled as head of security for the entire cartel. Besides Polo and Royale, he was the only nigga I trusted. His mom was my dad's sister. After my pop was killed, I started reaching out to his Haitian family just to feel closer to him. Fabian was the first one to contact me back and we grew close from there. When I took over the cartel, I moved him here. He ain't have shit going on back in Haiti, so I pulled him in and gave him a job. I had the means to help him, so I did. Fabian was smart and calculated as shit, plus he looked like a chauffeur and not a gang member. Incognito was the name of the game.

That was how I had things set up, so the people around me and I could stay hidden. Only the people who did business with me knew I was a caporegime of the London Cartel. Though there were whispers and speculation about me, most people thought I was just a wealthy business owner. Because of my size, strangers assumed I was a professional football player. The fewer people knew about me, the better.

Security is on it," Fabian informed me.

“Good.”

He stepped onto the elevator, and the doors closed. No matter what was going on between Samara and me, I would always make sure she was safe and secure. She was not only my wife but also my best friend’s little sister. I owed her my loyalty, even if she acted like she ain’t want it.

“You want to talk about it?”

My eyes shot up to Fabian. He was the only person outside of Mr. London who knew about my arranged marriage with Samara. He was also the only person who knew we’d crossed the line of that arrangement.

“Nah.” I shook my head. There was nothing to discuss. Samara had me fucked up talking about she didn’t love a nigga. She did. She wasn’t ready to admit it yet, and that hurt. I got it. A lot came with loving a gangster nigga. When she looked at me, she saw her father and the lifestyle she’d spent her entire life trying to escape.

“I’m not the best when it comes to women.”

“You think?” I blurted. Fabian had four kids and three baby mamas. Waving me off, he continued.

“I know you can’t force them to do shit. Kicking down doors and shit may work on those simple-minded hos you used to. Naveah liked that toxic shit, but even she grew tired of it. Samara is complex. You gon’ have to come at her differently.”

I nodded as Fabian rattled off advice I didn’t ask for as usual, but I appreciated it. I was in uncharted territory with all this relationship shit. I was a hood nigga. I didn’t date females. My last relationship was seven years ago, and even then, I wasn’t faithful. Hell, Naveah and I were young and on some high school puppy love type

shit.

I thought she was going to be my rider, but the moment she went off to college, she forgot about a nigga. She wanted a man with a future, and to her, I just looked like a going nowhere ass street nigga. After that, I entertained women for one purpose only: sex. I damn sure didn't marry them. Hood as a nigga was, I wasn't ashamed to say that I was down bad about Samara Marie London. She was the only peace a nigga had outside of Royale and Polo. It was crazy how things had progressed between us. One minute she was just Royale's little sister, the next, she was my wife. And then, she was guzzling my dick down her throat.

I never wanted any of this shit to happen. All I wanted to do was help my best friend become a doctor and provide for my little brother, Polo. Our parents were both gone. My father was murdered in an ambush, and my mother struggled for years to cope with his passing until she just couldn't anymore. I was all that Polo had here in the States. I had to provide a way for him. Agreeing to marry Samara had made all that possible. I underestimated how much alone time Samara and I would spend together. How we would bond through our secret and loyalty to Ro. I definitely underestimated how good her pussy would feel on my dick. The elevator doors opened, and I stepped off, taking slow strides toward the exit.

"It doesn't matter anyway. She wants a divorce, and I'm going to grant it for her." I clenched my fist. The thought of letting Samara go had me steaming, but at this point, there was nothing more for me to do. It had been a year since I'd made my intentions known, and nothing had changed. I was still chasing after her, and she was still dodging me.

"You know damn well Samara don't want a divorce." Fabian huffed. "Neither do you."

He was spot on. I didn't want a divorce. I wanted Samara to cut the bullshit and be

my wife. The more I pushed, though, the more she pulled. I didn't respond to Fabian as I approached the black car we'd ridden in. Fabian still followed behind me, talking shit. Loud tapping coming from the car's trunk made me halt my steps.

"Are you done?" I turned to Fabian. "We have unfinished business." I glanced around quickly, surveying my surroundings before popping the trunk open. Fabian approached, grabbing a zip tie from his pocket.

"Minding my business, boss man."

"Good, tie this nigga back up."

I stared down at Rah. He'd gotten out of his zip tie again. The task was supposed to be to keep him alive. My new sister-in-law, Monroe, thought he was her friend. She had no clue her former fiancé Kashus had been passing him for his cousin when they were secretly on some gay shit. I had no problem with gay people. It was disloyalty that pissed me off, and that was why I'd made the executive decision to deliver him to the Seven Mile Bridge. I knew Royale was keeping her too busy to even remember to check-in on this nigga.

"The sooner we drop this nigga in the Pacific Ocean, the better." Fabian's fist connected with Rah's face, knocking him out cold before he zip-tied his hands together. I threw the trunk door back down and made my way to the passenger seat of the vehicle.

I texted Ro to let him know I was on my way. I welcomed the distraction of work. It would keep my mind off Samara. My eyes glared up at Samara's window. If she weren't Royale's little sister, I would shoot her fucking windows out.

"She's on the move." Fabian pointed toward the door. My eyes followed, finding Samara exiting her apartment complex. I stared at her. She was the most beautiful

woman in the world to me. Her brown skin shimmered in the night sky, and her bob bounced in the wind as she made her way to the car. Our eyes locked for a second before I looked away.

Fabian pulled out of the parking space just in time because it was taking everything in me not to hop out, snatch her up, and wipe those tears falling from her eyes. I was in love with Samara. She was the only woman I'd ever feel this way about, but if she and I were ever going to work, she was going to have to come looking for my ass this time. I wasn't forcing shit anymore.

Samara

Two months. That's how long it had been since I last saw Demetrius. I mean, I had seen him, but it was always in passing, like him visiting Ro at work or us having to be at the same gatherings. His phone calls to me and his random pop-ups had stopped. He was finally giving me exactly what I'd been asking him for, and a bitch was sick. I was so sick that I'd called an emergency girls' night. I used the excuse of bonding with my new sister-in-law, but really, I just needed to soak up some positive energy.

"Samara! Go open the door!" Rebecca called, interrupting my thoughts and bringing me back to reality. Standing, I strutted to the door in my silk-short pajama set. I didn't even check the peephole before opening the door.

"Samara!" my favorite cousin, Aliza, shouted. My eyes widened at the sight of her. It'd been nearly a month since I'd seen her last. She'd been in Cuba helping her mom, my aunt Vanesa, with her restaurant, and I had been too busy dealing with life.

"Aliza!" I returned the excitement. Grabbing her up into a hug, I pulled her inside my condo. "You look so good!"

I closed the door behind her before turning and admiring her tall, thin frame in the unicorn pajama onesie she wore. She gave me a twirl in dramatic Aliza fashion as we proceeded with our childhood secret handshake. Aliza and I were close, largely due to her mom raising me after mine had passed. The years we'd spent conjoined at the hip made most strangers confuse us for twins. I saw the resemblance, but Aliza had

always been slightly shorter and thinner than me. Not to mention, she was light skinned, and I was slightly darker. I was of average height, and my weight fell between skinny and thick. I liked to say I was a midsized queen.

“Me! Girl, you! Who got your hips spreading out like this?” She moved her hands in an hourglass shape down my body. I dropped my head. I couldn’t do anything but giggle. I was becoming curvier, and it was probably due to the way Demetrius had been knocking the Mario coins out of my pussy the last couple of years.

“I am one honey bun away from thick as fuck, though, huh?” I joked. My hips swung from left to right.

“Um huh!” she replied. “Must be getting some good dick!”

I shook my head at her crazy ass. “I wish.”

“This was tucked in your door.”

Aliza handed me a plain white envelope with my name on it. I recognized the envelope and Demetrius’s handwriting as soon as she handed it to me. It was the same envelope I’d put in Demetrius’s door months ago. My heart dropped as I stared down at the envelope.

“You okay?”

“Um... yeah!” I lied. “Everybody in the living room.” I waved my hand toward where Monroe, Contessa, and Rebecca camped. We were having a girls’ night in since everyone was finally in the same city at the same time. Plus, I’d only gotten to hang with Monroe twice since Royale had introduced her.

“Let’s get this party started!” Aliza screamed, heading toward the living room. I

didn't move. My feet remained still as I fondled the letter in my hands.

"Are you sure you're good, Samara?" She turned to question me. Her eyes jumped from me to the envelope.

"Um... Yeah, I just need to use the bathroom. I'll be in there in a minute."

I turned and hurried down the hallway toward my bedroom, leaving Aliza standing there. She'd see me fall apart if I didn't escape her soon. My heart ached. I couldn't believe what I had in my hands. I closed my door and tore the envelope open, revealing the thick stack of folded papers. My eyes immediately found the bottom of the page. Sure enough, Demetrius's name was sketched on the signature line. Tears immediately slid down my face. I'd been waiting for this, but I didn't feel happy.

I stared at the divorce papers for what seemed like forever. This was his way of saying he was done, and though that was what I wanted, it was bittersweet. Our six-year marriage had run its course. I wanted to pull out my phone and call him, but what would I say? Did he want to hear from me? Tears drained from my body as I sat on my bed, crying uncontrollably. In a perfect world, Demetrius and I could work, but this wasn't perfect, and I wasn't cut out to be a kingpin's wife forever. Still, my heart didn't hurt any less.

"Samara! Would you come on?" My room door flew open, and my eyes bounced to Monroe. I tried to wipe my face and hide my tears, but it was too late—she'd seen me.

"Samara, what's going on? Are you crying?" She neared me, but I was at a loss for words.

"What are you looking at?"



Before realizing what I was doing, I handed her the divorce papers. Her eyes roamed the documents, and I just watched. This was a good time to finally air out my big secret.

“Samara, these are divorce papers.” Her face was glazed with confusion. Monroe and I had only hung out a few times, but we talked a lot. She knew enough about me to know I wasn’t supposed to be a married woman.

“Yep,” I said through my sobs. Monroe’s eyes fell back to the papers.

“I’m confused. Who the hell is married? Who is Demetri...” Her words trailed off, and her hand immediately flew to her mouth.

“No, it’s not! Meechie! Samara, are these papers saying that you and Meechie are married?”

“Was married!” I corrected her. “We’re getting a divorce.”

Monroe stared at me momentarily before she handed the papers back to me and walked away.

“Nope! I’m not in this! Forget I walked in here. I just came here for drinks and book talk, that’s it.”

“Too late, you’re involved,” I called behind her, causing her feet to stop moving. She sighed and turned to face me, moving back in my direction.

“What the hell, Samara? I know your brother does not know about this. When did y’all get married? Please explain.”

I stared at Monroe as she joined me on the bed. I tried my best to reel in my emotions

and control my breathing, but I couldn't get a grip. I'd been keeping everything about Demetrius and me inside for so long. Nobody knew. Not even Rebecca and I considered her my closest friend. I'd only given her bits and pieces of the truth. She had no clue I had been venting to her about Meechie or that we were married.

"It's a lot." I didn't even know where to start.

"Start at the beginning."

I stood from the bed and walked to my nightstand to retrieve my wedding ring. I didn't wear it often, usually only when we were conducting cartel business, but for some reason, I was being called to it. I glared at my five-carat, white gold diamond ring, and more tears streamed from my eyes.

"Ro doesn't know," I said, placing the ring in my left hand. I walked over to the bed. Monroe nodded and kept her eyes on me, letting me know I had her undivided attention.

"For Demetrius to take over the cartel, he had to marry into the family. I was the only option," I blurted. Monroe's mouth dropped.

"You've been in an arranged marriage with Demetrius for what..." She counted in her head. "The past six years?"

I nodded. Monroe had experience with arranged marriages, having been in one herself before meeting Royale. So I could see why she would label this as one, but I didn't see it that way.

"Royale said y'all family didn't do arranged marriages."

"We don't. My marriage to Demetrius was more of an agreement than an

arrangement. We both wanted Royale to go to college and become a doctor. My father was trying to push him back into the cartel. This was the only way we could think of to free him.” I sat on the bed and opened my hand to show her my ring. Nobody close to us had seen it. Monroe stared at it, and a smile appeared on her face.

“Meechie got this for you?” she questioned.

I nodded my head. “On the day we got married. I told him I didn’t need one, but he wouldn’t let me go without it.”

“You couldn’t tell your brother because he would have stepped in and took over.”

“Yes, and we couldn’t let him do that. Royale needed to become a doctor. His future was so much greater than being Capo. I did it for him.” I sobbed.

“Samara, this is heavy. Does anybody else know about this?”

“We know.”

My head turned toward the doorway as Aliza, Rebecca, and Contessa rushed into the room. I didn’t know how long they’d been standing there or how much they heard, but relief swept over me. I felt free, knowing that I didn’t have to keep this secret.

“Samara is married to Meechie!” Monroe shouted as everyone joined us on the bed. Their arms wrapped around my body, embracing me in a group hug. My body melted into them as I let out a few more tears.

“Was married,” I corrected her again.

“Is married. Divorces aren’t final until you submit the paperwork,” Aliza added.

“How much did you all hear?” I was curious. My secret was finally out.

“Everything, and I can't believe you kept this from me.” Rebecca slapped me on my shoulder. “So the guy you've been on and off dating, the one that has been stalking you, that's Meechie?”

“Um huh.” I nodded. Everyone stared at me dumbfounded with their mouths on the floors.

“How?” Rebecca mumbled.

“I know how to keep a secret.” I took pride in the fact that I had managed to hide things with Demetrius for so long. It was one of the hardest things I'd ever done, yet somehow, I'd done it.

“When did you two fall in love? And why are you getting a divorce?” Monroe's questions caught me off guard. She was diving right into my business. I hesitated for a moment, trying to find the right words. I'd gone back and forth on my position when it came to loving him. I didn't know when I had fallen.

“If I'm being honest, I fell for Demetrius early on in our agreement. He is so rugged but sweet. Always cracking a damn joke.” The girls' head all nodded.

“The second we got married, he took over all my living expenses. After the first time we slept together, I knew I loved him.”

“I know that dick was good!” Aliza shouted, causing me to laugh. “No disrespect, cousin, but Meechie's big ass gives off the best big dick energy.”

I shook my head at Aliza as Monroe pushed her, warning her to tread lightly. I didn't mind Aliza's comment because I knew she didn't mean any harm by it. Demetrius

did give off big dick energy and had since we were teenagers.

“I don’t mean to pry, but if you love him so much, why not explore a real relationship?” Contessa questioned. She was only asking the question everyone probably wanted the answer to.

“I can’t love him, okay? I can’t. He’s everything my father was. This marriage was for Ro, and that’s it.”

Everyone stared at me. They all wanted to say something, but I was glad they’d chosen silence. Admitting my love for Demetrius was hard, and judgment was the last thing I needed. I allowed my tears to coat my cheeks as the reality of everything set in.

“It’s over!” I sobbed. “I can’t believe it’s over. I love him so much.” I broke down. All six years of hidden emotions poured out. Nobody said a word. They just embraced me as I fell apart. My phone rang in the pocket of my nightgown, and I almost broke my neck retrieving the phone. As emotional as I was, I was hoping it was Demetrius. I needed it to be Demetrius. I felt disappointed when I recognized the number of the hospital where I worked part-time on the weekends. They probably wanted me to come in. Swiping the green button, I connected the call just as Monroe’s phone rang.

“Hello.”

“Hello, this is Nurse Practitioner Janson calling from Miami Memorial Hospital. I’m looking for Mrs. Samara Augustine. It’s an urgent matter.”

The blood immediately drained from my face. She’d called me by Demetrius’s last name. My last name wasn’t Augustine. I knew at that moment something was wrong. My eyes traveled to Monroe. She had moved from the bed to the corner of the room.

Her chocolate face had no color, and tears were welling up in her eyes. She knew the horrible news I was destined to receive. I couldn't stop my hands from shaking as I pressed the phone up against my face.

"This is her," I said through a shaky voice. Contessa ran to Monroe, who was now crying uncontrollably. Whatever was going on was heavy. I could feel it in my chest.

"This is Samara Augustine," I repeated. I needed to know what was going on.

"Miss, your husband, Demetrius Augustine, was rushed here with life-threatening injuries from a car accident. He is in the intensive care unit—" The phone fell from my hand before she could finish her sentence. My chest tightened, and I would be on the floor if I wasn't already sitting. I couldn't breathe. All the air had been sucked from my body.

"Demetrius!" I screamed, placing my hands over my face.

"What's going on? What happened?" Aliza called out. Her hand wrapped around my back.

"Somebody tried to kill Meechie!" Monroe shouted. I watched as Rebecca picked up the phone and continued speaking with the nurse. I couldn't make out what she was saying because the sound had drained from the room. Everything was moving in slow motion. The girls were all running in and out of the room.

"Put these on!" Aliza tossed me some tennis shoes. When I didn't move, she put them on me herself.

"We have to get to the hospital. They need you to sign-off on care."

My eyes shot to Rebecca as my mind traveled to the worst-case scenario.

“Is he breathing?” I questioned, just above a whisper. He had to be breathing.

“Yes, but we got to go now!” Aliza demanded. I nodded my head and climbed out of the bed. Tears still rolled down my face. This was the nightmare I’d dreamed of often. The man I loved was being ripped away from me without warning. It was the main reason I didn’t want to commit to Demetrius. My heart couldn’t take it.

“God, please watch over Demetrius.” I cried as I moved down the hallway and out the door of my apartment. I hoped God was listening because I didn’t know if I could recover from this.

Demetrius

I'd been staring at the security cameras outside of Samara's condo for twenty minutes like a simp ass nigga. I was in a room full of naked women, but in my mind, I was contemplating going over there and snatching the divorce papers from her door. I only signed them because I ain't know what else to do. She'd been ignoring me for two months. I was ignoring her, too, but my shit was valid. Samara was playing childish games, and I wasn't the type of nigga to indulge in that shit. I was straightforward. I said what I meant, and I got what I wanted.

"If you have second thoughts, nigga, then why did you do it in the first place?" Fabian asked, breaking me from my thoughts. My eyes traveled to him and then back to the big booty female shaking ass in front of me. I didn't respond as I swiped from my phone's security camera app.

"I'll go over there and get them motherfuckers out the door for you." Fabian passed me the blunt we'd been smoking. I stared at him and shook my head.

"Nah, she got it." I inhaled the smoke, allowing the marijuana to fill my lungs. My hand cupped the booty of the light-skinned chick in front of me. Shorty was doing her thing, making her ass clap.

"Fancy seeing you here." The familiar voice had me yanking my head up. I'd gone six years without seeing Naveah, and here she was in the flesh. I let my eyes roam her body. She looked older, but she was still fine as fuck. Her hips had filled out,



probably from having kids.

“Naveah Cannon!” I called her name playfully.

“Actually, it’s Cannon-Moore.” She flashed her left hand to reveal a decent-looking ring. From what I heard, she married some dude who played basketball overseas. He had a normal upbringing. His mother and father were lawyers. The complete opposite of me.

“My fault. Mrs. Cannon-Moore. What you doing in Miami?”

“You remember my cousin Joslyn?”

I nodded. Joslyn was a part of our little circle back in the day. Royale used to link with her sometimes.

“She’s getting married. I came in town for her bachelorette party.”

“That’s what’s up. Tell Jos, I send my congratulations. I’ll send y’all a bottle. Where y’all sitting?”

She pointed to the other side of the club, and immediately, my eyes spotted Joslyn. I shot her a small wave, and she returned the greeting.

“So, what’s new with you?” Naveah questioned.

“I’m still the same nigga you left,” I said, my voice laced with sarcasm. I didn’t have any hard feelings for her. I just wasn’t interested in playing the catch-up game with her. I already had enough on my mind dealing with Samara.

“I didn’t leave you, Demetrius. I went away to school, and you didn’t want to come

with me.” She recanted her version of the events.

“You got your version, and I got mine.”

She walked over to me and sat down, inviting herself into my space.

“I hear you’re the big boss around here now.”

I nodded. I wasn’t about to confirm or deny shit. Plus, I knew if she was still talking to Joslyn’s big mouth ass, she knew what the streets were whispering about me.

“You’ve always been capable of so much. I can tell you still have some animosity towards me. That’s cool.”

“Naveah, that was years ago. I’m not tripping off that high school shit.” I waved her off. I had long ago stopped caring about what had gone down between us. To Naveah, I was a going nowhere in life hood nigga, and I was cool with that. I’d used it as fuel to become the boss I am today.

“High school or not, you were my first love.” She was quiet for a minute before speaking again. “Just for the record: When I left, I was waiting for a grand gesture of love, Meechie. When you just let me go without a fight, I knew you weren’t as invested as you pretended to be.”

I listened to her. Everything she was saying was true. Falling in love with Samara had revealed that to me. I would go to the ends of the fucking earth for Samara, but Naveah couldn’t even get me to go to Chicago.

“I wasn’t ready for all that back then. Besides, you wanted me to be something that I’m not. I’m a gangster, Naveah. It’s what I was born to be.”

“I see more. I’ve always seen more,” she replied. A comfortable silence fell over us before she stood from the couch.

“I better be getting back. Hug.” She opened her arms. Standing, I pulled her into a friendly hug.

“Stay safe, Demetrius.” She pulled away and walked down the stairs. Bumping into Royale on her way out, they embraced and shared a moment before she was on the other side of the club.

“You and Samara are still on that bullshit, I see.” Royale’s voice thundered over the music as he entered my section at the strip club. I returned to my seat, pulling the big booty in front of me down on my lap before dapping up my best friend.

“What’s up, nigga!” I greeted him as he took a seat next to me. I was surprised he’d accepted my invitation to hang out tonight. Monroe had that boy’s head so far gone he acted like a nigga didn’t exist. I wasn’t complaining, though. My nigga was in love, and Monroe was cool people. If I could get Samara to act right, I’d be ducked off too.

“Sup.” He eyed me and the stripper awkwardly as he dapped up Fabian. I needed to holla at my boy briefly, but I wanted to get up with shorty later. I hadn’t fucked in months, and I was backed up since I was no longer fucking with Samara like that.

“I need to holla at my niggas, but I want to link with you later. That cool?” I whispered in her ear. There was no need to beat around the bush. All of the strippers in here already knew who I was and what I was about.

“Yeah, that’s cool,” she replied. Damn, this chick sounds like a man , I thought as I surveyed her neck for an Adam ’ s apple.

“What’s your government, beautiful?” I questioned.

“Raina.”

“Raina, what?”

“Jackson,” she replied. The first and last name was more for Fabian than for me. He ran anybody I met up with through a background check. In my line of work, I couldn’t trust anybody. Niggas weren’t above sending a woman to do their dirty work, so I had to be careful.

“Put your number in my phone. I want to get us a room when you get off.”

“Okay.” Her husky voice swooned.

She was lucky she was cute, ’cause her voice was deep as fuck. Taking my phone in her hands, she slid off my lap. My eyes met Royale’s. I knew he was going to have something to say in a minute.

“I get off at five,” she whispered into my ear before sashaying away. She put an extra twist in her hips for me. It wasn’t needed. I’d already decided she would do for the night. I watched her disappear from the section before cutting my eyes to Royale. He stared at me, and for the first time since we’d been friends, I couldn’t read him. I hated that Samara had exposed her brother to our shit. It was bad enough that I’d married his sister behind his back, but now I had to tell half truths about being in a relationship with her, and that shit was fucking with me.

“Really?” Royale’s head cocked to the side.

“What?” I shrugged. I knew what he was talking about, but I played dumb.

“Nigga, am I going to have to beat yo’ ass about my sister?”

We all shared a laugh, but I knew he was serious.

“If I were fucking her over, I’d beat my ass,” I replied. “Samara ain’t fucking with me.”

“What’s up with that? I thought y’all were doing good. Y’all broke up?”

“Something like that.” I took another puff of the blunt. I didn’t like discussing Samara with Royale. He was her brother. He thought Samara and I were just dating, and I didn’t like lying to him. In the beginning, we lied to stop Royale from stepping in and taking over the cartel. Now we were just lying for our own selfish reasons. We both didn’t want to deal with the fallout that telling Ro the truth would cause.

“Samara only sees a nigga as a gangster. She only sees—”

“Our father,” he cut me off, finishing my sentence.

I nodded my head. “Exactly!”

“You know Mara ain’t never had a good example of love or a relationship. She was too young to remember when our parents were happy. I tried my best as her big brother to show her what love from a man looks like, but it isn’t the same. All Mara remembers is living in an empty mansion and fending for herself. She ain’t never had a relationship with our father. He was always gone, always working. The cartel came first. He wasn’t even there when Mom or Darnell passed away.”

I took in what he said. We’d been friends for so long that there wasn’t much about him or Samara’s childhood that I wasn’t hip on. I’d seen their father’s lifestyle tear their family apart. My mom used to allow Ro, Darnell, and Samara to sleep over at

our house when their mama was getting high, and their father was with mine off running the cartel. Samara and I both had daddy issues. That was probably why the universe had stuck us together. I recognized her scars and she mine. It allowed me to offer her a little patience.

“Samara just needs to know that you will not abandon her for the cartel’s business, like our pops,” Royale continued. I heard what he said, but I didn’t know how to do that. The cartel was my life. It came before everybody. Sometimes, it came before me. I hit the blunt I’d been babysitting. It was the only thing keeping me mellow.

“You know I dropped the L bomb, and she flat out said she ain’t love a nigga,” I blurted.

“Damn! Like that!”

“Yeah, yo’ sister a fucking savage.”

“Don’t I know it?” Ro echoed my sentiments. “You love her though, nigga? I can see it on you. You weren’t even acting like this with Naveah.”

“Bruh, on some real shit, I love your sister. I ain’t trying to be with nobody but her. She the headache I don’t ever want to stop having.” I took one last puff of the blunt before passing it to Fabian. “I don’t know what else to do. She doesn’t want anything to do with the cartel, and I run that motherfucker. Probably gon’ run it until I’m six feet under. Ain’t no other options for me. So where does that leave us?”

It felt good to get that all off my chest. Ro understood this shit better than anyone, and he never passed judgment. Even when I was doing something stupid, he was there helping me fix it. Not many people were blessed to have the brotherhood we had. The more I thought about it, the more guilt clouded my mind. I needed to be one hundred with my boy and tell him the truth about Samara and my situation. He was

gon' be pissed, but he didn't have a choice but to understand. We'd done this shit for him.

"I don't know what to tell you other than kidnap her," he joked. "I'm probably not the best motherfucker to ask for advice. You see how I got my wife."

I shook my head.

"Samara will probably call the police on my ass if I pulled some shit like that."

"Yeah, she would." We shared a laugh. "Sister or not, she stubborn."

"Fuck yeah." I agreed.

"Keep applying that pressure. She'll come around. I already know what color tux I'm gon' walk her down the aisle in."

There went that fucking guilty feeling again. There was no need to lie about it anymore since the divorce would be final soon.

"I appreciate it." I took a deep breath. "I need to be one hundred about something." Now was as good as any to come clean.

"Go ahead." Royale stared at me.

"Samara and I are—"

"This nigga up here crying over Samara, ain't he?" Polo interrupted me as he entered our section. "You invited us out to the strip club to kick it, but I'm not seeing nan ass bouncing in this section." His loud mouth ass was already faded. I could tell by the tone in his voice.

“Try being with his simping ass almost every day!” Fabian cosigned, making everyone snicker.

“Sup, bro!” I ignored them all and greeted my brother. We dapped each other up before he dapped Fabian and Ro. Polo was everything I used to be back in the day. Loud, flashy, and turned the hell up. Well, I was still flashy, but his ass had me beat on everything else.

“Must you come in here with that loud shit?” I teased him.

“Man, you just finish simping, so we can get some naked ass in this bitch.” Polo waved me off. “I did not come out here to talk that mushy shit with y’all niggas all night.”

“Finally, somebody said it,” Fabian interjected.

“Fuck both y’all niggas.” I threw them both the middle finger.

“Don’t trip off them lonely ass niggas. We’ll talk later.” Royale grinned.

“Definitely don’t include me on that call. Old, in love ass niggas,” Polo mumbled. Royale and I burst out laughing at his bitter ass.

“You only feel that way because Contessa ain’t giving you no play.” I called him out.

“Fuck you, bitch. Ain’t nobody thinking about that girl.” He shot back as we all laughed. This was normally how shit went when we all got together. Just a bunch of jokes and shit talking. A trail of women entered our section, and I knew Polo had requested them. Royale and I sat back, enjoying the views as Polo let a big bankroll of money go in the air. I had no urge to trick tonight, so I just sat back and let him do his thing.



“Aye, boss man, Grant approaching to the left.” Fabian alerted me. Royale and I both sat up, placing our guns on our laps. We knew Grant wasn’t coming in peace. He wanted smoke for his fuck ass son Kashus and his nephew Rah. Both of them niggas deserved what they’d gotten. He was better off picking up the pieces of his dying ass mafia and moving on. Snooping around us was gon’ have him lying in the grave next to his crackhead ass son. I watched as his old white ass waltzed into our section with his goons. His face turned up.

“To what do we owe the pleasure?” I greeted him. I ain’t care how many times he popped up where we were. He was always going to get the same response.

“My son's body was delivered to my house last Saturday stuffed in a bloody box. My grandchildren were there.” He hissed. I could hear the pain in his voice. Losing a son, even one as fucked up as Kashus, must have been hard. It was why I’d given him the gift of being able to bury his son. I usually had all evidence of dead bodies discarded.

“Damn, you got any clue what could have happened?” Royale questioned. “Sounds like your son made an enemy.”

I darted my eyes to Royale. That nigga was so good at playing dumb. I almost believed he hadn’t been the one to put a bullet in Kashus’s head.

“I’m confused as to why you keep informing us. Do we look like detectives?” I questioned.

“My son came down here to look for that bitch, and now he’s dead. Then I hear Dr. London here has married her.” Grant’s nostrils flared as he approached Royale. Ro quickly stood from his seat, and we all joined him.

“I change lives, Mr. Grant. I don’t take them. Monroe and I getting married has nothing to do with your son’s disappearance. I assure you that.” Royale smirked.

Grant attempted to close the space between them, but the pistol Polo had aimed at the back of his head had him second-guessing his decision. The guys with Grant pulled their guns, and Fabian and I did the same. A few of the strippers screamed as they ran out of the section. I would have to pay the owner extra for scaring the girls. I cocked my head at Grant.

“I know you and that fat bitch had something to do with my son’s murder,” he spat. If there weren’t so many witnesses around, I would kill his ass now for disrespecting Monroe. She was my sis and I ain’t play that fat shaming shit.

“Is that so?” I replied. “Then I suggest you call the police. I’ve told you before. We can’t help you.”

“I might just do that.”

Royale and I withdrew our guns, tucking them back in our pants. Just like we wouldn’t shoot around all these witnesses, neither would Grant. He knew he didn’t stand a chance going up against the police and the judges we had on payroll here in Miami.

“We are sorry about your loss. Both of them, but I suggest you stop coming around here pointing fingers. We don’t take well to threats. We might have to withdraw our contract. Don’t forget who is keeping your bills paid.” I patted him on the pocket and stepped around him, leaving his old, wrinkled ass standing there. Royale, Polo, and Fabian followed. There was no point in staying there now. I didn’t chill in rooms with my enemies. Besides, Grant had killed the vibes.

“We’re going to have to kill his ass,” Ro blurted as he followed me out of the club.

“I’m already on it,” I replied. Fabian ran to get the car and pulled it around as we stood in front of the club. Few motherfuckers were bold enough to run up on us, let

alone pull their guns out. That alone warranted his death. I had killed people for less. This pop up, like the other ones, was not a coincidence. Grant was watching us and plotting. I wouldn't expect anything less from a man of his stature. I knew we would have to get him before he got us.

"Y'all niggas might as well meet me at the warehouse," I stated. Polo and Royale both stared at me, bobbing their heads. They already knew that an impromptu trip to the abandoned shoe factory I kept just off the ocean meant somebody was being disposed of. I didn't have to explain or consult them before setting my plan in motion. It didn't matter. They were gon' shoot first and ask questions later. That was how we all moved when it came to each other. My eyes meet Ro's. It had been a long time since he'd been to the warehouse. He was retired.

"I figured since you started this shit, it's only right you finish it."

"I'm down," he replied just as Fabian pulled my blacked-out SUV in front of the club.

"Y'all riding?" I offered. There was no need to take multiple cars if we ain't have to, but knowing these niggas they would want to drive their own shit.

Ro held up his hands in protest. "Naw, Monroe at Samara's having a girls' night. I'm going to follow just in case I got to dip at any time to pick up her drunk ass."

My eyes darted to Polo.

"Yeah, there's no way I'm leaving my baby parked out here." Polo declined my offer as he headed to his red Lamborghini.

"Meet y'all niggas there then." I climbed into the back seat of the truck.

“Have someone snatch up Grant. I want to show him the warehouse,” I instructed Fabian.

“Say less, boss man.” He sent a message on his phone before pulling off and merging onto the main intersection. I didn’t plan on spending my night working, but it was a welcomed change from thinking about Samara. Chopping up Grant would stop me from ending up at Samara’s doorstep, because signed divorce papers or not, she was mine and always would be.

I pulled out my phone and swiped her number. I wanted to call her. Shoot her a text or something. The sound of screeching tires in the distance had me pulling my gun out and going on alert, but I was too late. A huge eighteen-wheeler truck was already slamming into the side of the SUV. My head slammed into the window, and the world spun as we flipped multiple times. I threw my hands up to shield my face as glass shattered around me. My thoughts went to Samara and then my brother as pain radiated through my body. I attempted to move, but my legs were heavy.

“Fuck!” I groaned. The car stopped moving, and I attempted to search for my gun. I wasn’t sure what was happening, but I wanted to be prepared if this was an ambush.

“Fabian!” I called, trying to gather myself. My ears rang, and the pain in my head forced me to close my eyes.

“Fabian!” I called again, hoping for a response, but there was nothing. Only sirens and voices in the distance.

“Meechie!”

“Fabian!”

“Check that truck!” Royale called out as his face came into view outside the SUV.

“Ro,” I whispered as he yanked the door open. His eyes ballooned as he took in my condition.

“Meechie! Fuck!” Royale’s eyes locked on mine. He was scared, and that confirmed what I already knew.

“I... you... These niggas trying to kill me, ain’t they?” My words jumbled together, and my vision blurred.

“I got you, nigga,” Royale mumbled. The overwhelming urge to tell him about Samara and I crept in.

“I... Samara... we—” I tried to mumble as I faded in and out of consciousness.

“We got you, bruh. The ambulance is on the way.” That was the last thing I heard as everything faded to black.

5

Samara

“Excuse me!” I approached the receptionist’s desk frantically. I took a second to catch my breath before speaking. As soon as Rebecca had stopped the car, I jumped out and ran inside. My mind was in a whirlwind the entire car ride.

“I’m Samara Augustine. My husband was brought here from a car wreck.” My words moved as fast as my heartbeat in my chest. Monroe, Aliza, Contessa, and Rebecca joined me at the desk as the receptionist slowly typed on her computer screen. She clearly couldn’t sense the level of urgency in the room.

“Name of the patient?” she replied dryly.

“Demetrius Augustine.”

Her head dropped back down to the computer.

“I don’t see a patient by that name. Are you sure this is the hospital the patient was brought to?” A hint of an attitude laced her voice. This bitch acted as if I inconvenienced her. I took a deep breath, trying to calm my anxiety. I was a nurse, and I understood how hectic medical work could be.

“Excuse me.” I peered down at the badge she wore around her neck.

“Tonia, that cannot be correct. I got a call from this hospital. I’m sure of the number

because I work PRN here on weekends. Can you check again, please?"

"There is no patient in our system by that name." She was cold and dismissive.

"That's impossible. Please check again." At this point, I was livid. "Demetrius Augustine!" I screamed, banging my hand on the desk.

"Miss, I'm about to call security."

"Call them!" I screamed. "Somebody needs to find my damn husband!" I was ten seconds from hopping the counter and whupping her snooty ass.

"Samara!" Monroe pulled me away from the receptionist's desk. "He's on blackout. Royale is coming down to get us."

A sigh of relief immediately escaped my mouth. It made sense that he would be on the blackout list. With all the enemies Demetrius had, it wouldn't be wise to disclose his identity and location to just anybody. I plopped down in the waiting room chair, allowing more tears to flow from my eyes. This was all happening so fast that it felt like a bad dream. The elevator dinged, and my head flew up. My brother appeared, holding the door and signaling us to come on. I jumped up, rushing onto the elevator. I took in my brother's appearance. He looked like hell. Being a nurse, I usually wasn't moved by the sight of blood, but Royale was covered in it. It made me nauseous. If Demetrius had lost that much blood, how could he still breathe?

Royale glanced at me, tears still resting in the corner of his eyes. Our eyes met, and his heartbreak and disappointment peered into me.

"Y'all married?" Those were the first words he spoke, and my sinking heart sank again. I had no words. I dropped my head.

“Imagine my surprise when the doctors informed me that my best friend had a Samara Augustine listed on his paperwork as his next of kin. As his fucking wife.”

“Royale, baby, calm down.” Monroe placed an arm on his shoulder.

“Royale... I—”

“Save that shit, Samara. No matter how foul you and Meechie are for this, our only concern needs to be saving his life.”

“We did it for you,” I whispered to myself. I didn’t know if he had heard me. Never in a million years did I think this was how he would find out. Royale turned around. He didn’t say anything else to me for the remainder of the ride to the ICU. We all rushed into the lobby as soon as the elevator doors parted. Royale showed us to the private waiting area that he’d requested for us. Two brown-skinned women greeted me when we stepped into the room. They were wearing scrubs, so I assumed they were the doctors.

“Are you Mrs. Augustine?” one of them questioned.

“Yes.” I nodded, closing the space between us.

“I am Dr. Foster, and this is my nurse practitioner Miss Jansen.”

“We spoke over the phone,” Nurse Practitioner Jansen said.

“As mentioned, your husband was brought in for injuries related to a car accident. We were able to get him stable, but several scans showed internal bleeding in the abdomen. He has extensive damage to his spleen. It is ruptured. Mr. Augustine also has a break in his right leg.”



Tears rolled down my face as I listened to the doctor list Demetrius's injuries. With all of that going on, it was a miracle that he was alive.

"He needs to undergo immediate surgery to stop the internal bleeding and repair his ruptured spleen. He's going to need a partial splenectomy to save his life."

"Oh my God!" My knees buckled, but I was glad Royale and Monroe were there to hold me up.

"Miss, your husband has lost so much blood. He'll lose more during the procedure. It isn't safe to operate on him without giving blood. To operate, he'll have to undergo a blood transfusion. That is where we need your consent. Unfortunately, time isn't on your side. We need an immediate decision."

The room looked as if it was spinning as I tried my best to process what she said. A splenectomy was a serious surgery with a lot of risk factors, and so was a blood transfusion. So many things could go wrong, but our choices were slim. The fact that Demetrius trusted me to make decisions about his medical well-being had more tears glazing my eyes.

"Yes, I consent. Do what you need to save his life, please," I cried. The doctor nodded and offered me a light tap on the shoulder.

"I'll do everything I can. I'll have the nurse bring back the paperwork." Dr. Smith turned to walk away, but Royale stopped her.

"Excuse me, Doctor!" he shouted. "We were also waiting on news about the man brought in with him. Fabian Baptiste."

Dr. Smith looked down at her clipboard and then back up at us.

“Are you his next of kin?”

“We’re the only family he has here in the States. He’s here on a work visa,” Royale informed her. I watched as the doctor’s expression grew somber, and my already broken heart shattered.

“He didn’t make it. The bleeding in his head was too much. I’m sorry, but he succumbed to his injuries.”

Dr. Smith turned and briskly walked out of the room before disappearing behind the double doors. Nurse Practitioner Jansen trailed behind her. The room was silent. Hearing that Fabian hadn’t made it was heartbreaking. I didn’t even know why I hadn’t thought to ask about him. Of course, he was driving Demetrius. He drove him most of the time.

Royale released me and walked over to a waiting room chair. He tucked his head in his shirt, shielding the tears he shed for Fabian. My eyes traveled to Polo as he cried into Contessa’s chest. This was heavy and now seemed like the perfect time to fall apart. The room filled up with the sounds of my sobs. I cried for Fabian. I cried because of the thought of losing Demetrius, and I cried because I’d spent the last six years suppressing my feelings for Demetrius to avoid this very moment, and it still came.

“We got you. Everything is going to be okay, sis. It has to be.” Monroe rubbed my back.

“What if it’s not? Fabian is gone. The last thing I said to Meechie was I didn’t love him.” I tucked my head into her chest and let my broken heart spill out without any reservations.

“What if he dies thinking I don’t love him?”

“He knows, sis,” Polo interjected from where he sat with Contessa in the corner of the room. “Y’all love for one other... That’s what’s keeping him here. That’s what’s pushing him to fight.”

I stared at Polo. Despite the tears he’d shed for Fabian, this was the calmest I had ever seen him. Splats of blood covered his clothes too.

“That nigga is not about to die and let you move on with another nigga,” he added, lightening the air in the room. It was needed. Everyone chuckled a little as a nurse appeared with a clipboard.

“You want to go over the consent to treat here or somewhere more private?” she asked. I glanced around the room at everyone present. We were all an important part of Demetrius’s life. We were all his family.

“Here is fine,” I replied.

“Okay.” She looked down at the paper and back at me. “Mrs. Augustine, the procedure involves operating on your husband to address abdominal bleeding being caused by a ruptured spleen.”

My lips moved as she spoke. I already knew the spiel about blood transfusions. I’d given this same spiel to many people. It didn’t matter what she said. I was going to sign.

“I want to ensure that you understand the risks and potential benefits of the surgery and the blood transfusion. Do you have any questions or concerns before we proceed?”

“No,” I replied. The nurse handed me the consent forms, and my hand trembled. I was terrified but certain I was making the right decision. I glanced around the room at

everyone. All eyes were on me. I understood the urgency of this. We all needed him to be okay. We needed him to come out of this. I took a deep breath, steadied my hand, and etched my name at the bottom of the paper.

Now, it was time to wait, pray, and trust the doctors. I looked around. Polo and Royale were whispering to each other in the corner. The looks on their faces told me they were handling business. I stood and walked over to the recliner chair in the corner and made myself comfortable. I was going to be there for a while. Pulling out my phone, I opened up the hidden picture thread of Demetrius and me. I swiped to the day we'd gotten married. I didn't think we should take any pictures. After all, our union was fake, but Demetrius insisted. He said fake or not it was my wedding day, and I should remember it. A smile formed on my face as more tears dropped. If he died tonight, I knew I would regret every time I told him we couldn't be as I rested my head on the recliner as minutes turned to hours.

No amount of time joining Royale in the operating room could prepare me for the stress that came with waiting for the man I loved to come out of surgery. We'd been waiting on an update on Demetrius for so long the sun was now coming up.

"He's out of surgery!" Polo yelled from where he stood at the receptionist's desk. He'd been harassing these people for hours, trying to get an update. "The doctor is on her way out to talk to us."

I sat up. Suddenly, the door opened, and Dr. Smith entered with a warm smile on her face. Relief immediately coursed through my body at her facial expression as I stood and approached her. Polo, Royale, and Monroe all did the same. Surely, she wouldn't be smiling if he hadn't made it.

"I'm so pleased to be able to tell you all the surgery went excellently," she began, her eyes finding me. "Your husband is recovering in the recovery room and doing surprisingly well. We weren't able to repair the spleen laparoscopically, so he does

have an open wound. Only a small portion was removed.” We all collectively released a sigh of relief.

“We’ll closely monitor your husband’s progress in the next few days. Pain management will likely be the most crucial aspect of his recovery process.”

“Can we see him now?” I questioned.

“Once he’s moved to a private room, you all will be free to see him. It won’t be much longer.”

I nodded.

“When can he go home?” Royale questioned.

“Three, maybe four days. It depends on how well he is recovering,” Dr. Smith replied.

“Is there any way we can continue his recovery at home? I’m a doctor and could monitor his care,” Royale stated.

“The main thing is to ensure that he is comfortable because he has an open wound that will need monitoring.”

“I’m a plastic surgeon. I know all about wound care.”

“Do you want to continue care at home, Mrs. Augustine?”

I stared at Royale. I wasn’t sure I wanted Demetrius to go home, but I knew that would be what he wanted.

“Yes, I’m also a NP. I think between me and my brother, we can manage his aftercare.” Dr. Smith nodded.

“In that case, we’ll monitor him for a few hours and then get him released. I’ll have a list of all the items you’ll need for his care.” Dr. Smith turned and exited the room.

“When Meechie is released, we’re moving you and Monroe to the safe house.” Royale turned and looked at me as soon as Dr. Smith disappeared.

“Safe house?” I was puzzled. Why would I need to go to the safe house? Then it hit me all at once. “Wait, this was an attempt on his life? Somebody was trying to kill him?” The words sounded as heavy leaving my lips as they did in my brain.

“Yeah, this was an assassination attempt,” Royale confirmed. “Someone sent an empty, driverless, eighteen-wheeler racing down an intersection. It’s only right to assume it was with the intention of taking out Demetrius.”

Everything around me seemed to move in slow motion. In the shuffle of everything, I’d forgotten that Demetrius was Capo. I thought this was just a regular car accident. I should have known it was cartel related.

“You said me and Monroe were going to the safe house? Where is Demetrius going?”

“With Polo and me. Hurt or not, we got business to take care of.”

“I’m not leaving Demetrius so he can work. He just had surgery. He almost died. Hello!” My voice was growing louder.

“Samara, don’t make this difficult. You knew what you were signing up for when you secretly married this nigga.”

I stared at my brother. We joked all the time. The usual brother and sister banter, but we hardly ever had a real fight. He was holding so much animosity toward me. Finding out I was married to Demetrius bothered him.

“You’re right. I did know what I was getting into when I married him,” I blurted. “An agreement that would keep my brother from having to take over the cartel so he could follow his dreams of being a surgeon.” My eyes locked on Royale’s. “I married Demetrius behind your back to benefit you. We did this for you!” I screamed. The stress of the situation was evident.

“Y’all ain’t did shit for me.” Royale waved me off.

“Yes, we did. Demetrius couldn’t take over without being blood or marrying blood. You thought you could just turn it over to him, but you couldn’t! If you don’t believe me, ask your father.”

“You’re telling me y’all been married for the last six years?”

“Yes, the rules said five, but things got complicated.”

“Y’all caught feelings,” Polo added, reminding me that it just wasn’t me and my brother in this room. Royale stared at me. Disbelief and disappointment were etched on his face.

“Y’all two motherfuckers lucky we are in the midst of a fucking war.”

Tears rolled down my cheeks. Royale had always been the closest thing I had to a father. Knowing he was mad and disappointed in me broke my heart.

“After he’s released, you’re going to the safe house, and that’s not up for debate—”

“Hello. You all can see him now. I will take you. Are you all ready?” The nurse interrupted Royale. I took one final gaze at him before turning to face the nurse.

“Yes.”

“Follow me,” she instructed. My feet moved briskly behind the nurse as she escorted us out of the waiting room and down a long hallway to Demetrius’s private room. Monroe, Aliza Rebecca, and Contessa trailed.

“It’s a lot of you here. We ask that you keep it to three visitors at a time. He’s been floating in and out of consciousness. That’s normal after a blood transfusion. He may sleep most of the day due to the anesthesia and pain medication.”

I didn’t need the rundown, so I pushed the door open, eager to see him. Polo and Royale followed behind me. As I entered the dimly lit hospital room, my heart raced, and my eyes instantly filled with tears. I’d seen a ton of patients recovering after surgery, but the sight of Demetrius lying there fragile and broken was something I could never prepare for. Demetrius was a giant. He was so strong and protective that sometimes I forgot he was human. I approached his bedside with tears rolling down my eyes. No matter his position in the cartel, his money, or his power, he was just a man, as fragile as anyone else. I reached out and took his hand in mine.

“You’re trying to give me a heart attack.” I exhaled the breath I’d been holding. The warmth of his touch reassured me that he was still here. Demetrius’s eyes flickered open, and a weak smile tugged at the corners of his mouth.

“Don’t come in here with that sad fake shit,” he whispered hoarsely as he turned to stare at me. An overwhelming sense of relief swept over me at the sound of his voice. He was still his same petty self. I rolled my eyes and smiled at the same time. It didn’t matter what he said to me because he was still fighting, still breathing, and still here with me.



“Be nice to sis. She signed off on the paperwork to save your life,” Polo murmured, his voice choking with emotion. Demetrius’s eyes bounced between us, confused.

“You could have told me you put me down as your next of kin.”

“You are my wife, Samara. Your name on all my shit...” His voice trailed off as he turned his head in search of Royale, probably tempering to see if he was in the room. If our secret hadn’t already been out, it would have been now.

“I already know, nigga.” Royale broke the news to him. I could see the flood of emotions that appeared on his face.

“Ro, it isn’t what you think.”

“I think you married and fucked my little sister behind my back for six years and called it loyalty.” Royale’s voice was so distant, so cold. Demetrius didn’t reply. He and Royale just stared at each other. I could barely stand to watch. They never were at odds.

“We ain’t talking about this shit now. It was flawed as fuck, bruh, no matter the reason, but we can’t dwell on that now. Right now, we have more important shit to worry about. Considering your condition, we’re already one step behind,” Polo interjected.

Royale retreated to the window and leaned against it.

“This was a hit, wasn’t it?”

“Yeah,” Polo responded.

“My money on Grant. Have Fabian put somebody on his ass immediately.”

My stomach churned. I wanted to tell him his cousin was gone, but Polo was right. He wasn't strong enough for that yet. We didn't want to risk a relapse during his recovery.

"The thing is, why would Grant get you and not me? I was right behind you. A few seconds later, he could have taken out both of us," Royale added.

"Yeah, well, we'll put our ears to the streets. See what's being said. In the meantime, put our loved ones up in the safe house. I want them far away from this shit. Mexico."

"We're already on it, nigga."

"Y'all for real right now!" I shouted. My eyes were bouncing between all the men in the room. "Y'all gon' talk about this right now? Demetrius, you fresh out of surgery." I was livid. I understood the danger we were in, but I didn't understand why someone else couldn't handle it. Demetrius was in no shape to be trying to run the damn cartel.

"Business doesn't stop, Samara."

"But it needs to! You almost died! You have an open abdomen and a broken leg. I'm not letting you run off to some drug war!" My heart pounded in my chest. I didn't understand why nobody saw my side.

"If someone tried to kill me, then our livelihood is in jeopardy. I have to protect that. I ain't laying down for no nigga, Samara!" Demetrius's voice thundered, causing him to cough. The monitors beeped fast as he went into a coughing fit. I had upset him. That wasn't my intention. The nurse rushed into the room, pushing us all out the way as she administered more pain medicine.

"I'm sorry!" I whispered, retreating to the corner of the room. "He got a little worked up," I offered. The nurse acknowledged my comment with a nod as she worked hard

to get him stable. If a little conversation with me made his blood pressure spike, then how was he going to orchestrate a war?

“He needs rest. We’re going to hold visitors for a while and push back his release to this afternoon. I suggest you all go home, shower, get things ready for him, and come back later.”

I heard what she’d said, but there was no way I was leaving this hospital until he could come with me. We exited his hospital room and walked into the small waiting area at the end of the hall. Everyone stood.

“Samara got us kicked out,” Royale announced. My mouth dropped in shock. I wanted to cuss his ass out, but Monroe grabbed him before I did.

“We’re going to go pack your things for the safe house. I would tell you to come with me, take a shower and change, but I know you’re not leaving.” Aliza approached me.

“Do you need anything in particular?” Rebecca added.

“No.” I shook my head. Rebecca reached for my hand and handed me her keys.

“We’re taking Monroe’s car. Royale is riding with Polo. They’re going to leave to go set things up for Meechie. Here are my keys to at least go for a drive or something.”

“Okay.” I gave them all hugs, and everybody emptied the room. I waited until everyone was gone and snuck back into Demetrius’s hospital room. My gentle bear was sleeping so soundly. Moving quietly, I plopped down in the chair next to his bed and took his hand into mine again.

“I love you,” I whispered, leaning forward and planting a kiss on his forehead. I had to figure out a way to get us out of this mess. In a perfect world we could be together

free of all the drama. I stared at Demetrius. I wasn't leaving his side to go be a sitting duck inside some safe house and leave him to die or end up in jail. There was no way.

"Ma'am, I have his discharge papers." The nurse's voice jolted me out of my sleep. It took a moment for me to remember where I was. I hadn't even noticed that I'd closed my eyes, let alone gone to sleep. I looked to my left at Demetrius who was still resting. Someone had come in and changed his clothes while I was passed out. He was no longer sporting the hospital gown but a pair of gray sweatpants and a white shirt. The sunset glaring through the hospital window told me that we'd been sleeping for more than a few hours.

"Miss, do you hear me?" the nurse questioned.

"Yes, I'm sorry. Just tired."

"I understand. It's been a long twenty-four hours for you guys." She smiled. "You are free to go, but Dr. Smith wants you to promise he comes in for a follow-up in two days."

"Yes, of course." I agreed.

"Sign here. This is the consent to discharge." She pointed to the bottom of the page. I etched my signature on the paper as the nurse went over the recovery instructions and walked me through all of Demetrius's medications. She showed me how to change his bandages and care for his wound. It was all standard for a patient who'd suffered his injuries. I was confident that I could take great care of him at home.

"The transporters will be here to help you get him in the car. Best of luck to you both."

"Thank you." I nodded my head as she exited the room. Standing up, I began

gathering all Demetrius's things. I was expecting it to take longer, but the moment I put his last item in the hospital to-go bag there was a knock on the door.

“Transport!”

“Come in,” I called, and in walked two tall, skinny, light-complexioned men. One was pushing a wheelchair. I was unsure if they were strong enough to move Demetrius, but I guess they could handle it. Lightly, they tapped him on the shoulder.

“You’re being discharged, can you stand up for us?” The tattooed man spoke. Demetrius’s eyes fluttered open, and he nodded his head. They helped him swing his body to the end of the bed before assisting him with standing up. Demetrius moved toward them. Slowly, they lowered him into the wheelchair, securing his legs into the restraints.

“We’re good to go, ma’am.” They rolled him to the door. Taking one last look around the room, I joined them in the hallway. As we made our way down the hall and into the waiting area to wait for the elevator, I was surprised to see it was empty. Royale, Polo, Contessa, Monroe, Rebecca, or Aliza were nowhere to be found. I didn’t realize no one had made it back yet. I didn’t even have my car.

“Um, excuse me, wait,” I called behind them as we piled onto the elevator.

“Yeah.” One of the men turned to look at me.

“I don’t have—” Suddenly, it dawned on me that I had Rebecca's car. I reached in the pocket of my pajamas and retrieved the car keys. Attached to them was a valet tag.

“Is this for valet?” I held up the car keys pointing to the yellow tag.

“Yes, ma’am. I can give your keys to the valet for you.”

I handed him the car keys as we exited the elevator into the hotel lobby. I watched nervously as the transport guy handed my keys over to a pale man at the valet desk. The pale man didn't waste any time taking off toward the parking garage.

"Is this spot cool to wait for your car?" the other transport guy asked just as we made our way outside.

"Yes, this is fine," I replied as I took in my surroundings. The fresh air was a welcomed change from the stuffy hospital room. I stared down at Demetrius. His eyes opened as he took in the scenery. My thoughts raced. I wasn't ready to leave him.

Rebecca's Mazda pulled up in the roundabout and I hopped inside. They placed Demetrius in the back seat so he could rest.

"Thank you," I said to the men before they returned to the hospital.

Sitting in the car, I pulled out my phone to call Royale. I needed to figure out where to take him. No sooner than that thought crossed my mind did it disappear. This was my chance to get away... To leave all of this behind. We didn't have anything but the clothes on our backs, but I didn't give a damn.

I threw Rebecca's car in drive and pulled off. I made a mental note to have Rebecca's car shipped back to her when we got to wherever we were going. I was sure she would understand. My heart pounded and my hands trembled on the steering wheel as the hospital grew smaller and smaller in the rearview mirror. I was leaving all my worries and troubles behind. I didn't know where we were going, but I hoped it was somewhere we could both find healing.

Demetrius

“Fuck!” I groaned as my eyes shot open. The stabbing pain in my stomach had rocked me out of my sleep. Everything that happened last night and today flashed in my head in bits and pieces. I remembered being hit by a truck and arriving at the hospital, but after that everything was spotty. I’d had surgery, but I couldn’t recall the procedure. I knew Samara was there when I’d woke up and that she’d signed off on the procedure to save my life. It was exactly what I knew she would do if I ever needed her to, and that was why I’d put her on the paperwork years ago. I’d put Samara on all my paperwork. If I wouldn’t have made it, everything I owned would have gone to her.

The shooting pain in my stomach coursed through my body again. It must have been time for me to get more pain medication. Every part of my body felt like I had been hit by a fucking truck. I would have rather been shot. Leaning my head forward, I took in my surroundings. I was in the back seat of a car I didn’t recognize and a nigga head was spinning. I blinked in confusion, trying to make sense of where the fuck I was and why. When I spotted the back of Samara’s head, I was instantly relieved. Lifting my hand, I intertwined my fingers in her beautiful curls just as I did when I was giving her back shots.

“A nigga ain’t gon’ never get tired of this view,” I mumbled, giving her head a slight tug. The car swerved a little bit as she yelped.

“Oh my God, Demetrius, you scared the fuck out of me.”

I opened my mouth to respond, but a green sign passing by my window caught my attention.

“Welcome to Georgia,” I read underneath my breath as more confusion set in. Why the hell were we in Georgia?

“Aye, why we just pass a welcome to Georgia sign?” I questioned. “Where the fuck we going?” She didn’t say shit, but I could feel the car speed up.

“You don’t hear me talking to you?” I tugged on her hair with a little more aggression. I needed answers as to why we’d been on the road for more than six hours. My memory wasn’t the best right now, but I ain’t remember Georgia being a part the plan.

“We’re headed up to Contessa’s safe house. That’s where they want us to hide out.” Her voice was doing that high-pitch thing it did when she was lying. We’d been around each other all of our lives damn near. Samara knew I knew when her ass was lying. Removing my hand from her hair I snaked my hand around the headrest and took hold of her neck.

“Lie again.”

“Demetrius, stop playing, you’re going to make me have an accident,” she fussed, attempting to pull my hand away from her neck.

“Stop lying then.” I tightened my grip. If she thought because a nigga was hurt she was gon’ play with me, she thought wrong. “Why are we in Georgia, Samara?”

“I just told you.”

My grip tightened again. I applied just enough pressure to let her ass know I meant



business. Her panties were probably becoming ruined by the second. Without warning, that throbbing pain returned to my stomach, making me drop the grip I had on her.

“Shit!” I winced in pain as I doubled over. The reality that someone had actually executed an attempt on my life and almost succeeded set in.

“Are you okay?” Samara questioned. I could hear the concern in her voice, but I was in too much pain to answer her. “It’s time for you to get your meds. I just need to find a decent place to stop.”

I lifted up my head trying to pinpoint where we were. I’d made this trip a thousand times back when my job was running coke from Miami to Atlanta.

“The next exit is good.” I pinpointed where we were. Just outside of Bristol City. “There’s a gas station and a little place to grab something to eat. A nigga hungry. I’m good on the meds though,” I informed her before leaning my head back on the window. As sore as I was, I knew better than to rely on the pain medication to fix it. I’d seen too many motherfuckers get strung out off that shit. It was why the cartel had such a huge stake invested in prescription drugs.

“You need your pain meds, Demetrius,” she replied.

“I’m good,” I responded.

“You have an open wound.”

“I’m good,” I repeated. “I ain’t trying to mask the pain. I need to feel it so that I learn from it and never end up in this situation again.”

She didn’t say anything after that and just merged into the exit lane as I pondered

why Royale and Polo would have Samara taking me up the highway to Bristol City.

“Do you have my phone?” I needed to call those niggas and see what was going on.

“Yeah, it’s in your bag. I’ll give it to you when we stop.” Her voice did that high-pitch thing again. Samara was hiding something, but I wasn’t going to trip about it. The truth would reveal itself soon enough. Samara pulled up to the gas station and I surveyed my surroundings. I had always been vigilant, but after a nigga had gotten bold enough to try and kill me, I was a little paranoid. Groaning, I attempted to move across the back seat of the car and get out.

“What are you doing?” Samara questioned as she opened her car door.

“Getting out to pump the gas. You know I ain’t about to let you do that while I’m sitting right here.”

“Demetrius, you can barely stand up.”

“I ain’t dead, though.”

“I got it. I’m sure the pump police is not going to come get you for this one time.” She giggled. I adjusted myself on the back seat as she fondled around in the glove compartment.

“Here, just in case.” She tossed a gun on the back seat next to my broken leg. “I got mine.” She patted the small purse she carried.

“I thought you ain’t want to be gangster’s wife?”

“I said I didn’t want to, not that I didn’t know how.” She exited the car with a smile.

A slight smirk swept over my face as I watched her walk away in the cute little pajama set she had on. Even injured my dick stood at attention for her. Samara's little feisty ass was effortlessly gorgeous. My eyes stayed on her as she moved through the gas station. I was amazed at how, even after spending hours in the hospital at my bedside, she was still fine as fuck. That was my wife. The only woman I loved and the only woman that I wanted to throw off a cliff. I shook my head as the sound of the car phone blurred through the speakers. Leaning forward, I looked at the center console.

"Just the nigga I need to talk to." I leaned forward, pushing my body up just enough to answer the call.

"Sup!"

"Meechie!" Royale's voice filled up the car.

My eyebrows furrowed. "Who else would it be?"

"Where the fuck are you and Samara?" Royale wasn't his usual calm self. He sounded frazzled.

"We just got to Georgia. We about three hours away from Bristol. Stopping to get gas, bruh, relax."

"Bristol!" That was Polo's voice. "What the hell y'all doing in Bristol City?"

"Going to the safe..." My words trailed off as I started putting shit together. Something was going on and Samara was the culprit behind it all.

"Samara lying to me, ain't she?" I questioned.

“Samara checked you out of the hospital, stole Rebecca’s car, and took off. We didn’t know if y’all were okay or if this was part of the ambush,” Royale explained. I couldn’t believe my ears, but at the same time, I could. Samara had a habit of taking shit into her own hands. I stared at her as she walked out of the gas station. She had a lot of explaining to do.

“You got my sister out here sneaking around, lying, pulling shit like this.” Royale was pissed.

“Ro, you know damn well I ain’t making Samara do—”

“Save it. Talk to Polo.” He cut me off, and I could hear commotion on the other end before Polo’s voice filled the speakers. I couldn’t blame Royale for being mad. I’d done some foul shit marrying Samara behind his back. It was fucked up, and this surely wasn’t the way I wanted him to find out, but what was done was done.

“I was about to burn this whole motherfucking city down.” Polo snapped me from my thoughts just as Samara swung the car door open.

“Who are you talking to?” She hopped in quickly, attempting to hang up the phone.

“Don’t!” I spoke calmly, letting her know I meant business.

“You ain’t seen me calling you for the last six hours, Samara!” Royale shouted from the background. The phone must have been on speaker. “We in the middle of a damn war and you pull this stunt. You don’t care about your damn life.”

Samara rolled her eyes and folded her arms as Royale scolded her like he was her damn daddy. I understood his anger. This wasn’t the time for no damn impromptu road trip.

“What were you thinking, Samara?” I questioned.

“Demetrius needs to heal not run our father’s stupid cartel. Y’all weren’t listening.”

“That’s not yo’ decision to make, though,” I said.

“Last time I checked, I was your wife.”

“Oh, now you my wife? Last time I checked you didn’t want that title, Samara.”

She didn’t say anything else... Just sat there rolling her eyes. I wanted to chew her out, but I couldn’t bring myself to kick her while she was already down.

“Where was we going for real? Bristol City couldn’t have been your plan.”

“I don’t know.” She shrugged.

“How the hell you gon’ kidnap a nigga and not know where you taking me?”

“Fuck you!” She tossed up her middle finger.

“Nah, I’m good on that,” I teased her. I watched her roll her eyes from the rearview mirror as she exited the car to pump the gas. This damn girl was truly my heart and my fucking headache. I ain’t know what to do with her sometimes.

“We’re headed back now, Polo.” I turned my attention back to the conversation at hand. Samara’s little stunt had taken up enough valuable time. We needed to ship the women off to Mexico and get to work tracking down Grant.

“Hold that thought. Shit actually a little hectic here.”

“What you mean, nigga?”

“We found Grant dead, and word on the street is it was us who sent the hit in retaliation for you. On top of that, our shipment was hit. Everybody at the containment facility is gone,” Polo explained. My head spun. What the fuck was happening right now? My head throbbed as I tried to piece it all together. I came up dry. None of these rival gangs had the manpower or the resources to pull off such a move. The containment unit that was hit was hidden. Only members of the cartel knew about it. It had me thinking that this was somebody on the inside.

“It was an inside job.”

“We already know, but we can’t pinpoint who,” Polo said. “Ro closing the clinic for three weeks or until we can get this shit figured out. Samara had the right idea.”

“‘Cause I’m a genius. Where’s Aliza and Becca?” Samara climbed back into the car.

“We’re here!” they both called.

“Contessa too. We don’t want to risk it,” Polo confirmed.

“Aye, add Fabian to this call. We need to all be on the same page.”

The line grew silent, and Samara dropped her head. I could feel it before anything was even said.

“He gone, ain’t he?” I questioned.

“Yeah, there was too much bleeding on his brain, bruh. I’m sorry,” Polo informed me.

My chest felt like a thousand big booty bitches sat on it. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't process what he was saying.

"Why y'all ain't tell me!" I slammed my hand against the car door. "Fuck! Why y'all ain't tell me!"

"We wanted you to get out of the hospital first, bruh. I know this one is hard." Polo tried to comfort me. He was right. This one was hard. I was the reason Fabian was over here. I'd convinced him to come to the States. I'd involved him in this fucked up ass cartel shit, and now he was gone. I didn't cry often. I could count that shit on one hand, but this was heavy. I could feel the tears rolling down my face.

"The plan is to lay low until we find out who the fuck sent the hit. Leave the country if need be." Polo's voice echoed through the car. Business didn't stop 'cause a nigga was mourning. This was how this cartel shit went.

"Let the streets think I'm dead." I used my shirt to catch the tears that had fallen for Fabian.

"That's smart. It'll expose whoever the fuck thinks they got one up on us," Royale stated.

"Exactly."

"Where y'all gon' go, nigga?" Polo questioned.

"I gotta do this shit right. I need to deliver the news about Fabian to Gran and Pop in person."

"You going to Haiti? How you gon' get there? You can't use the private plane," Polo questioned.

“We almost to Bristol City. You still talk to that girl who works for TSA?”

I referenced Polo’s on-again, off-again situationship. Tika was as ratchet as they came, and she wasn’t afraid to break the law. We’d used her before to make fake boarding passes for runners. If anyone could help us get to Haiti undetected, it was her.

“I haven’t, but I guess I have to. You know where to meet her?”

“Of course.” I nodded my head. We didn’t know who we could trust right now but going through Tika was worth the shot.

“We use nothing but burner phones from here on out. We don’t know if our shit is tapped. Hit us up on this number when y’all get to Haiti,” Polo stated.

“And take care of my sister, nigga!” Royal shouted in the background.

“It’s me, Ro. You already know I got her.” The call disconnected, and Samara pulled out of the gas station parking lot.

“Get back on the highway,” I directed Samara. “We need to leave the country ASAP.”

“Um... Okay, just tell me where to go.” I stared at her in the mirror. Our eyes locked briefly. I was expecting a rebuttal. Some smart mouth ass statement. I wasn’t expecting her to go along with it so easily.

“What?” she questioned, noticing how I was eyeing her.

“Nothing, how you feel about meeting the rest of my family?”



S amara

I pulled the rental car we'd gotten from the airport in front of an interesting looking blue house that sat alone at the end of a dirt road. When Demetrius said we were going to his great-grandmother's house in Haiti to lay low, this was not at all what I pictured. I thought it wouldn't be too different from Miami, but it looked like we'd arrived at someone's farmhouse in Mississippi. My head swiveled all around, taking in my surroundings. Everything was vibrant but still southern and rustic. The exotic flowers and swaying palm trees gave the only inkling that we were on an island thousands of miles away from home. It was crazy how quickly our lives had changed. One minute, I was crying over Demetrius signing the divorce papers, and now, I was in Haiti with him, preparing to meet the family he barely spoke of.

"I can go knock on the door and see if someone can come help you inside." I stared out the window. We couldn't sit out here forever.

"Nah," he said as he stared at the floor. The heaviness of the reason we were here was taking a toll on him, and I understood why. The London Cartel was under attack. He was injured, and his cousin was dead. His life was spiraling out of control. The entire flight over here he was silent. Deep in thought, he was probably trying to figure out his next move. I didn't know how to support him right now. I didn't know if he wanted me to. I just stayed quiet, rubbed his back, and tended to his wound.

"Are you at least ready to go inside?" I questioned. It had been days since I'd showered, and I was eager to get out of this pajama set and comb my hair.

“Yeah,” he replied.

I exited the car, grabbing his crutches from the back seat. It was too soon after surgery for him to be trying to walk but arguing with him about it would be pointless. He was still going to do what he wanted to do. I figured once he stood and that pain shot through his abdomen, he would be singing a different tune. Demetrius opened the passenger-side door and swung his feet out as I propped both crutches on the side of his body.

“Try to stand, but move slowly,” I instructed as he stood up.

“Aww, fuck!” He grunted in pain as he steadied himself.

“Demetrius. You shouldn’t be doing this. You can bust a stitch.”

“Good thing you’re a nurse, huh?” his smart mouth ass replied.

“A nurse not a doctor.”

“Close enough, now move so I can walk,” he demanded. My skin crawled with irritation as I wished he would go back to being silent. I moved to the side to support his back as he took a few steps toward the door, both of our eyes on the ground being sure he didn’t miss a step. Neither of us saw the front of the home open.

“My God!” a woman’s voice cried, making us both pop our heads up quickly.

“It’s me, Gran! Demetrius!”

“I know who you are, boy,” she replied. I stared at his grandmother. She wore a head scarf and donned a floral night gown as she stood on the porch with her hand over her mouth. Her eyes were bright with warmth. I took in her face and every wrinkle told a

story of wisdom. I was enamored by her, wanting to know more.

“Demetrius! Mwen pa ka kwe.” She spoke what I assumed to be Creole and her Haitian accent was beautiful.

“Se mwen ki kwe li,” Demetrius replied back. I didn’t even know he was fluent in Creole. I’d never heard him speak in full-blown sentences. Demetrius had grown up in America all his life. I’d always known he was Haitian on his father’s side, but Demetrius didn’t really embrace the culture. I stared at him in awe as he spoke with his grandma. His accent was actually a little sexy.

“Jean Pierre, Claude. Go get that old wheelchair. Prese, prese!” She turned and called in the house before coming down the stairs and approaching us.

“Oh my God! What you doing here, boy? What has happened to you?” She turned to look at me. “And who is this beautiful girl?”

I threw my hand up to wave but was completely thrown off by Demetrius’s words.

“This is my ex-wife, Samara. The one I told you about. Samara, this is my grandma, Esther Baptiste. Everybody calls her Gran.” My head cocked to the side at his introduction as I embarrassedly lowered my hand. Our dynamic had been weird, but introducing me as his ex-wife was a new level of petty for even him. He could have just said friend or something.

“Royale’s sister? The picture Fabian showed me doesn’t do you any justice. You’re more beautiful in person.” She wrapped her arms around me and hugged me warmly before releasing me.

“Nobody can humble you like a Haitian grandmother.” Demetrius smirked. Besides the fifty curse words I wanted to scream at him, I had nothing to say.

“Why you divorce my Meechie?” she questioned. “What you do, boy? Is it the hair?”

“It’s definitely the hair.” I flicked one of his dreads. Now it was my turn to laugh.

“I told you to cut that mess, boy. You cut or I cut it for you. This a nice girl. She want a nice-looking guy. Now you got Fabian wearing this mess too.”

Demetrius’s facial expression and demeanor changed at the mention of Fabian. Gran must have sensed it because she took his face in her hands. She studied him for a bit.

“You’re in trouble, aren’t you, boy?”

“I messed up, Gran! I messed up.” I knew he was referring to Fabian. He was holding so much guilt for his death.

“I see it in your eyes.” She stared at him, her facial expression slowly mimicking his.

“Fabian’s —”

“Shh!” She put her pointer finger up to his mouth. “Let’s get inside. Get you and Samara settled. I’m cooking breakfast. Then we’ll talk.” As if on cue, the screen door echoed, and I looked up to see two men who favored Demetrius come running out of the house. One appeared to be older, around the age of Gran, and the other looked to be a teenager.

“Zoe!” The older man shouted a Haitian term I’d heard before. “Look what the cat dragged in.” He stopped at the door and narrowed his eyes at Demetrius.

“You’re all banged up, ain’t you, boy?”

“You let this beautiful woman kick yo’ ass?” the younger man said as he came down

the stairs carrying an old wheelchair.

I watched Demetrius's mood change as the corners of his mouth turned up, and he gave him a handshake and brotherly hug. This had to be bittersweet for him. He was happy to see his family but saddened by the news he had to share.

"It's good to see y'all too. This is my is my cousin Claude, and that old man up there is my grandpa, Jean Luke. Call him Grandpapa."

I put my hand up again to wave. I wasn't usually shy, but I'd never met anyone's grandparents before.

"Is this your wife, Meech?" Claude approached us.

"Ex-wife," Demetrius said again. He was really testing my patience now.

"Actually, we are still married. I never got to turn in the papers." I rolled my eyes as I stomped away from him. In this moment, his stupid ass could fall over for all I care.

"She gon' beat yo' ass again when y'all alone." Claude snickered while he helped him into the wheelchair.

"Sure is. Push yo' ass right in the tub, Charles." I referenced a famous scene from a popular movie as I attempted to make my way up the front porch.

"We still married?" I felt my body being brought back into Demetrius's presence. He turned me to face him, and my entire body heated up with embarrassment. Did I just get snatched up by a broken-leg nigga on crutches?

"Duh, I was looking at the papers for the first time when you got hurt," I replied. His eyes narrowed in on me as he held me in place. We stayed there for a moment, just

staring at each other. I couldn't read him. I had no clue what was going through his head. I barely knew what was going through mine.

"How about we get you two settled? You look jetlagged." Gran forced her way into the small space between us. "You are staying here, right?"

I turned to look at Demetrius. I thought we might stay at a hotel or resort, but I didn't know about staying with his family.

"Nah, we were going to get a room up at the resort," he replied.

"Nonsense! We have plenty of room." Demetrius's Grandpapa shouted from where he stood on the porch. I stared at the older version of Demetrius. He was a few inches shorter than Demetrius and you could tell old age was taking a toll on his muscular build.

"I was just about to cook breakfast. Samara can stay in the sunroom, and you can stay with Claude," Gran stated.

"If we must stay, I'll stay with my wife in the sunroom," Demetrius said.

"Ooohweee!" Everyone erupted.

"This is better than my soap operas," Gran said, making me giggle as I turned to move up the stairs.

"You all don't have any bags?" Claude questioned.

"No, just the clothes on our back," I blurted without thinking. I immediately glanced at Demetrius. I wasn't supposed to mention anything about our situation to them. He didn't want to stress them out. His grandparents had no idea what he did for a living.

“You come all this way with no bags?” Grandpapa questioned.

“No. They lost them at the airport,” Demetrius lied.

“See, now that’s why I don’t fly on these people’s planes. Damn high-priced death traps in the sky,” Gran mumbled. “We can go down to the market after breakfast. There are plenty of shops you all can get clothes from until yours arrive.”

“Perfect. Is there any way we can freshen up before breakfast? We’ve been traveling for days, and I need to change his bandages.”

“Sure, follow me, beautiful.” She strutted up the stairs. Grandpapa took her hand and kissed her cheek before opening the door and walking inside. I followed behind them, a small smirk on my face. Seeing them still have love and affection for each other at their age was beautiful.

As I stepped over the threshold of the home, the smell of home-cooked food and coffee filled my nose. An immediate comfort coated my body as I allowed my eyes to take it in. It was bigger than it appeared to be on the outside. I didn’t see any stairs, so I assumed it was one story. The furniture and everything looked older than me and that was the beauty of it. Everything seemed to have a place. It was quaint, cozy, and very clean.

“I have a few dresses that may fit you, and Claude has plenty of things for D.” Gran talked as she walked through the living room and down a long hallway showing me around the home.

“I know it’s not as nice as what you’re probably used to in America or no fancy resort, but it’s rich in love.” She turned to look at me, still holding her husband’s hand.

“It’s perfect. Beautiful. Thank you for allowing us to stay here,” I replied just as Demetrius was wheeled inside. I could hear him fussing at Claude that he was fine to walk, but Claude just kept pushing. Gran led us through the kitchen to the back of the house.

“This will be where you and Demetrius can sleep.” She opened the door to reveal a large, enclosed sunroom that reminded me of Royale’s greenhouse in Cuba. It was beautifully decorated with flowers. A queen-sized bed sat in the middle of the floor with two nice nightstands on each side.

“It looks good out here, Gran. When you convert this to a guest room?” Demetrius questioned.

“It’s been this way for a while now. You just haven’t been here in ages,” she replied, walking into the room.

“We’re preparing the house for our great-grandson. Between you, Claude, and Fabian, somebody has to be having a baby soon,” Grandpapa said. I glanced at Demetrius, whose face dropped again at the mention of Fabian. I knew he was waiting for the right time to break the news, but a part of me just wanted him to spit it out.

“Here, this looks like it’ll fit.” Gran handed me a bright-colored sundress she got out of the dresser that sat next to the door. “I’ve collected enough clothes over the years from family and friends stopping through that there should be plenty of clothes in here you can wear.”

“This is perfect. Thank you,” I replied.

“Did you see the bathroom when we walked up?” she questioned. I nodded my head. “There are towels in the bathroom closet. Soap and extra toothbrushes under the



sink.”

“Not too much hot water, we’ll run out,” Grandpapa added.

“Nou jwen li granmoun. We got it, old man,” Demetrius replied, speaking Haitian again.

“Breakfast will be ready in about an hour,” Gran said as she closed the door, leaving us alone.

“You can speak Haitian?” I blurted, still in awe that I didn’t know this about him.

“I can say some stuff, mainly greetings and shit. I’m not fluent,” he replied nonchalantly, hopping past me.

“I guess we can start with you. I need to check your incision.” I turned around to face Demetrius but was met with his hard body pushing into mine. I didn’t even know when he’d stood from the wheelchair.

“Let’s get you over to the bed.” I swallowed the lump in my throat, trying to calm my nerves.

“Nah, you go first. Go take care of you first. I can manage until you come back.” He grabbed the crutches that were on the side of him and made his way to the bed. I stared at him for a moment. I heard what he said, but I was used to caring for people. My patients came first, and right now he was my patient. Taking the backpack off my back I ravaged through it, looking for the things I needed. When I found them, I approached Demetrius where he sat on the end of the bed. He threw his hand up.

“Go take a shower, Samara. For real,” he demanded, making me stop in my tracks. His words seemed to register this time as I grabbed the dress Gran had handed me

and turned on my heels.

“I’m going. Don’t try to do too much,” I warned as I exited the room and headed toward the bathroom. It had been days since I showered or changed clothes. As I entered the bathroom, I marveled over the details of the décor. Everything matched the theme of dolphins. There were dolphin towels and shower curtains, as well as pictures on the walls. It fit the rest of the house perfectly and showed its age. Shutting the door, I turned on the water in the shower and undressed. Taking my hair out of the bun it was in, I let it fall to my shoulders and stepped into the shower. The water felt so good grazing over my body, and the weight of everything that had occurred lifted from my pores and washed away. The last thirty-six hours had been a lot.

I thought I was going to lose the man I loved. I’d run off with that same man only to be forced to go into hiding with him. The surgery center was closed, and everyone I loved was on the other side of the world, also hiding out. It was crazy and everything I hated about this cartel life. No matter how much I ran, it still found me and pulled me right back into the chaos, like a damn Showtime series. I couldn’t escape from it.

Then, there was my current situation with Demetrius. How was I supposed to sleep in the same room with this man and suppress my feelings? Did I even want to suppress my feelings? The water ran cold without warning, and I quickly jumped, turning the water off. I didn’t think I had been in that long, but I guess it’d been long enough. I stepped out of the tub and wrapped my body and hair in a towel. For every stress I’d just shed, it seemed I added a new one. Glancing at myself in the mirror, I took a few deep breaths before placing the dress over my head. It was a little small, but it hugged my body in all the right places and held everything in place, making up for the fact that I had no bra or panties. I took one last look in the mirror.

“You got this,” I whispered to myself as I exited the bathroom and made my way back down the hallway and through the kitchen.

“Just place your dirty clothes in the hamper. I’ll do laundry later,” Gran said as I walked past her.

“Okay, thank you,” I replied before pushing the door open and entering the room.

“I’m bac—” My words trailed off as I noticed Demetrius sleeping on the bed. Slowly, I crept into the room, getting the things I needed from the backpack. Changing his bandages would actually work better with him asleep. Kneeling in front of him, I started at his leg, removing his shoes. I examined his feet, checking to make sure he was getting good circulation in his toes. After noticing that everything was good, I moved his leg, propping it up under a pillow. Moving to sit on the bed, I worked to change the bandage on his abdomen. Slowly, I unbuttoned his pants and lifted his shirt so I could have enough working space.

“You didn’t ask my permission to sexually assault me.” Demetrius’s groggy voice invaded my ears. I turned to look at him.

“We’re married.” I flashed the ring I’d been wearing on my hand since the day I showed it to Monroe. “Besides, you were asleep, and I didn’t want to wake you,” I replied as I pulled the tape off the wrapping.

“Fuck!” He squirmed, causing my hands to slip.

“Be still. I know you not worried about this little tape.” I pulled the bandage, exposing his surgery wound. It was healing perfectly. A little bloody and swollen but that was normal. The tape would fall off on its own once the skin was healed.

“You are free to get in the shower, but it will be tricky with your broken leg. They did you a cast cover before you left the hospital,” I informed him as I ran alcohol down the wound site. It’d been more than twenty-four hours since the surgery. He didn’t respond, instead he just stared at me, making my body heat up under his gaze. I tried

to ignore him the best I could as I cleaned the wound, but it was hard.

“Thank you,” he finally said.

“It’s no problem, Demetrius.”

“But it is. Even with everything we had going on, you hopped right in and did what you had to do for a nigga.” He touched my hand.

“You don’t have to thank me, Demetrius. I was never about to let you die. No matter how fucked up our shit is,” I replied.

“Always jumping in to help, being selfless. The loyalty always been top tier.”

His words made me blush, and I found myself running my finger down the side of his wound, tracing it. The incision site ran right through the tattoo he had on his torso. It was a reminder of how I’d almost lost him. A reminder of how much I loved him.

“Born to be a nurse. What can I say, it’s in me not on me.” I shrugged.

“Still, I appreciate it. Even what you did. Kidnapping me from the hospital. It’s a lot to do for a nigga you don’t have feelings for.”

“Didn’t nobody kidnap you from the hospital. You were released,” I replied. “And I have feelings for you Demetrius. I never said I didn’t.”

“But you don’t love me.”

My eyes shot to his and back down at his chest. I’d fallen in his trap. I do love you. I admitted it to myself, but this was not the time to confess my love to Demetrius. We both were vulnerable. Both of our lives were being turned upside down, and I still

didn't know if I was ready for everything that came with that.

"Breakfast will be ready soon. We should get you in the shower." I tried to change the subject.

"The classic Samara deflect." He chuckled. "You can't deflect forever, baby, I'm inevitable."

"I'm not deflecting... I'm just trying to make sure you're okay. You haven't showered, and I don't want you to miss breakfast."

"Um huh," he said as silence fell over us. My finger continued tracing up and down his chest as I placed a clean bandage over his wound. Once I was done, I pulled down his shirt and went to roll back up his pants but was greeted by a bulge in his sweats.

"Yeah, you woke him up." The tone in his voice told me I was in trouble.

"I wasn't... trying..." I tried to jump up from the bed, but Demetrius used his arm to keep me in place.

"Come put that pussy on my face," he instructed like what he'd just requested wasn't completely left field. His hand tugged at my dress.

"Demetrius!" I called his name. "Stop playing. We haven't been on that type of time for a long time."

"Whose fault is that?" he said.

"You're hurt, and we shouldn't be doing anything remotely close to this and your grandma is right outside the door." I thought I was making all valid points, but the look on Demetrius's face told me he wasn't listening.

“Now, Samara! I’m hungry.” His voice was low and demanding, and I knew I couldn’t resist him. The cocky look on his face said it all. Rolling onto my knees, I shimmied out of my dress and crawled up to his handsome face.

“Naw, the other way.” He nodded his head in the direction of the bulge in his pants.

“No. I’m not lying across your stomach! You’re crazy,” I replied, realizing what he was insinuating. There was no way we could sixty-nine with him injured like this.

“Now, Samara!” he demanded again, and like a good fool I turned my body around so that I faced away from his head.

“Good girl!” He smacked my ass as I threw my leg over his head and mounted his face. I was met with the feel of his wet tongue on my clit as his hands snaked around my thighs and locked me in place.

“Ooh.” I threw my hands over my mouth to muffle my moans as his lips latched onto my clit. Pleasure immediately shot through my body as he slurped and sucked, making me his morning breakfast as he feasted. I rolled my hips across his face, feeding him more of me, chasing the feeling I’d been depriving myself of.

“Oh my God!” I bit into my hand as he sucked me into his mouth. His grandparents hearing us was not the first impression I wanted to make on them, even if I didn’t plan on being with their grandson.

“Tell me why you can’t admit you love me?” He lifted me just enough to speak. His voice was full of need. I couldn’t believe he wanted to talk about this right now. Instead of responding, I threw my body down, being sure not to put any of my weight on his stomach. I snaked his dick out of his pants and marveled over its beauty. It was the perfect girth and length, and the veins that ran through it made it look like a delicious chocolate snack.

“Tell me why you trust me with this pussy and not your heart?” he questioned before latching on to me once more and feeding my pussy his fingers. My head fell back for a second before I gathered myself and took his dick to the back of my throat.

“Fuck!” he moaned as I slid my mouth up and down on his dick. Everything he asked were valid fucking questions, but I couldn’t answer them. Maybe if I sucked him good enough, he would forget what he was asking. It was much easier to stuff my mouth with his penis than to confess the secret love I had locked away for him.

“Mm!” I lapped his dick with my tongue while moving my hands up and down his shaft.

“I won’t tell your secrets, baby, it’s just me and you.” His voice vibrated on my pussy sending me over the edge. “You feel that?”

“Yes!”

“Good! That’s our love! Stop denying us our love.”

My body quaked as I rolled my hips on his face and deep-throated his dick at the same time. Coming up for air, I screamed.

“Fuuuck! I’m cumming!” My legs trembled as he intensified his movements right before he lifted me from his face. Confusion set in and panic replaced the euphoric feeling that was coating my body.

“I’m sorry. Did I hurt you?”

“You deny me... I deny you, baby.” He sat me on the bed and leaned up without hesitation. So many words ran through my head as I stared at him like he’d lost his damn mind.

“Are you serious?”

He eyed me with a devilish smirk coating his face as he grabbed his crutches and pulled himself up from the bed before he stopped. Leaning down, he caught my lips. My mouth betrayed me and my lips parted, allowing his tongue to touch mine. He kissed me like this was the last we'd ever kiss again. As soon as it began, it ended. Demetrius pulled back with no words, just a shake of his head, his eyes burning a hole in my soul.

“When you ready to answer my questions, come holla at me. I'm going to shower. See you at breakfast.” He stood before hopping his crippled, petty ass out of the room.



Demetrius

“Don’t tell me you cooked all this for me, Gran.” I kissed my grandma on the cheek as I entered the dining area for breakfast.

“Don’t trip. I cooked it for Samara,” she replied. “We don’t get too many girlfriends around here.” She was setting the table and humming an old Haitian hymn I could never quite make out. It had been nearly a decade since I’d been here, and mostly everything still looked the same. It still gave me this strange sense of belonging.

“She’s my wife, Gran,” I corrected as I stared up at the mantelpiece and eyed my parents’ old, tarnished wedding picture. They looked so happy in it. Their eyes were so full of love and hope for their lives together. It was a very different contrast to how I saw them growing up. By the time Polo and I came, my father was a busy lieutenant in the cartel, and my mother was a full-time, stay-at-home, exhausted mother.

“You said she was your ex-wife. Why you say that?” She swatted a dish rag at me. I’d said that shit earlier just to get a reaction out of Samara. Even if Samara had turned the divorce papers in and our shit was final, in my eyes she would never be my ex-wife.

“It’s complicated, Gran.” I shrugged.

“Then uncomplicate it. You two having trouble?”

I stared at my grandmother. She didn't know how complicated Samara and I were. When I called to tell her I was married, I'd left out all that shit about it being fake. My grandparents didn't know anything about my profession. They thought I owned businesses just like they thought my father did before he died.

"I'm trying, Gran." I sighed. If I wasn't doing anything else, I was trying. Samara had some walls on her that were hard to tear through.

"Fabian says she's a nurse. Smart girl! That's what you need."

An instant pain shot through my chest. My cousin was gone due to a hit that was meant for me, and he wasn't coming back. That shit was heavy, and no time seemed like the right time to break that to my grandparents. Fabian was all they had left of my aunt, and now he, too, was gone.

"Gran, Fabian is..."

"Here taste this." She shoved a fork full of her famous cornmeal porridge in my mouth, making my words trail off. She was avoiding my bad news like she knew what it consisted of. I gave the porridge a good taste.

"That taste just like my mom's, Gran."

"Who do you think taught her? An American woman don't know how to make cornmeal porridge."

We shared a laugh before she turned to the doorway.

"Tan pou manje!" she yelled, announcing that it was time to eat. Grandpapa and Claude came running into the kitchen fast.

“I’ll go get Samara,” I announced as I turned on my crutches.

“Chita ou enfim tet ou. Sit yo’ cripple ass down. She’s already on the way,” Claude replied just as Samara entered the room. Her eyes immediately found mine and her lips turned up. If looks could kill, I would be as dead as a motherfucker. I watched as she strutted her pretty, thick ass to the other side of the table and sat down. I knew she was pissed about me stopping her orgasm, but hell, I’d stopped my nut too. It took everything in me to pull that Dyson vacuum cleaner that was Samara’s mouth up off my dick, but it was a sacrifice worth making.

Samara really thought she was gon’ keep benefiting from fucking a nigga and not accepting everything else that came with it. I didn’t chase women; they flocked to me, willing to give me any and everything that I wanted. But for the last six years I’d been running after Samara. I had my lil links on the side, but the more I slid up in Samara the less I wanted to mess around. I just wanted to openly love and cherish her for the rest of my life, even if I didn’t properly know how this love shit worked. I stared at her pretty ass from across the table as we all sat down to eat. She was trying not to look at me, but she kept looking up, stealing glances, showing all the feelings she thought she was doing such a good job tucking away.

“We have eggs and plantains, spaghetti and sausage, and my infamous cornmeal porridge,” Gran announced, mainly for Samara as she was the only non-Haitian at the table. Samara loved to try different types of foods, so I wasn’t worried about her not liking any of it.

“It all looks good, Gran. Thank you,” Samara replied.

“Let’s eat!” Grandpapa announced, and we all dug in without saying anything else. I took a few bites, but honestly, I ain’t have much of an appetite. My mind kept wandering to all the shit I had going on.

“D, I was thinking about moving to the States like Fabian. You think you can put me up until I get on my feet?” Claude questioned. The air sucked right out of my lungs. I glanced around the table at my grandmother. I couldn’t think of a better time than now to break this news to them. My eyes shot to Samara. She was staring at me, her chest heaving up and down. I felt her foot find mine under the table. It was a small gesture, but I appreciated it. She nodded and I took a deep breath.

“Fabian was in the car—”

“How do you like everything?” Gran interrupted. It was like she knew what I was about to say and didn’t want to hear it. I turned to her.

“We can’t avoid it anymore, Gran,” I commented. “Fabian was in the car when somebody slammed into us. He didn’t make it, that’s why I’m here.”

Silence blanketed the table, and all that could be heard was heavy breathing.

“I’m sorry that I had to come here under these circumstances.”

“Repeat that shit again,” Claude said. “Are you saying Fabian is gone? No way, I just talked to him two days ago.”

“He was pronounced dead at the hospital. Fabian had an intracerebral hemorrhage. The increased pressure in his skull was too much.” Samara spoke.

“My God!” Gran threw her hand over her mouth and tears flowed down her face. I’d seen a lot of death in my lifetime, some of those lives I’d taken, but nothing matched up to this moment right now. A nigga was truly hurting.

“Are you and your father determined to kill off this family!” Grandpapa yelled as he pounded on the table. His face was a stark difference from Gran’s. He didn’t have

any tears, only anger. I understood it. I was angry at me too.

“Fabian didn’t have much here dammit, but he was alive. He was alive and well and free of that gangster lifestyle you live!” he shouted. “You think we don’t know what you do? Who you are? Why you had to marry that girl? We know! You’re the face of the London Cartel!”

His words felt like somebody had snatched duct tape off a wound. My eyes bucked at the realization that they knew who I was. I didn’t know how they had found out, but people talked. I had employed many Haitian natives since I’d become Capo, anyone could have mentioned it to them.

“I didn’t know this was gon’ happen,” I managed to say.

“You take him to that America, make him join your gang. What did you think was gon’ happen?”

“That he was gon’ be able to make some money, provide for himself. Do something with his life!” I defended. “I’m not going to apologize for helping my family.”

“Helping? You sound like your father.” Disgust dripped from his words.

“Yes, helping. I did what I had to do to provide a better life for everybody. You all stay here because you want to. I bought you a bigger house, a better one.”

“We don’t want your drug money! This house, I provided for my family with hard work. I woke up every day and farmed the land. Legally! I didn’t have to destroy others to build up my own. I loved your father. He was my first-born son, but he wanted more than what we could provide. He wanted that American dream and did anything to get that ratchet, cursed money.”

I stared at my grandpa as he ranted. There was nobody in this world that could speak to me this way and survive, but this was my grandfather, and he was right. A part of being a man was learning how to listen. How to take criticism and own up to messes I had created. I needed to hear everything he was spitting at me just as much as he needed to get it off his chest. Samara reached across the table and grabbed my hand. Her support in this moment was everything, even if it was just her touch.

“Your precious lifestyle has taken your father. Your mother died with a broken heart seeing you and Polo go down the same path as him. Now Fabian is gone. What else will you take?”

“Jean Pierre!” Gran’s voice thundered, breaking the tension in the room. “That is enough!”

Grandpa looked at his wife before turning his attention back to me. “You think you can go through life, selling poison to families, tearing them apart with your drugs and your guns. You think because it gives you money and power you’re doing something good for your family! It’s the opposite. You think God is going to bless your house when it was built on sorrow? You are not helping anyone. You are a plague in your own community, amongst your own people. That is not success. Whatever you are running from is going to catch up to you, and you are not welcome to hide here.” He stood from the table and stormed off.

Sobs erupted from my grandmother and Claude as we all sat there processing what had just happened.

“I’m sorry about Fabian. I’m sorry you don’t agree with my lifestyle. I’m not proud of all my choices, but I made the best out of the life I was given. My father wasn’t perfect, he was very flawed, but he did what he had to do to survive. He taught me how to be a man. So as a man I sit here saying that I’m sorry. I’m grieving, too, and the people responsible for his death will suffer. Thank you for breakfast, Gran. We’re

leaving. I'll be in touch about funeral arrangements." I stood, steadying the crutches under my arms.

"You don't have to go!" Gran protested.

"I do," I replied as I began moving to the back room. Samara and I could stay at a hotel until it was safe to return to Miami. I wasn't down to stay anywhere I wasn't wanted.

"Thank you for breakfast." Samara stood. She quickly rounded the table and placed her hand on my back.

"I got you," she whispered as she placed her hand on my back and helped me walk to the guest room to gather our stuff.

S amara

I helped Demetrius walk into the hotel room at the resort we found just a few miles away from his grandparents' house. I was glad they weren't fully booked because we still didn't have any phones to set anything up online.

"This is beautiful." I ogled as we walked inside the two-bedroom suite. Demetrius didn't say anything as he hopped over to the bed. The entire ride he had been silent. I knew the things his grandfather had said were getting to him. How could it not? His grandfather had ripped into him so viciously that I wanted to say something in his defense. I couldn't, though, because while it was unwarranted, it was all true.

"Sit down and relax. I'll comb through this directory to see where we can get a cell phone." I lowered him to the bed and attempted to walk away, but softly, he wrapped his arms around my thighs and held me there.

"Everything he said was true. I didn't help Fabian. I got him killed. I... The cartel does more harm than good."

The look on his face was one I'd never seen him make before. He was broken and it pained me to see him like this. Running my hands through his hair, I gently took his head and lifted it up to look at me.

"I can't argue with you on that. You know how I feel about the cartel, but we can't change the decisions of the past, Demetrius. We can only change the ones we make in



the future. You were given this life, and you made the best of it.”

He looked up at me and leaned his head against my thighs.

“My father taught me how to shoot my first gun when I was six. He took me to my first shipment when I was eight. I never felt like I had a choice in this shit. I ain’t finish school like you and Ro. This gangster shit is the only thing I know. What am I supposed to do if I’m not a part of the cartel?”

“Find yourself. Find your greater purpose.” I held him closer. “You may even be able to find a nice girl and fall in...” My words trailed off as Demetrius leaned me down just enough so that his lips touched mine.

“I’ve already fallen in love with this lil feisty, thick shawty. She kind of perfect for a nigga.”

“I’m not perfect,” I mumbled.

“Sure you are. Sometimes I don’t even feel worthy of you.”

Tears swelled in my eyes hearing Demetrius place me up on this pedestal I didn’t feel worthy enough for, especially when I was just as messed up as him.

“My childhood was so fucked up that I have more trauma and daddy issues than I can deal with. I rush into things. I never ask for help and I self-sabotage my relationships. It’s so bad that I’ve gone so far as to lie about not being in love.” I didn’t know when I had started crying, but tears rolled down my cheeks. Demetrius squeezed my legs tighter as he lifted me into the air and lowered me on his lap, making me straddle him.

“The first step in healing is acknowledging that we both fucked up.” He placed a soft

peck on my lips.

“We’re halfway there then, huh?” I sniffled as we both shared a laugh. Something was shifting in us, in me, and I welcomed it.

“There’s so many things I would change if I could, Samara.”

“The good thing about life is that as long as you’re still here, you get to rewrite it.” I stared into his eyes. I was speaking more to myself than to him, but I think we both needed to hear it.

“Maybe I’ll do that,” he replied.

“Maybe you should start by asking me that question again.”

Demetrius looked at me. His eyebrows wrinkled and confusion coated his face. “Ask you what?”

I stared at him, allowing my eyes to speak every emotion that was running through my brain.

“Ask me again?” I repeated. His eyes told me he knew what I was talking about this time.

“Do you love me, Samara?”

“Yes, I love you so much.” After everything we’d been through in the past forty-eight hours, it seemed pointless to fight it anymore. If Demetrius was ever taken away from me, I wanted him to at least know I loved him. Demetrius’s face lit up like a child on Christmas morning, and a huge burden was released from my soul.

“I love you, too, baby girl.” Our lips collided again. This time I opened my mouth and welcomed the taste of his tongue.

“Make love to me.” I rolled my hips across his lap, trying to put out the fire that was rising between my thighs. His eyes dipped low as he gazed at me.

“Music to my ears.” He lifted me up slightly, and I took my hands and freed his dick from his shorts.

“Ask me again?” I whispered as he lowered me back down and inserted himself inside me.

“Do you love me?” His hand wrapped around my neck as the other assisted me in bouncing up and down on his dick.

“I love you, baby.”

“Say that shit again!”

“I love you! I love you!” I let out a pleasurable moan as we found our rhythm.

“I love yo’ ass, too, girl!” A collaborative moan escaped us as he continued to bounce me up and down in his lap hard and fast. Our bodies collided in a way they never had before, causing my pussy to leak my love down his dick.

“Ooh!” I moaned, our sex sounds making a beautiful soundtrack to our lovemaking.

“Tell me yo’ secrets, baby. They safe with me.” He tightened his hands around my neck as he leaned in and placed kisses on my lips. He was fucking me so good I would tell his ass anything he wanted to hear. I’d sing the five-dollar foot long jingle to his big dick ass if he asked me to.

“Fuck!” I threw my head back.

“Tell me yo’ secrets,” he repeated.

“I am terrified to commit to you. To love you!” I admitted.

“Tell me more.”

“I’m afraid you’ll leave. Afraid you’ll let me down.” I poured my heart out to him as I rode him into oblivion. He probably already knew this but admitting it to him and myself was so freeing.

“I’ll never leave you intentionally, baby girl.” He released my neck to grab the sides of my face, bringing me into a kiss. “You’re safe with me. Do you hear me, Samara? These niggas can try to kill me a million times over, but they’ll never take me from you.” He pushed his lips into mine again, and another moan escaped them.

“Ooh, oh it... feels... so good!” I stammered. His words pierced my heart and my pussy at the same time. We’d had sex countless amounts of times, but it never felt this good. I didn’t know if it was the fact we hadn’t had sex in months or the fact that all our feelings were finally out there in the open. Either way, Demetrius was so deep inside me, his dick was hitting every nerve ending in my body. I was on the verge of cumming.

“That’s right, baby! That’s our fucking love.” He grunted as I slammed down on his dick. My walls squeezed tight around him, attempting to drain him dry.

“This pussy is so wet and good, baby!” He moaned, making me rotate my hips even more. We should have probably been more cautious. It hadn’t been that long since he’d had surgery. The way he was pounding into me from the bottom said he didn’t give a damn about that incision.

“Fuck! Baby!”

My eyes rolled to the back of my head as he continued to drop me up and down on his dick. His hips rotated beneath me. He was stroking me into pure bliss. I could feel my insides contract around him, and I knew I was cumming.

“I-I love you, Demetrius!” I screamed, releasing my juices all over him.

“What’s my name?” He smacked my ass.

“Meechie! Meechie! Shit... fuck!” I threw my head back as I trembled in his arms.

“I love you too.” He grunted as he coated my insides with his semen. I didn’t know how I had hidden my feelings for this man for so long.

“Ain’t no divorce ever. You know that, right?” He pulled out of me and gently lifted me from his body.

“I know.”

“Good!” He climbed up into the bed and lay down next to me. My body wrapped around his instantly, and I rested my head on his chest.

“Tell me a secret?” I asked him the same question he’d been asking me. He pulled me in closer.

“Sometimes, I think about leaving the cartel life behind, but I don’t know what to do. I don’t feel good enough to be anybody else.”

I lifted off his chest just enough to see his eyes. I never knew he felt like that. I never knew he shared the same desire I did to be free of it all. Demetrius was a natural

leader. He exuded money, power, and respect. He showed no signs of slowing down. I wondered if this was an effect of almost losing his life.

“Is this new?” I questioned.

“Naw, if I’m being honest. I never wanted to be a Capo. I just went with it out of loyalty when Ro mentioned it.”

“Let’s never go back,” I blurted at his confession. He chuckled before placing a kiss on my forehead.

“Tempting, but unfortunately, we have to. Royale will hunt me down for kidnapping his little sister.”

“Actually, I kidnapped you.” I giggled.

“Is that right?”

“Um huh!” I nodded my head as a yawn escaped my lips.

“Get some rest, kidnapper. We need to get up and get those burner phones before it gets too late. We have to update Royale and Polo on our whereabouts before those niggas send the calvary searching for us.”

“Okay,” I replied as I snuggled into his arms, allowing sleep to find me.

“Wake up. I’m dialing Royale.” Demetrius’s thick voice shook me from my sleep. My eyes snapped open as they adjusted to the light in the room.

“Huh?” I narrowed my eyes on Demetrius. He was standing over me shirtless, propped up on one crutch, waving a cell phone in the air. When did he get a cell

phone? I sat up on the bed, still naked from our lovemaking session, confused about what was going on.

“Huh? How’d you—”

“Paid the bellhop to get them,” he answered before I could even finish asking. My eyebrows raised in suspicion. How the hell did he even get downstairs to talk to the bellhop?

“You’re doing too much. Please remember you are not a cartel boss over here. Don’t start bossing these people around trying to find minions and shit.” I shook my head.

“I’m a boss everywhere, baby.” He crawled into the bed next to me and positioned the phone so we could both see it. I peered down at the old model smartphone in his hand. He had an identical one in his other hand. They were a stark difference from the ones we’d left in Rebecca’s car back home. I would be surprised if it even had a video-calling feature.

“It’s ringing.” I leaned forward, pulling the cover up over my naked body. Even if this was just a call, I wanted to be presentable. It was my brother. Breathing echoed through the speakers, and I knew that the call had connected.

“Royale!” I spoke softly into the phone. I was nervous. Things with my brother were weird, and I wasn’t sure if they would ever be the same.

“Mara!” Royale’s voice rang out. I could hear the relief as he let out a sigh. “It’s them!” he shouted. It soothed me to know even in his anger, he was at least still worried about us.

“Thank goodness,” Monroe said in the background.

“Took y’all asses long enough. Tika said y’all flight left over sixteen hours ago.” That was Polo.

“A few hours more, and we were about to raise hell,” Royale added.

“It took us some time to get the phones. A nigga is cripple,” Demetrius explained as he pulled the covers and joined me underneath. I eyed him as he got comfortable next to me, pulling me into his body. The affection wasn’t new to me. This was our dynamic when we weren’t on bullshit. What was interesting was how quickly we seemed to find our rhythm, like nothing had transpired. Like he hadn’t put divorce papers in my door a few days ago.

“Y’all good? Y’all made it to Haiti? Y’all settled?” Ro fired off question after question.

“Yeah, we’re straight. What about y’all?” Demetrius responded.

“We’ve made it to Cuba. The new safe house not ready yet, so we’re staying at a place Aunt Vanessa recommended. Monroe is getting flashbacks of being out here, but I’m keeping her occupied,” Royale replied. My heart went out to Monroe. The last time she and Royale were in Cuba, my father sent a crazed man to kill her at the safe house he had built for Royale, now Royale was having another one built for them.

“Good, we’re all out of the way,” Demetrius reiterated. “Now we just stay low. Have y’all heard anything?”

“Nah, just speculation that you didn’t survive the crash. The news outlets added in that one, though. They reported one person dead in a car crash,” Royale stated.

“That’s perfect! Whoever did this shit gon’ have to show their cards in a minute. All



we have to do is enjoy our vacations and relax.”

“Enjoy our vacations?” Polo shouted. “Don’t forget your ass is a ghost. Don’t be frolicking all over Haiti. We don’t know where these niggas got eyes.”

“Don’t worry. Samara ain’t let my ass loose. Y’all just continue to put the poison in the water. The cartel is scrambling in the wake of my death. I want all shipments slowed down.”

I shook my head. No matter what I did, I couldn’t stop this man from working. Being a boss was in him, not on him, for real.

“Put a constant check on the cameras in Samara’s apartment. If they are trying to take over the cartel, as my wife and rightful heir, she might be the target now.”

My eyebrows narrowed at the thought of me being a target. Somebody trying to kill little old me was crazy.

“I’m not there, though.” I interjected.

“Yeah, but they don’t know that. They probably think you at home grieving or some shit. If somebody stops by your house, we may see who’s behind all this and get a jump on their ass.”

“Oh, that’s smart.” I nodded.

“I told you I was a boss, baby.” He kissed me on the forehead, and my body melted.

“Y’all motherfuckers gon’ wait another six years to tell me where the fuck y’all relationship stand. Y’all together or not?” Royale said into the phone as my eyes traveled to Demetrius. The tone in Royale’s voice said he was still in his feelings

about our marriage. I was sure had we not been caught in this predicament, he probably wouldn't even be talking to us.

"Gone get it out, bro. You're entitled to it." Demetrius spoke up. Him and Royale had been friends for so long, I hoped that this wouldn't tarnish that.

"I'm good. Y'all fucked up bullshit not that important right now," Royale replied.

"It is though. Let's air this shit out like men. Like best friends. I went behind yo' back and married Mara so I could take over the cartel for you. We saw it best not to tell you. That's it, that's my truth."

"I asked him to do it!" I rushed to add. "I just wanted you to live out yo' dreams."

The phone was silent for a minute. My nerves were bad as I waited for my brother to respond. Demetrius and I were finally going to happen, and it would mean so much to me if we had his support.

"Y'all fucking around on the low is one thing but getting married behind my back is another thing. Y'all sat in my motherfucking face and lied. Y'all lied for six fucking years! That's some unloyal ass shit coming from two people I would give my life for."

I could feel Demetrius's body stiffen as Royale went in on both of us. He had the same look on his face he'd had the day I presented him with the arranged marriage. We both sat there, allowing Royale to vent. He deserved to have some time to process what he was feeling.

"Meechie, that's my little sister! You, of all people, knew damn well she was off-limits. You knew damn well I ain't want her involved in this cartel shit."

“It was never supposed to be anything other than on paper. I ain’t about to apologize for falling in love with Mara, bro. I can’t. I love the fuck out of her, and we gon’ be together.” He wrapped his hand in mine before continuing. “I ain’t about to apologize for doing what I thought was best for all us at the time. What I will apologize for is keeping the shit from you for so long. That was some bitch shit, and I can’t do anything but own up to it.”

Another round of silence fell over the phone. I didn’t know what Royale was going to say. I didn’t even know if I could live with knowing I’d broken up their friendship.

“I’m just pissed I ain’t get to be a flower boy in my only brother’s wedding.” Polo broke the awkward silence. “I was gon’ let that shit rain!” he joked. His ass could never be serious, but he was the humor we needed at the moment.

“I’m saying. I was gon’ be fly as fuck in a tux.” The tone in Royale’s voice had me exhaling the breath I’d been holding.

“Y’all niggas might still got y’all chance,” Demetrius countered.

“On some real shit, though, just treat my sister right, Meechie. You know what she deserves. You know what she needs.”

“I know, man. Trust me, I got her,” Demetrius assured Royale.

“And, Samara, stop playing those silly ass games. Meechie not Pops. Write those issues down in a diary and heal before you miss out on a good man.”

My eyes grew big, and I threw my hand to my chest.

“I feel targeted!” I shouted.

“Good, you should,” Royale replied. Demetrius laughed as he pulled me close to him.

“Not too much on my wife, boy.” He kissed my cheek. I couldn’t believe we were finally free of the secret that had controlled our lives for so long. It felt good. I only hoped that Demetrius wouldn’t let me down. The conversation switched gears to Fabian’s funeral arrangements, and I could feel Demetrius’s emotions with every detail. His guilt was radiating off his skin.

“I’ll go by Grandma’s and get shit set up on this end,” Demetrius offered. “Can y’all handle getting his body shipped as discreetly as possible?”

“I’m on it. I know exactly who to go to,” Polo stated.

“Hopefully, we can get this shit figured out by the funeral so Fabian can rest in peace.”

“Agreed.” We all replied at the same time.

“Fabian deserved that much,” I whispered.

“Yeah, he do,” Demetrius replied. His voice was just above a whisper.

“Fabian’s death is hard on all of us. We gon’ get them motherfuckers, though,” Polo said.

“Oh, I know. Ain’t no other way. Y’all keep me posted on anything y’all hear,” Demetrius ordered.

“We got you.” The phone disconnected, and Demetrius immediately pulled me on top of him. For an injured man, he was still manhandling the fuck out of me. The nurse in me was concerned, but the other side of me was so fucking turned on.

“What are you doing?”

His hand snaking up my back made me giggle.

“Putting you back on this dick. I want to hear more of your secrets.” He kissed my neck.

“Only if you tell me yours.” I moaned as he slid inside me.

“We’re each other’s diaries, baby.” He placed his lips on mine, and we let our souls spill their guts to each other.

10

Demetrius

The gravel on the old dirt road made a crunching sound as I pulled up to my grandparents' house. If I were a prideful man, I wouldn't be there, not after that shit my grandpapa had said, but this wasn't about me; this was about Fabian. I needed to get his funeral arrangements mapped out.

Exiting the car, I grabbed my crutches and propped myself up. It was getting easier for me to move around on these things. If Samara knew I'd driven over here, though, she'd be pissed. That's exactly why I'd dug in her guts all night and left her ass asleep at the resort. She would have wanted to take me if I told her this was where I wanted to go. I appreciated her support, but I had to do this alone.

I walked slowly toward my grandparents' front door and surveyed their property. On both sides of their home was land that once was a thriving coffee bean farm. Hurricane Gordon had come through right before I was born and destroyed it. My grandparents were able to rebuild their home, but they could never recover from the loss of the farm. The entire Haitian coffee industry had suffered.

"Ti gason tet di!" I heard my grandpapa yell. "You don't listen just like yo' damn daddy either!" He was standing in the distance, tending to the small piece of the coffee bean field he could sustain.

"I am hardheaded, huh," I shrugged. "I need to discuss Fabian's funeral arrangements, and my father taught me to take all my losses like a man. I wonder

where he got that from.” I shot back as I switched gears and headed toward where he was working in the field.

“He ain’t get that shit from me,” he grumbled. His Haitian accent was dripping with sarcasm, making me smirk as I neared him.

“You still fooling around with these old coffee bean plants?” I made small talk as he whacked away at the coffee bean tree. Every morning, my grandfather would come out here and gather coffee bean seeds so that my grandmother could make fresh coffee.

“These old coffee bean plants once were the staple of this family. Bought this house you tried to replace,” he said. A tinge of guilt shot through me.

“You know I ain’t mean no harm, Grandpapa. Just wanted to give y’all something nice. Do something that showed y’all I was successful. I ain’t mean it like that.”

He put down the axe and turned to look at me.

“I know, son. You know the problem with you younger folk is you think that money equates to success and happiness. You value things for how expensive they are. The more expensive, the better the quality.” He approached me, touching my shoulder. “You forget that the beauty is in the journey. Success is more about defining who you are and what is important to you. It’s not about how much money you make, but your impact on people’s lives.”

I listened as he spoke, appreciating his wisdom. This kind of wisdom only came from living life. His words contradicted everything my father had instilled in me as a child. To my father, success was money and power. He ran the London Cartel alongside Royale’s father with fear. He didn’t care whose life he ruined to get what he wanted. It was a flawed way of thinking, but one I had inherited like a trophy.

“I’ve always only done what I knew. What my father taught me. He taught me that money equals power and respect. He preached that once I had those, success would come. The only men around me growing up were gangsters. The only men I’d ever seen with money and status who weren’t tossing a ball were gangsters. I’m a big nigga. My father didn’t put me in sports growing up. He took me to cocaine farms, fed me gangster music, and taught me how to use a gun.”

My grandpapa looked up at me with a solemn expression etched on his face.

“Your father wanted everything fast. He went to America after the hurricane. Things were so bad here, and he wanted to chase the American dream. What he found once he got there was what most people of color do. The American dream wasn’t designed for people who look like you and me. He couldn’t find a job that made him decent money. I don’t know how he became a cartel member, but it changed him.”

I had never heard these things about my father before, so I stood there and listened. Took it all in like a sponge as I slowly started helping my grandpapa pluck the coffee cherries from the trees.

“Your father equated success with what he could do financially. He didn’t realize that what he had right here was the seeds of success.” Grandpapa grabbed a few coffee cherries from the tree and held them up. “This is nice. My home is nice. My life is nice. Not because I have money but because I have purpose. My family. My wife. That is my purpose. That is where I find my success.”

His voice trembled, and I stared at the coffee cherries as he cracked them open with his bare hands revealing the coffee bean inside. The word purpose rang out on repeat in my head. I didn’t know what my purpose was, then Samara crossed my mind. I never felt like anything other than a gangster until we got involved. She gave me purpose. She was my purpose. A silence fell over us, and we worked in unison, filling the bucket with ripe cherries. It made me think of those times Fabian told me about



doing the exact same thing when he lived with our grandparents.

“You were right. It’s my fault Fabian is gone. I could have given him a legitimate job. I could have given him money to start a business, but I made him my security. I made him pledge to put my life before his own, and that’s exactly what happened.”

“We can’t change the decisions of our past, but we can use the lessons learned from those decisions to write a better future,” he said as he embraced me. “I’m sorry for placing that burden of guilt on yo’ spirit. Grief clouded my judgment. I ain’t know how to handle the pain. Hearing of Fabian’s death reminded me of the day I found out your father had been killed.”

His apology had me thinking so much. I couldn’t do anything but nod in understanding. It felt like the burdens of the past were releasing both of us. Maybe forgiveness was the key to healing. I had to forgive my father for the choices he’d made and the life he’d presented to me. I had to forgive myself for the lives I’d negatively impacted being a part of the cartel. I had to forgive myself for Fabian’s death. I stared at the field, feeling everything I’d bottled up.

“Here, meet me at the grinder. Your grandmother will come out here looking for her coffee beans any second.” He handed me a basket full of ripe coffee cherries.

“Okay.” I steadied the basket in one hand, still gripping my crutches.

“There you go. You look just like an Augustine man now,” he commented as I made my way over to the pulper.

“This is where the magic happens.” He pointed to the small gray machine. “This is where the cherries get turned into coffee beans. Dump them.”

I steadied myself on the crutches and poured the seeds into the pulper. I watched as

the cherries went in and the coffee beans came out on the other side, and a peaceful feeling swept over me. The word purpose echoed through my head again, and I felt a sense of pride sweep over me.

“Let’s get these beans in the house. I smell breakfast,” he said as he leaned down and grabbed the bucket. I nodded my head and followed behind him.

“Look who I found,” Grandpapa announced as we entered the home. My grandmother rounded the corner into the living room. Her face lit up when she saw me, and relief washed over her face.

“Boy!” she shouted, running over and wrapping me in a warm embrace.

“I came to discuss Fabian’s funeral arrangements,” I said.

“Where’s Samara?” She pulled back, staring a hole in my face.

“At the resort. I drove—”

I wasn’t able to get my words out well before she took her hand and slapped me across the head.

“You not supposed to be driving!” she fussed.

“I know, Gran. I just wanted to come do this on my own.” I turned to Grandpapa. “I ain’t want her to get kicked out of here twice.” We all shared a laugh as I lifted the basket of coffee beans. “Oh, and I have these.”

“You’ve been in the field?” she questioned.

“Yeah, Grandpapa showed me the Augustine way.” I shrugged. I could see pure joy

on her face at what I'd said.

“Come sit. I'm almost done cooking. We can discuss the arrangements over breakfast. Is that okay?”

“Of course.” I followed her into the kitchen as she started talking about my family's history with coffee beans.

S amara

As I paced the floor of our hotel room, my worry and frustration grew with every minute that passed. Demetrius had been gone since before I'd woken up, and I'd been up for three hours now. The rental car was not parked outside, so I knew he was driving, and that made me livid because his hardheaded ass knew he shouldn't be driving with a cast on his leg. I'd probably called him a thousand times, and each one had gone straight to voicemail. So many worst-case scenarios played in my head. I was dialing him again when I heard the doorknob twisting.

I moved quickly to the front door of our suite. A mixture of anger and relief swept over me as soon as his ass came into view.

"Where the hell have you been?" I shouted before he could even get in the door. "And why the hell were you driving?"

"I got breakfast!" He held up a large Tupperware container. "Gran sent this for you."

A slight smirk appeared on his face. Demetrius knew the way to get rid of my attitude was through dick or food. He steadied himself on his crutches and entered the room. My annoyance softened as he handed me the container. Knowing that he'd only gone to his grandparents' house made me feel a little better, but I was still pissed. He was lucky I was hungry.

"You went to your grandparents?" I questioned. "How did that go?" I took the

container from his hand, walked to the kitchen counter, and sat on the bar stool. Demetrius was right behind me, taking a seat.

“It was cool. Grandpapa and I had a good talk. We got Fabian’s arrangements in order.”

“When are they?” I questioned.

“Two weeks. We got two weeks to wrap all this shit up before then.”

“We will,” I reassured him as I stuffed a fried plantain in my mouth. Gran could cook her ass off. I loved her traditional Haitian cooking. Demetrius watched me as I ate. I couldn’t help but notice the look on his face as he watched me.

“What?” I stopped chewing and glanced up at him. He was up to something.

“Just hurry and eat. I want you to get dressed. I want to take you somewhere,” he said. My eyes doubled in size, and my curiosity piqued.

“I hope it’s going to get some clothes. Did you forget we don’t have much—”

My words trailed off as a knock sounded on the door. My eyes darted to Demetrius.

“Go get the door.” The look in his eyes told me something weird was going on. Side-eyeing him, I slid off of the bar stool and headed toward the door. I checked the peephole, but there was nothing there.

“There’s nobody here,” I replied.

“Just open the door, hardheaded ass girl,” he demanded. Doing what I was told, I opened the door. I saw nothing at first, but several shopping bags sat there when I

looked down at the foot of the door.

“What’s all this? ” I looked between Demetrius and the front door.

“You needed clothes, so I made a quick stop and got you some.”

He said it like it was nothing, like he wasn’t a few days removed from surgery. I stared at the bags in complete disbelief. Demetrius had always spoiled me. I never went without anything I wanted, but the thoughtfulness behind pulling this off in another country was blowing my mind.

“Thank you,” I said as I pulled all the bags into the room. I recognized several designer bags, and the others were plain bags with words written on them I couldn’t make out. They were filled with men’s clothes, and I knew it must have been for Demetrius. He didn’t have any clothes either, so it made sense he’d cop a few items for himself too.

“It’s a few options you can do today. I recommend you dress comfortably. We’ll be doing a lot of moving.”

“Moving?” I repeated. “Where are we going?”

“On our first official date. Since you’re my woman now, it’s only right.”

It was crazy because we’d been on several trips, had been sleeping together for a while now, and had never been on an official date. It wasn’t because he hadn’t asked.

“Oh, I’m your woman now?” I made my way over to him and stood in between his legs.

“Been my girl, you were just a little delusional.”

“I was delusional?” I questioned.

“Hell yeah!” He pulled me in closer to his body as we both shared a laugh.

“I’m down for a date, but you haven’t asked me out on a date,” I teased. Demetrius stared at me like I’d grown two heads.

“I’ve asked your stubborn ass a thousand times. You better take one of those,” he said, causing me to playfully hit his arm.

“Stop playing!” I shouted.

“Girl, ain’t nobody play—”

I narrowed my eyes at him, letting him know I meant business.

“Okay, okay.” He threw his hands up in surrender before grabbing my hand and staring into my eyes. “Uh, I feel kind of silly doing this, but uh, this your husband, you know, the one you have been married to for the past six years.”

I tried to pull away from him, but he held me in place. I don’t know why I thought he was about to be serious.

“You know niggas was out here tripping over you, so I had to put my gun to they head. You know, ’cause I think you’re kind of sweet.” He burst into laughter, and I rolled my eyes as I realized he was remixing Alicia Keys’s song.

“You know what, never mind.” I broke away from him, but he softly grabbed my arm.

“Would you make me the happiest simping ass nigga on this island and go out on a

date with me?" he asked. It was rough and sweet, the two things I loved about Demetrius.

"That is more like it. Yes, I would love to," I replied.

"Go and get ready for me. Don't wear any panties. I might want to touch that pretty pussy while we're out."

I giggled as I grabbed all my bags off the floor and strutted off to get ready. Demetrius and I were finally going on a date, and that was the only thing that seemed to matter.

"We're here. You can stop pouting." Demetrius pointed as he pulled the car into a long, curved driveway. I stared out the window, still pissed that he'd insisted on driving. Talking about he couldn't have me driving us to our first date. I stared out the window, trying to make out where we were, but all I could see was a huge stone house with movers going in and out. A large truck that read Habitat House was a few cars up from where we'd parked. I was completely baffled as to what the hell was going on. This couldn't be the location of our date.

"Where are we?"

"Our date," he confirmed. I stared at all the people walking around the house.

"Ain't we supposed to be laying low?" I reminded him, counting the amount of people outside the house. This is not us laying low.

"We are, don't worry." Demetrius exited the car and walked around to let me out, crutches and all.

"It's here? This place looks under construction." I climbed out of the car.



“That’s the date. We’re volunteering with Habitat House. You’re always talking about doing one of those mission trips in a foreign country and giving back. I figured we could help while we’re here.”

I turned to Demetrius. “To think I thought we were just going to go on a picnic.”

“You should have known I wasn’t about to do no regular nigga shit.” He balanced himself, moving both crutches to one side so he could hold my hand while we walked up the driveway and onto a stone path.

“These houses go to needy families, right?” I questioned.

“Yeah, a lot of Haiti is still recovering from Hurricane Matthew from nearly ten years ago. Many homes and communities were lost, and much of the aide has moved on.”

I listened to him as we walked into the home’s entrance. Nothing could have prepared me for how beautiful it was on the inside. I stared down at the marble floors. The high ceilings gave it a spacious feel, and the windows overlooked the ocean. It looked like the perfect vacation home. I became jittery inside, thinking that I was going to play a role in gifting such a beautiful home to a less fortunate family.

“This house is beautiful.”

“Yeah, it is.” Demetrius looked around, taking in the home.

“Oh, hello!” A voice I didn’t recognize greeted us from the top of the stairs. My eyes traveled to the dark-skinned stranger as he walked down the stairs and in our direction.

“I’m Ramik. I’m the building manager for Habitat House. Thank you for coming to help us today,” he said.

“Thank you for having us and accommodating my condition. My wife loves to help, and I’ve donated money to your organization for years. Just let us know what we will be doing—not too much. As you can see, I’m a little banged up.”

I stared at Demetrius as he talked. I loved when he put his professional voice on. It made him sound more like a wealthy business executive and less like a street nigga.

“As you can see, the build of this home is finished. We fully furnish all our habitat homes, which you’ll be helping with today. Picking out items and decorating the home.”

My face lit up. I loved decorating and doing it while also giving back made this date perfect.

“Sounds good. Where do we start?” I clapped my hands together, eager to get to work.

“We’ll start in the kitchen. Follow me.” Ramik took off toward the kitchen and we followed behind him, hand in hand.

“This is perfect,” I whispered. “How did you know I would like something like this?”

“Because I know you. You’re selfless. You like helping people, which is why you became a nurse.”

My smile widened as I leaned up to kiss him. I felt silly for not allowing this man to take me out for so long.

“Everything that is needed for the kitchen is in those boxes. All you have to do is unpack them and put them where they belong,” Ramik explained. That sounded simple enough.

“Can you tell me a little about the family? It will help me decorate,” I inquired.

“All I know is that they are a married couple looking to start a family soon. They lost everything and need a fresh start.”

“That’s all I need. Thank you.” My heart swelled as I began moving around the kitchen. It was spacious and sleek, with marble countertops and stainless appliances that gave it a modern feel. If I were going to dream of a kitchen, this would be it.

“Perfect, I’ll leave you to it. Come find me if you have questions.” With that, he left the kitchen and disappeared behind a wall. I got to work immediately, opening all the boxes and laying them across the floor to see their contents.

“Hand me a few of those boxes as well. I can unpack them from here.” Demetrius jumped on the counter and took a seat. I did what he instructed and placed a few boxes on the counter.

“Maybe we should start with the stuff we have to build.” I noticed one box held the contents of a kitchen table.

“I just work here, baby. Tell me what to do.” Demetrius shrugged. I smiled as I stared up at him. I’d finally stripped away all my fears of dating Demetrius, and it was like I was finally seeing him for who he truly was for the first time. He had so many layers, and I loved all of them.

“You’re amazing. You know that?” I started taking the pieces of the table out of the box.

“I’ve been told.” He pressed his body against my back and softly kissed my neck. I didn’t know he had gotten behind me so fast. We stood there for a moment. The room filled with warmth, and I found myself caught up in imagining what things would be

like if we actually lived together.

“Let’s get to work on this kitchen table. You can work from the counter.” I moved out of his space. My body was heating, and the last thing I needed was to have my pussy juice dripping on these people’s kitchen floor and counter before they could do it themselves.

“Sound good.” He hopped back over to the counter, and we got to work.

Demetrius

“They are going to love this bed!” Samara fluffed the last pillow in the main bedroom. I smiled, looking at her in action. I’d been in a trance all day, watching her move her fine ass around our home, decorating it. I thought she would have caught on to what I was doing by now, but she really did not know, and that made all the trouble I’d gone through to pull this shit off worth it.

“That was the last room on our list. I think we did good.” I stood from the chair I was sitting in. “You ready to find Ramik so we can get out of here and grab something to eat?”

“Yes! I’m starved.” She moved toward me, a huge smile on her face, letting me know I had knocked this day out of the park, and it would only get better.

“I already know. Come on. I want to feed you before you get hangry.” I nodded my head toward the door, allowing her to walk ahead. Before we could round the corner good, Ramik appeared right on schedule.

“Aye, my man, we’re all done. We about to head out.” I delivered Ramik the code word to let him know to prepare the backyard for our arrival. Ramik really did work for Habitat House. He was a friend of my grandparents and had been house-sitting for me over the years. That didn’t stop this little skit from costing me a fifteen-thousand-dollar donation and duplicates of all the furniture I’d brought for our home. The cost was nothing, though. I’d spend every dime I had to make Samara happy, if that’s

what it came to.

“I know you said y’all leaving, but before you head out, there are a few things in the backyard that we could use your help with.”

Samara looked back at me for an out. She was ready to go, but I knew she wouldn’t turn down helping. I nodded, letting her know I was cool with it. Samara looked from me to Ramik.

“Just this one more thing. Your help today has been awesome!” Ramik pleaded.

“It’s no problem with me, baby girl.” I pushed the button to the elevator. “We’ll leave right after this, alright?” I lied. I’d already checked us out of the resort. This was where we’d be staying for the rest of our stay.

“Okay, sure! Just show us what to do,” Samara confirmed as we gathered onto the elevator. A nigga was hyped as fuck and nervous as we descended to the first floor. I ain’t know how she was gon’ react. We’d just made this shit official, and here I was already presenting her with a house. I ain’t gon’ lie, I didn’t originally purchase this home for Samara. Our relationship was still strictly business when I bought it five years ago. It was meant for my grandparents, so I’d had an elevator put in it. When they refused to move in, it just remained empty. I never thought to live in it or use it at all until I stepped foot on this island with Samara. Then it all made sense.

The elevator opened, and Ramik led Samara and me into the backyard before disappearing. The moment she stepped outside and saw the dimly lit backyard come into view, her jaw dropped.

“What is going on?” Her footsteps halted, and she turned to me. She was visibly overwhelmed with emotion as she gazed at me in disbelief. I smirked, seeing her eyes fill with tears. I’d had our backyard decorated with flowers, candles, and a romantic

fort since we never got to enjoy the one at that dancing nigga's house. The stars twinkling in the night sky added an extra touch to the ambiance. It was perfect.

"You had to know there was more to this date," I replied. "Do you like it?"

"I love it, but I don't feel right doing this in some needy family's backyard." She looked between me and the fort.

"Good thing it's our backyard then, huh?" I walked past her, leading the way to the fort.

"What did you just say?" She hesitated, and I stopped to look at her.

"Welcome home. This is where we'll stay for the rest of our time in Haiti."

"Wait, you're serious. This is your house?"

"Our house," I corrected her.

"Our house?" she repeated slowly, like she was attempting to wrap her head around it. "And we just spent all day decorating it together."

"That is correct." I nodded my head. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she looked up at the house.

"Oh my fucking God!" She shrieked. "I... I can't believe you did this. It's the most thoughtful thing... What are you trying to say?" She stumbled over her words as she approached me. The shock of it all was clear on her face. I pulled her into me, balancing us the best I could on one leg.

"This might seem sudden, but on some real shit, we've already wasted enough time."

I kissed her forehead as she sobbed in my arms.

“What about Miami? Are you proposing we move in together? Move here?” She fired off her questions.

“We can have a home in Miami. We can live here. Use this as a vacation home. It’s whatever you want to do, baby girl.”

She pushed slightly off my chest and gazed up into my eyes. I didn’t know what she was searching for, but she was searching for something. It was making me sweat a lil bit. I ain’t want to be out here doing too much, but what was too much with the woman I’d been married to for six years?

“Living together is a huge step.”

“I know.”

“Moving out the country is even bigger.”

“I know.”

Her breathing hitched as I stared into her eyes. She was overwhelmed, and the last thing I wanted her to do was shut down on me.

“Don’t overthink it, baby girl. Let’s just enjoy tonight.” I kissed her soft lips. I could feel her body relax into mine. “No stress, this is home while we’re here, and we’ll talk about that other shit when we get home.”

“Okay.” She exhaled softly.

“Come on, let me feed you.” I moved one of my crutches to the other side of my



body, propped myself up on Samara, and headed toward the fort.

“It’s all so beautiful. Thank you,” Samara muttered as she helped me onto the air mattress that was inside the fort before joining me.

“See, a nigga can be romantic. You just never gave me the chance.”

Samara glanced at me. Her mouth opened and closed as she got comfortable next to me.

“It was never that I thought you couldn’t be romantic, Demetrius.”

“What was it, then?”

“Everything else and nothing worth mentioning all at the same time.” Samara’s voice cracked. She said nothing, but I understood every word.

“It don’t matter. I got your ass now.” I pulled her into my body and kissed her on the forehead.

“How is this going to work, Demetrius? Do we date? Do we behave like a married couple?”

There she went overthinking again.

“You’re definitely my wife, but I think we take shit at our own pace. Define it as we go. Is that cool?”

“Yeah,” she replied. “What’s for dinner?”

I removed the food from the chafer dishes. I’d had it delivered from a local restaurant

that Ramik recommended. It was Haitian Tasso and rice since my baby liked steak.

“How do you always know what I want to eat?” She lifted the plate.

“I pay attention. Plus, you eat the same three things in rotation.”

“No, I don’t.”

“Steak, sushi, tacos.” I held up my finger and counted off her three items. Her mouth opened and closed, but she didn't respond. She knew I was right.

“Exactly!” I added, causing her to giggle. We settled into a comfortable silence as we ate, and nothing seemed to matter. Not the cartel, not the fact that somebody had tried to kill me. The only thing that mattered in that moment was me and Samara. She had some shit to work out within herself, but I would be there every step of the way, talking her through it.

Thunder roared from above, and the sky opened up, allowing a light drizzle to fall around us.

“Oh my!” Samara shrieked frantically. She started trying to gather our things, but I sat my food to the side and pulled her in closer. We were barely getting wet under the tent. I wasn’t about to let a little rain interrupt our night.

“Stay. The rain just makes this more beautiful.” I pulled her into me even more. I loved being close to her. The feel of our skin touching was the best fucking thing in the world. It gave me more peace than any blunt.

“Here, I have something for you.” I grabbed the box next to me and handed it to her. Her eyes ballooned as she opened it.

“A diary?” She looked between me and the rose-colored book.

“In case you don't want to tell me your secrets.”

She didn't say anything... Just put the diary to the side and mounted me.

“I want to tell you my secrets.” Her voice was low, and my dick was already hard as fuck. “I've never felt seen or heard before you. I've never felt as though my heart was safe with anyone.”

“Your secrets, your heart, I'm the bodyguard of both of them motherfuckers.” I tapped the spot on her chest just above her heart. “Do you hear me, baby girl?”

“I hear you.” She rolled her hips across my lap. If I wasn't working with just one fully functional leg, I'd bend her ass over and fuck the shit out of her right now. It was probably a good thing I couldn't, though. It made the ambiance more intimate. Wrapping my arms around her waist, I pulled her into a hug. We stayed like that for a minute, just listening to the rainfall around us blend with the beat of our hearts.

“Tell me your secrets, baby girl.” I kissed her. She raised her head to look at me and then nuzzled her face back into my neck.

“When I was a little girl, I dreamed of doing stuff like this with my daddy.”

My eyes bulged, and I turned my head to peer at her. What the hell is she talking about?

“Not this... You know, like the girls on TV. Daddy-daughter dates. A walk to the park, a trip to the toy store. A movie night camping out in a fort,” she explained, and I allowed her to rest her head back in the crook of my neck. “When I was eight. I asked my dad if he could take me to the movies. It was right after my mom had passed. He

said yeah. So, I got all dressed up. We got to the movies, and he watched maybe two minutes of it before his phone rang, and he had to run off. He left me at the movies alone and had the nanny pick me up. I was so scared. So devastated.”

I pulled her in closer as I made circular motions on her back. I could still feel the pain in her words as she talked.

“That was the day I vowed never to date a man who had anything to do with the cartel like my father.”

I pulled her up. I wanted to look into her face when I asked her this question.

“What other times did your father let you down?” I wanted to know so that I’d never let her down in those same ways.

“I’m killing the mood. I’m sorry.” She tried to deflect.

“You are the mood.”

She took a deep breath before replying.

“My father never took me to a school dance. When Royale was old enough, he started going in his place, but it wasn’t the same.” She held her fingers up.

“He missed my birthdays, but he always sent a gift. Oh, or planned a party that he didn’t even attend. Several Christmases, my first period, my first date. You remember you and Royale had to see me off?” She dropped a finger every time she named something. She was laughing, but I could tell it was a coping mechanism. Just another way she’d learned to deal with constantly being disappointed.

“I’m sorry your father wasn’t there for you. I’m sorry he didn’t know how important

his job was as the first man to hold your heart.” I kissed her lips, and tears once again coated her cheeks, and it burned me up inside. I was ready to send a prison hit into his fucking jail cell for being such a suck ass fucking father. He was already on my shit list for what he’d done to Royale and Monroe, but now I really wanted his ass. Cartel or not, he should have been there more. When I was a kid, I looked up to Mr. London. Now, I just saw him for what he was—a bad person who was only concerned about himself. He was the perfect example of a father that thought he could provide money in place of love and time, and Samara was the perfect example of why that shit didn’t work. It only taught her how to build borders around her heart.

“You don't have to worry about that anymore because I have your heart now, and I know what to do with it.”

Our lips once again connected. This time, Samara had thrown her lips onto mine.

“Enough about me. Your turn. Tell me your secrets,” she asked back. “I’m your diary too.”

I wanted to tell her about my thoughts about retiring from the cartel, but I didn’t want to get her hopes up if that wasn’t possible.

“Come here,” I commanded. I was talking more to her pussy as I lifted her in the air so she could remove my dick from my basketball shorts and insert me inside her wet center. Her pussy engulfed me, and an immediate rush of pleasure shot through my body.

“We only got enough time for your secrets today, baby girl.” I grabbed her hips and assisted her in bouncing up and down on my dick.

A soft moan escaped her lips.

“Just like that!”

“Shhhhit!” Samara moaned, and I pushed into her with more force, trying to erase all her disappointments and letdowns.

“Oh my God!” Her head fell back in pleasure as our bodies collided. I couldn’t get in her pussy the way I wanted to, but I wasn’t holding back. I drilled into her guts with precision, making her thrust her hips into me harder.

“Ooh!” she cried. Pleasure coated her pretty face.

“Let me know how good this dick feels,” I commanded.

“It feels good! It feels good. It feels so fucking good!”

“Fuck yeah, it do!” I grunted as her walls pulsed around my dick. Her eyes rolled to the back of her head, and another moan escaped her mouth. She was on the verge of cumming, and I wasn’t too far behind her.

“Do you trust me with your heart, baby girl?” I asked. Her mouth moved, but the only thing that released was a loud, pleasurable cry. My hand wrapped around her neck, and the rain seemed to blow in our direction.

Do... you... trust me with your heart?” I sent a slow stroke into her with every word.  
“Say it!”

“I trust you with my heart!” she screamed, her pussy juices raining down on me as her whimpers and screams mixed with the sound of the rain.

“That’s right, baby girl. Cum on your dick!” I commanded, and her body trembled in response.

“My God! I’m cumming!” She erupted.

“Fucking cum, then!” I pulled her down on top of me, still grinding into her. Our lips collided. I was about to release, and I ain’t care about pulling out. I forced her body down and kept fucking her from the bottom.

“Shit, baby girl!” A breathy growl escaped my mouth as I sprayed my semen inside her walls. I prayed our love sprouted the seed of life. I’d already made her my wife. Now all that was left to do was give her my seeds.

“You’re safe with me, baby girl.” I pulled her from on top of me and wrapped my body around hers.

“I know.” She snuggled up next to me, and the rain serenaded us to sleep.

13

S amara

“Hand me those cucumbers over there,” Gran instructed me as soon as I walked into the kitchen. The enticing smell of spices filled my nose, and for a second, I forgot I was here to help Gran prepare the food for Fabian’s funeral services.

“How many?” I questioned as I looked at the big bag of cucumbers sitting on the counter.

“The whole bag will do,” she replied. “I expect many people to stop by and pay their respects.”

I grabbed the bag and handed it to her. Two weeks had come and gone rapidly, and we still had no clue who had caused all of this. It had Demetrius on edge, and every day that passed with no leads made him even more angry. The only thing that seemed to calm him down was being inside my pussy or out on the coffee bean farm with Grandpapa. He’d been coming here almost every day to help Grandpapa plant coffee bean trees. He had this crazy idea that he could rebirth their old farm. I didn’t know if that was possible, but it was helping him cope with our current situation, so it was fine with me. Plus, the more we came over here, the more time I spent with Gran and Grandpapa, and for someone who never had grandparents and barely had parents, I was enjoying the time.

“Come on over here, chile.” She smiled warmly at me while gesturing for me to join her. “You need to know how to do this. When I’m gone, somebody will have to pass



down my recipes.”

I smiled as I eagerly rolled up my sleeves. I wasn’t much of a cook. Growing up, we always had a chef or Aunt Vanessa cook. As an adult, it was just more convenient to eat out. After burning water on several occasions, I gave up. There was really nobody to show me. Now that there was, though, I was willing to learn.

“I’m a be honest, Gran. I’m not much of a cook.” I was nervous.

“You just need a good teacher.”

I smiled as I settled on her side. She handed me a knife, and I joined her in cutting up vegetables.

“This is simple enough,” I mumbled to myself as I cut.

“Demetrius’s mother couldn’t cook either when my son first brought her home,” she shared. “You American women are just pretty without a lick of skill.”

My hand flew to my mouth as I tried my best not to laugh. I would have been offended had anyone else said something like that, but it was Gran, she didn’t mean any harm. Being direct was just a part of her culture.

“Not all American women, Gran. Some can really cook. Plus, I’d like to think of my skill as healing people. Not everybody can stomach blood.”

“Touché.” She grinned. “You got to be some kind of special. My grandboy loves you.”

“And that’s scary,” I admitted. Gran stopped chopping the cucumbers and stared at me.

“And what’s so scary about it?”

“What’s not scary about it? Being in love is terrifying.”

“Do you love Demetrius, Samara?”

“I do, and that scares me too. Demetrius is a good man but too much like my father, which scares me.”

“Hmm. I take it you don’t have a good relationship with your father.”

I shook my head in response. A little part of me wished I had a different response.

“Chile, it’s not love you fear. It’s being hurt. You’re so afraid of being hurt that you’ve closed yourself off to being loved. Afraid of the heartbreak that your father caused you. Your father was the first person to break your heart.”

I stared at her, contemplating what she’d said. I guess I never really thought about it like that.

“Unfortunately, baby, you were always going to fall in love with someone like your father. It’s inevitable. Our subconscious just does that. Ask yourself, is Demetrius like your father in all the good or bad ways?”

The door opened, and the sound of laughter and Demetrius’s crutches hitting the floor alerted us that the men were coming in. Gran turned and went back to chopping up vegetables like she hadn’t just put so many things on my mind. Maybe I was only seeing one side of him and not him in his entirety. Maybe I was only looking for the bad in him and blocking out everything good.

I was speechless as Demetrius, Claude, and Grandpapa entered the kitchen.

Grandpapa wasted no time walking up to his wife. He immediately wrapped his arms around her and sprinkled her with kisses. Gran giggled like a schoolgirl, and it made me smile. Their love was so beautiful. I'd witnessed nothing so pure. My parents already hated each other by the time I was old enough to understand what was going on.

"Go to your room," Claude demanded.

"Boy, hush!" Gran fanned him off as she gave her husband a kiss.

"I'm ain't gon' never stop loving my queen," Grandpa mumbled.

"That's right, Grandpa. Me neither," Demetrius replied before quietly pulling me aside and leading me to the back room.

"Is everything all right? I was helping Gran cook." I was concerned by the serious look he had on his face. He didn't say anything as he led me deeper into the room and sat on the bed, pulling me down on his lap. The way he squeezed me close let me know everything I needed to know. He was anxious about tomorrow. Paying his final respects to Fabian was taking a toll on his mental. I could see it in his eyes. We were having a private viewing for him since we were technically still laying low. There was no telling who Fabian's funeral would attract.

"You're anxious." I noticed the dazed look in his eyes.

"Just pissed. We still haven't pinpointed these motherfuckers."

"You will." I pulled him into my chest. "It's just taking a little longer than we expected." I kissed his forehead. My lips barely grazed his skin.

"Shit like this don't take me this long, Samara. What the fuck is going on?"

“You’re human. You’re not perfect. You’re not invincible. This is just that part in the superhero film when it looks like you will be defeated.”

Demetrius stared up at me and I could see the anxiousness disappear from his face.

“Am I the superhero or the villain in this movie?” He shot back.

“You’re definitely the superhero.” I pulled him in deeper into my chest. In one swift movement, his eyes lowered, and he popped my right nipple out of my shirt.

“What are you doing?” I tried swatting his hand away, but he was already inhaling a mouth full of titty.

“You know sucking yo’ titties keeps a nigga from spazzing,” he stated, causing me to giggle as he circled his tongue around my nipple.

“You’re crazy,” I replied, just as Demetrius’s phone dinged with a message. He looked at the text, and whatever was on the screen had his face balling up and rage pooling in his eyes.

“What is it?” I questioned. Demetrius turned the phone around, and I peered down at the screen. Multiple pictures of Ashton knocking on my apartment door appeared on the screen. My eyebrows narrowed in confusion as I read the caption under the last picture.

Ro: Ask Samara who is this nigga?

“He’s gon’ make me come out of hiding to kill his ass.” Demetrius shook his head, and I laughed. I didn’t know what Ashton was doing at my condo. I hadn’t talked to him since the day Demetrius kicked down his front door. Well, I’d sent him a sorry text message he’d left on read, but that was it.

“I really don’t know why he is at my door.” I laughed it off.

“You know exactly why.” He shot back as he lifted me in the air with no hesitation at all and positioned me on his shoulder. The skirt I had on rolled up around my ass, and he used his teeth to rip the thin thong I had on. I felt his breath tickle my clit and it sent chills shooting through my body.

“As good as this motherfucker taste... You know exactly why that nigga sniffing around.” He rolled his tongue up and down my pussy.

“Demetrius!” I squealed, wiggling my hips, trying to free myself from his tight grasp. I was supposed to be helping Gran in the kitchen, not allowing her grandson to devour my pussy like his last meal.

“Stop moving before you fall. Out here letting soft ass niggas taste my pussy.” He gritted his teeth. “You think I like killing niggas over pussy, Samara?” He wiped his tongue over my pearl. His anger had him applying just the right amount of pressure.

“Oh my.” I let a soft whimper escape my lips as he buried his head in between my legs. He rolled his tongue around my pussy, sucking up my juices as they rained from my body. I wrapped my own hands around my mouth to silence my moans.

“You mean everything to me, baby girl.” He hummed into my center.

“Ooh, fuck!” I moaned, my voice just above a whisper. I could feel my thighs tightening around his neck as my sweet juices coated his face. I don’t know what I had been thinking allowing Ashton or anyone else to come close to me when this man made me feel so damn good.

“Sweet ass pussy.”

“Um huh! Don’t stop!” It felt so fucking good. I could barely silence myself. My body shook as he sucked my pearl like he was trying to remove it from my body. My back arched, giving him more access to me. I was on the verge of cumming.

“I’m....cu... cu... cumming!” I let out a muffled scream.

“Wet my fucking face!” He coached me as he snaked one of his hands around and pushed his thumb into my clit. My legs began to shake uncontrollably around his neck.

“Fuck! Oooh! Meechie!”

“You better not ever let another nigga taste my pussy again.” He pulled on my pearl as my juices sprang from my body. “I want yo’ curve game strong as fuck from this day forth! Do you hear me?”

“Yes!” I panted, attempting to break free of his hold, but he held me there, never removing his face from between my legs.

“Damn! I love you!” My vision was blurring, and I didn’t know if I could cum anymore. “I love you... please.” I was begging. Slowly, Demetrius lowered me to the bed.

“And you moving out of that damn apartment when we get back. I don’t want no nigga knowing where you rest yo’ head.”

He stood from the bed.

“Now, go help my grandma cook. She probably worried and yo’ ass in here being fast.”

I rolled my eyes at him as I flipped his dumb self off.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m good. I am just about to rest in here, trying to figure out what the hell we are missing. He kissed me on the lips, and I exited the room.

Gran gave me a sly grin, letting me know she knew what we had just done in the back room.

“The power of love,” she said as I went to the sink to wash my hands.

“The power of love,” I repeated.

14

Demetrius

The air inside the funeral home was heavy. I could feel it the moment I walked into the building for Fabian's funeral. Due to my current need to stay hidden, there was nobody present but close family. Gran, Grandpapa, Claude, and Samara were all there, along with all three of Fabian's baby mamas and his four kids. I slowly strolled up to his casket with Samara by my side, supporting my back.

I'd been getting around pretty good on my crutches, but today, I was having a hard time. Grief consumed me the moment we made it to his oak wood casket. He looked like himself. Like he was sleeping and not like a corpse. I cut my eyes away as I reached in and touched his arm. I could barely bring myself to look at his lifeless body lying there. I was responsible for this. Responsible for his children having to grow up without a father. I'd lost a lot of soldiers since becoming Capo, none this close to me. None of them family. I couldn't shake the overwhelming sense of guilt that coated my body, weighing me down and suffocating me like a ton of bricks.

"He looks nice," Samara whispered as she stared down at him. Her face was wet with tears.

"He does," I replied.

I could hear Gran sobbing, along with Fabian's first baby mother. I was sad, broken even, but I refused to shed a single tear. I couldn't. Every tear I wanted to cry, I replaced with anger. Fabian shouldn't be gone, and I just couldn't understand why he



had to go so soon. My brain started going through all the things I could have done differently. Why didn't I give him a different job? The options were literally endless, but I'd given him what was probably the most dangerous job in Miami.

Unable to bear the sight of my cousin any longer, I abruptly turned on my crutches and walked away. Samara trailed behind me, supporting my back as I moved to the back room I'd watch the services from. I moved fast, probably the fastest I'd ever moved since my leg had been broken.

"Are you okay?" Samara reached out, attempting to comfort me, but I wasn't in the mood for questions right now. I needed answers, and I needed them motherfuckers right now. Pulling out my phone, I dialed Polo's number. There was no way I was about to go another week without the niggas that did this six-feet under the ground. As soon as Polo picked up, I wasted no time getting to business.

"I don't like this shit, bro! We need to figure out who's responsible for this hit now. Fabian can't even rest in peace." My voice was strained but laced with anger.

"I know, man," Polo replied. His voice matched mine. I could tell he was going through it, unable to come to the services. He wanted to be here; we just couldn't risk it right now.

"Ain't no way I'm letting this shit slide. Two weeks with no leads is crazy! We the fucking London Cartel, nothing moves in Miami without my damn stamp of approval. What the hell going on?"

"Ro and I been looking at security footage from the warehouse all day and coming up with nothing. The niggas were all masked up. There was nothing in the truck that hit you and Fabian. I checked that motherfucker myself," he replied. I sighed as I walked over to a nearby seat and sat down. It had to be something we were missing. Somebody we were missing.

“Focusing on what we don’t know is not getting us anywhere. So let’s focus on what we do know.”

“We know whoever is behind this doesn’t think you’re dead,” Polo said, and the wheels in my brain started turning.

“If they thought for a second my ass was really dead, they’d be moving into our territory by now.”

It was making sense. Nobody was going to kill me for the fun of it. They either wanted my status, the cartel altogether, or both. Whoever we were dealing with just wanted me dead. They wanted the cartel weakened, not completely dismantled.

“These motherfuckers want the cartel to remain intact.” Polo took the thought right out of my head. “Who inherits the cartel if you die?” he questioned.

“I do,” Samara answered, making me look up at her.

“Who would benefit from the cartel being turned back over to Samara?” I posed the question out loud.

“What about my cousins? The Smiths. They been trying to steal the cartel from my father for years. Maybe they think with you gone, I’ll just give them the cartel.”

I considered what she’d said. I knew who she was referring to, but I hadn’t had any run-ins with them since I’d taken over. Why would they be making a play for the cartel now? And how did they have inside knowledge? I had a thousand questions, but it was the only lead we’d had in weeks. So, it was worth pursuing. I looked up at Samara, knowing she wouldn’t like my next suggestion.

“Baby girl.” I summoned her over to me and pulled her onto my lap. “You’re going

to have to go see your father.”

Her eyes ballooned as she tried to jump from my lap.

“You can’t run from this one.” I held her down, stopping her from moving.

“Why the hell not?”

“We need to find out everything about these damn Smiths, and your father will be able to tell us all we need to know.”

She didn’t say anything in response. I watched as she went through the motions. It had been years since she’d visited her father. If I wasn’t in hiding, I’d do it myself.

“Can’t somebody else go?” she questioned.

“I can go. I don’t give a fuck,” Polo blurted.

“It’s okay. I’ll go.” Samara spoke just above a whisper. “I refuse to let Fabian’s death go unanswered, and I love Haiti but am ready to get back to my normal life.”

“Bet. I guess we coming home.”

15

S amara

I stepped out of the car and made my way toward the jail entrance. It had been several years since I'd visited my father. He had nothing of value to offer when I came. It was always about what I could do to help him or his precious cartel, so I'd stopped coming.

I made my way through the parking lot, my sundress dragging the ground. There was this weird feeling gnawing at me, but I just chuckled it up as nerves. I surveyed my surroundings, making a note of where security stood. Being back in Florida had me on edge. Demetrius had given me the speech about my safety a thousand times. He'd followed me in a black truck all the way here and would wait in a nearby hotel. I didn't have security following me around. There was no Tahoe full of jump-out boys since we still weren't sure if someone would make an attempt on my life. It was risky being here, but it would be worth it if my father could assist us in any way.

"Samara!" A familiar voice called my name, causing me to turn around fast as fuck. An immediate chill coursed through my body, and my lips parted in a silent surprise.

"Ashton?" I questioned. "What are you doing here?" I fumbled with my dress.

"I had to bring my brother out here to see his pops," he explained. "Did you move? I stopped by your apartment last week. I have been calling you." He was getting closer to me as he spoke. Something about this didn't feel right. What really were the odds of him and me being here at the same time? The prison was about two hours outside

of Miami. Now I was regretting leaving my phone in the car.

“I’ve been going through a lot. Staying with family,” I replied.

“Oh, trouble in paradise?” he uttered as he closed the last bit of space that was in between us. He was too close for comfort. I looked at the door and then at security as I slowly began inching away from him.

“Well, it was good seeing you,” I lied. “I better get in there.” I pointed toward the door.

“It was good seeing you too,” he replied. “Sorry about Meechie.”

His last statement made me hesitate a little as I turned back to look at him. A sly smirk was etched across his face. I hurried inside the jail, making a mental note to fill Demetrius in on Ashton. Maybe I should have let Demetrius kill him a long time ago. I breezed through the security checkpoint and made my way to the waiting area.

“Who are you here to see?” the woman at the front desk questioned.

“Mr. Matthew London.”

“Oh, he’s currently with a visitor. Would you like to wait? We can ask him if he’d like to cut the visit short.”

“No, it’s okay. I’ll go on back,” I told the guard. My curiosity was piqued. Who was visiting my father? I walked into the visitation area, and my eyes roamed the room eagerly in search of my father. I wanted to see who was here. My eyes zeroed in on him instantly, sitting behind the protective glass. A man I’d never seen before sat across from him. They seemed to be immersed in conversation. Slowly, I approached the visitation booth. The moment my father noticed me, his eyes grew wide.

“Samara?” he mumbled. “Wow, it’s been years, sweetheart.”

I stared at him, not sure what to say. The strange man turned around, and immediately, I recognized him from one of Ashton’s social media videos. He was Ashton’s brother, but I couldn’t remember his name. I stood there, my eyes bouncing back and forth between my dad and Ashton’s brother, the words that Ashton had said on replay in my head. He was bringing his brother to talk to his pops. I could barely form words as I tried to understand it all.

“Samara, this is Julez.”

“What’s... g-going on?” I stumbled over my words.

“Have a seat, Samara. Join us,” my father instructed me. I didn’t want to sit. I wanted to run out of there and tell Demetrius what I was making sense of in my head. My father had another son. Instead, I sat next to the light-skinned man who favored Ashton and looked like a brighter version of Royale.

“Samara, this is your older brother, Julezua,” my father said nonchalantly as if he hadn’t just dropped a huge bomb on me.

“What? Come again?” My jaw damn near hit the floor at his words. “Brother?”

“Yes, your brother. I dated his mom back in the day. She was married, and so was I. She got pregnant, and we both agreed to get rid of it. I gave her money for an abortion, and she disappeared. I never saw her again. Julez came looking for me a few years ago after his mom passed.”

“I wanted to know my dad. My mom never mentioned who you were, but after she died, I found evidence that led me here,” Julez explained.

“Brother?” I repeated. I was still stuck on that part. “How old are you?”

“I’m twenty-eight,” Julez replied.

“Two years younger than Royale. Does Royale know about this?”

“No, I didn't know Julez existed until he came to visit me,” my father replied.

“Neither you nor your brother have been to see me in quite some time. You haven’t answered my phone calls—”

“I wonder why that is?” I interrupted him. He didn’t get to sit up here and act like we didn’t have valid reasons to cut his ass off.

“Cut it, Samara. You and Royale like to paint me as the bad guy when I provided both of you with everything.”

My eyes rolled, and all the emotions I’d suppressed when it came to my father came pouring out.

“You provided things. We never felt loved or supported. You were never there for us. Never at Royale’s basketball games. Never at my birthday parties. It was always the cartel over us. You sent a crazed man to Royale’s safe house to kill his wife—”

“Like I told your brother, I didn’t know he was going to try to kill her,” he interrupted me, making me stare at him in disbelief. Of all the things I’d just said, that was the only one that he wanted to reply to. He knew very well what he had done.

“Now you want me to sit here and not act surprised or shocked or hurt that you just told me you had an illegitimate child on my mother twenty-eight years ago.” Rage was seeping from my skin. I was so angry. “For God’s sake, I have a brother I’ve never met.”

I turned to the stranger. He looked amused by all of this. I found nothing amusing. My head was spinning out of control. I didn't know which crazy detail of all of this I wanted to dissect. Ashton and I shared a brother. Had he known that all along or was this a coincidence? I could see my father's lips moving, but I was so lost in my own thoughts I couldn't hear him.

"Samara!" he called, bringing me back to reality. "I know why you are here."

I silenced my thoughts so I could focus. With all the new revelations, I'd almost forgotten why I visited.

"I was coming to talk to you about what happened to Demetrius," I said.

"Yes, my sources tell me he's dead. I admit I didn't believe it until you waltzed in here looking like grief. How are you holding up?"

"Not well. I want revenge. Who do you think may have sent the hit? I was thinking Cousin Smith?"

Julez and my father let out a loud laugh that had me eyeing them both in confusion. I didn't see the joke.

"Don't worry your pretty little head about that, sis." Julez touched me on the leg.

"Why not?"

"That's why I'm here. Dad and I decided that since Demetrius is gone, I'll be stepping in to take his place. Cartel business is none of your concern."

"The London Cartel is back in the hands of a blood-born London. I failed with my first son, but Julez is ready and willing. I know you have no desire to run the cartel,"



my father added.

I couldn't believe what I was seeing and hearing. My father thought Demetrius was dead, and there wasn't an ounce of sadness or remorse on his face. Suddenly, it all made sense, and I could barely stop my heart from beating out my chest. My father had sent the hit on Demetrius. I thought my dad couldn't break my heart any more than he already had. I was clearly wrong.

A surge of emotions hit me like a ton of bricks. Hurt, sadness, and betrayal all rolled into one. I couldn't handle it. I wanted to give my father a piece of my mind, but I couldn't reveal that I knew it was him.

"You're taking over the cartel? Who said I was stepping down?" My eyes bounced from Julez to my father.

"You can't run the cartel, Samara!" my father barked.

"Watch me!" I got up and stormed out of the visitation area. I needed to tell Demetrius what I'd just found out. I moved quickly through the waiting area and security. My heart pounded with each step.

"Yo, what's up? You all right?" Ashton called after me as I made my way to my car.

"I don't need this right now, okay? Just leave me alone," I said. I was doubling my steps, trying to move quickly to my car.

"Samara!" Ashton called again, making me turn around.

"What! You want to tell me how all of this was a part of a sick game? Did you know we shared a sibling? Did he tell you to pursue me?"

Ashton said nothing. He just stared at me. A tiny bit of emotion was displayed on his face.

“I’m sorry, Samara. It wasn’t personal. None of this is.”

I didn’t let him finish as I stormed past him. He didn’t say anything else. He just watched me walk to my car. I quickly climbed inside. I wasted no time peeling out of the lot. My blood was boiling. I couldn’t get to my phone fast enough before I dialed Demetrius’s number.

“That was fast.” His deep baritone filled my car speakers.

“My daddy sent the hit,” I said quickly. “He has another son. It’s Ashton’s brother. They plan to take over the cartel.”

“Breath, Samara, slow down, baby girl, so I can follow you.”

“Ashton’s brother is my brother. My dad wants him to take over the cartel. They are the ones that tried to kill you.” I slowed down my words, but now tears were pouring from my eyes. “My father tried to kill the man I love. My husband!” I sobbed.

“Fuck!” Demetrius shouted into the phone. “Where are you, Samara?”

“On my way to the hotel,” I responded.

“No, I’ll meet you at the gas station when you arrive. Get out of the car and go inside. Use another door and get in my car,” he instructed. “The stakes of this shit just went up, baby girl.”

“Okay!” I nodded as if he could see me.

“Do they know I’m alive?” I heard his car start on the other end, letting me know he was already en route to the gas station.

“No! I don’t think so.” I pulled up to a red light.

“Good, we have the advantage then. I’m leaving the hotel now—”

I didn’t hear the rest of what he was saying because my car door flew open in the blink of an eye, and I was snatched from the seat. A bag was immediately placed over my head.

“Ahh!” I screamed.

“Samara!” I heard Demetrius call out right before I blacked out.

16

Demetrius

“Samara!” I shouted at the other end of the phone right before the call dropped. “Samara!” I called again.

“Fuck! Fuck!” I banged my fist against the steering wheel. I wanted to run to the scene and shoot every motherfucker within the vicinity, but by the time I got there, Samara would be long gone. I called back even though I knew she wouldn’t answer, but a nigga was panicking. I’ve never in my life been afraid of shit, but this had me spooked. The phone rang six times before going to voicemail, confirming what I already knew. She’d been taken. My mind raced a mile a minute as I dialed up Royale. I knew Polo wasn’t too far away from him. I needed to talk to the only people in this world that I trusted.

“They got Samara!” I shouted as soon as the phone call connected. There was no point in wasting any time. We needed a plan, and they needed to be on first thing smoking back to Florida.

“Hold up. Who... W-What? Meechie, s-slow down, nigga.” Royale stumbled over his words.

“Samara went to see y’all pops, and she ain’t make it back. She was on the phone with me. I just heard her get snatched out of her fucking car.” I was talking fast, my head buried in my hands.

“Fuck!” Royale thundered. “Do we know who got her?” I could hear the panic in his voice. It matched mine.

“Your dad has another son, and since Samara thinks he ordered the hit, my money on y’all brother.”

“What?” Royale hesitated. “Run that shit back.”

“Your dad has another son,” I repeated. “Samara just met him at the jail.”

The phone fell silent, and I could hear rustling on the other end.

“What’s going on, bro? Royale just tossed me the phone and stormed out,” Polo questioned. I ain’t blame Royale for dipping. This was a lot to process at one time. He had a long-lost brother, his sister was kidnapped, and his father had sent a hit for his best friend. I was surprised he wasn’t knocking holes into the wall.

“Samara was taken,” I told him.

“Shit!” He let out a breathy sigh, and I ran down everything Samara told me over the phone before she was taken.

“How’s Royale?” I checked in on him.

“He’s good, just taking a breather. This shit heavy.”

“As fuck, man.” I took a deep breath as I threw the car into drive. My emotions were replaced with logic. Royale had the right idea. I needed to take a minute to calm down. I couldn’t go into this with emotion. The wrong move could cost Samara her life.

“I’m texting the pilot now. We headed your way. Don’t move until we get there, Meechie,” Polo said. He knew I was ready to make moves, but I wasn’t stupid. I was hurt. I couldn’t bust my gun and hold up these damn crutches.

“I’m posted,” I reassured him. “I’m about to see what I can find out about these niggas to see if I can figure out where they might have taken her.”

“Yeah, we need everything pulled up on these motherfuckers.” Polo agreed.

“If something happens to Samara, father or not, I’m gonna put two to his head,” Royale barked. I guess he’d taken enough of a breather.

“Not before I do.” I shot back. I couldn’t believe he was behind all of this. Mr. London was like a father to me. He never wanted me to run the cartel. He just had no choice at the time. I never thought it would come to him trying to get me killed and having his own daughter taken. If I could, I would walk up to his jail cell and end his miserable life.

“The jet can get us there within the hour.” Polo updated. My house wasn’t that far from here because I didn’t live in Miami. I lived just outside of the city. I pulled my car out of the hotel parking lot. An hour seemed long as fuck when we didn’t even know if Samara was okay.

“Aye, what if they kill her? What if she already gone?” My voice was barely there. I couldn’t fathom living this life without her. Samara was my fucking rib.

“We can’t think like that. If they wanted her dead, they wouldn’t have taken her. They could have easily shot up the car and kept going,” Polo replied. He was blunt, but he had a point. She was alive. They had taken her for a reason. We just had to figure out what them niggas wanted.

“Aye, Polo, look at this shit!” Royale shouted in the background. There was movement on the other end before Polo started cursing.

“These dumb motherfuckers!” he grumbled. “We know where they took her, bro.”

“Where? Let’s fucking go.” I was ready.

“Your house.”

“My house?” My eyes widened.

“Ro just got a security alert about movement at your residence. I’m sending over the footage now.”

I shook my head in disbelief. My house had two security systems. One had the cameras in plain sight. The other one had the cameras hidden. Ro and Polo had access to both of them. I guess he’d downloaded the apps on his burner phone to watch out for properties while we were gone. Going to my house had to be the dumbest fucking move.

“Oh, these lil niggas bold, but they dumb.”

“Big dumb.” Polo cosigned.

They’d taken her to my playground on the false belief that I was dead. It was about to be a mistake that would cost them. My phone dinged, and I looked down at the camera footage Polo sent over. I could see three masked men bring Samara in the back door. One of them was the dancing nigga, and the other was a short, light-skinned nigga that had Ro’s face. I stopped for a minute. Damn. Mr. London really had another son. That was wild.

I watched with clenched teeth as they stripped Samara down to her panties and tied her up on my basement floor. She was scared, visibly shaking as they dragged her across the floor and tied her to a support beam. I zoomed the image in to examine her. She appeared to be okay, which eased me slightly.

“They think they’ve won,” Royale said as I ripped my eyes away from the screen.

“They’re hiding in plain sight by going to your house and not disabling security cameras. Samara’s the fish. Who’s the bait?” Polo stated.

“If not me, then Royale.”

“Samara inherited the cartel if I died. Maybe they thought she’d give it to Ro. Either way, taking both of y’all out would give them a clear, uncontested path to take over the cartel.”

“Okay. We know where they at. We know why. What’s the plan?” Royale questioned.

“They expect you to come in guns blazing to get Samara. Let’s give them that,” I suggested. “It’s the perfect distraction for me to come in and deliver the kill shot.”

“With your crutches, Meechie? You’re a dead giveaway.”

“Once I get in position, I won’t need them.” There was a small and unnoticeable trapdoor in my bedroom that led to the basement. I put it there as an escape route if I ever had to evacuate. All I needed to do was get to my room, remove the trapdoor, and fire the kill shots.

“Yeah, but how we gon’ get you in position?”



“Let me worry about that,” I replied. Injured or not, there was no way in hell I would not fire the kill shot to save Samara. These niggas had violated me in every way, and that warranted a personal visit.

“I’m taking the shot even if I have to re-break my fucking leg to do so,” I told them. “That’s yo’ sister, Ro, but she the fucking love of my life.”

“You take the shot. Now let’s air out this plan a little more. We don’t need no slip ups.” Royale gave in. He knew it was a lost cause trying to argue with me.

“Let’s fucking go!” I merged onto the highway, heading toward my home.

17

S amara

I sat on the floor of Demetrius's basement, naked and cold from being stripped down to barely anything. My hands were tied behind my back, and I was chained to a concrete pole. I'd never been more terrified in my entire life.

"How long you think yo' brother gon' take?" Ashton questioned me from where he was sitting across the room. I stared at him. He knew I couldn't answer because my mouth was taped shut. He kept asking about Royale. They seemed to be waiting on him to show up. I low-key hoped he didn't. I didn't want him getting hurt for the sake of me. That wasn't an option, though. Royale, Polo, and Demetrius were all coming. It was embedded in their DNA to protect.

"Answer me!" Ashton's voice thundered as he approached me. He removed the tie that was around my mouth.

"Fuck you!" I shouted as I released a wad of spit from my mouth.

"Bitch!" He jumped as the spit barely missed him and landed on the floor. He rushed me, wrapping his hand around my neck.

"That reminds me. I never got to bury my dick in that tight ass pussy." He ran his hand over my body and down into my panties. Fear crippled me. He was going to rape me. I couldn't stop the tears from rolling down my cheeks. As he removed my panties, a loud, blaring sound came through the speakers.

“Somebody’s at the front door.” The security system blared. I sighed in relief as he pulled away and headed toward the stairs. I glanced around. I needed to get out of here. I started wiggling to break the chains, but there was no use. I was stuck. Another alarm sounded in the house. This time, I knew it was Demetrius.

“Samara!” Royale called as he rounded the corner. Relief coated my body but was quickly replaced by fear. Julez was walking behind Royale with a gun pointed at his head.

“Not another fucking move!” Julez shouted. Royale stopped.

“Turn yo’ fucking ass around, brother. And do it slowly.”

Royale did what he was told.

“And slide me your gun.”

Royale hesitated momentarily before bending down and sliding his gun across the floor. Julez quickly grabbed it and pointed it at me.

“I take it you’re Julezua.”

“In the flesh. It’s nice to meet you finally, big brother. Pops talks about you a lot. How you broke his heart by not taking over the cartel.” He waved the gun at Royale. “Frankly, I’m tired of hearing it.”

“I’m just here for sis.” Royale threw his hands up in surrender.

“I know. You’re right on time.”

“Come on, bro, what are you trying to prove? Let sis go. We don’t want the cartel.

It's yours. Have at it." Royale looked back at me.

"Oh, I'm gon' have the cartel. That lil doctor's office you have... All of it will be mine." He neared us. "This knocking off my absent father and his spoiled rich kids is just a part of the revenge."

My eyes widened hearing his plan. He wanted us dead.

"Why?" Royale questioned. He was stalling, probably allowing time for Demetrius and Polo to arrive.

"Y'all got the silver spoon. Got everything y'all wanted. It ain't fair." He turned to me.

"That little story he told you at the jail was bullshit. He told my mom to get an abortion. He gave her ten thousand dollars and told her never to show her face again. From there, she struggled from man to man. We were always moving. Never had nice clothes or shoes. Some days we ain't have food to eat. We struggled while y'all lived the best life. Affording nice cars and fancy colleges and shit."

I felt bad for him as he told us how our father had let him down.

"We didn't live a perfect life. We had the same trash ass father as you," Royale replied.

"But you had him! I had nothing!" Julez barked. "I will have it all, though. Get yo' ass over there by your sister."

Royale backed up slowly and joined me on the floor.

"I didn't know today would be the day I would get the ultimate revenge. As we

speaking, our father is eating his last meal. I had one of the cafeteria workers lace it with poisoning. You know what's sweet about it? I used dad's money to pay the bitch." He laughed hysterically. "He's funding his own murder."

My heart sank at what he just told us. I didn't know how to feel about my father being murdered. I hated him, but I didn't want him to die.

"Look who I found." Ashton's voice echoed as he entered the room with Polo and a gun stuck in his back.

"Oh, good. We can eliminate all these asses together." Julez chuckled.

"We just came for Samara," Polo said again.

"Like I just told them, I can't do that. Get your stupid ass over there with my siblings," Julez demanded. Royale rolled and pulled the tape from my mouth.

"Are you okay?" he whispered. I ignored him and addressed Ashton.

"So, you moving into my apartment complex? Dating me? That was all to spy on me?"

"Pretty much. Your pussy was sweet as fuck though. I was thinking about keeping you around, making you my girl, but you dissed me for that big nigga." He laughed to himself before continuing. "How does it feel to know I'm the one that sent that eighteen-wheeler barging into his ass?"

My mouth dropped at his confession. Ashton was directly responsible for Fabian's death.

"This is crazy!" I shouted. "You're blaming your siblings for your parents' mistakes."

Is that fair? We hate that man just as much as you.”

“Life ain’t f—”

Julez didn’t get to finish his statement as a window in the distance shattered, bringing all of our attention to a hole in the ceiling.

“You missed, bitch ass nigga!” Demetrius said as he fired a shot that hit Ashton in the head. Ashton fired as he hit the floor, and shots rang out. Royale threw his body on top of mine, and I could feel a strange heat radiating from my belly. Ashton and Julezua’s lifeless bodies fell to the floor.

“Samara, you okay?” Royale called out. I couldn’t respond. Pain ripped my body.

“Shit, she was hit. One of them niggas shot her!” he shouted. My eyes traveled to where he was now applying pressure. My stomach was covered in blood.

“Fuck!”

“Stop the bleeding!” Demetrius shouted. My head turned to him as he hopped out of the ceiling on one leg. He fell to the ground and immediately scurried over to me.

“Baby girl! Fuck!” I could hear his voice, but it sounded like it was fading into the distance.

“I’m s-scared,” I mumbled as his arms wrapped around me. Tears dropped from his face and landed on mine.

“Tell me your secrets, baby girl. I’m here.”

“I’m scared to die.” I coughed. I could feel his arms tighten around me.

“Who about to die? Nah, hang in there, baby girl. You can’t leave me. I love you. Do you hear me? Samara!” His voice got further and further away until I couldn’t hear anything anymore.

18

Demetrius

“Meechie! She’s up!” Monroe shouted as soon as the elevator door opened. I had just gone downstairs to order flowers for her hospital room. That motherfucker looked like death, and I didn’t want that to be the first thing she saw when she opened her eyes. My baby had been through a lot in the past week. The gunshot had punctured her stomach, and she had to get emergency surgery. A few days after that, she caught an infection and had to undergo another surgery. We’d been waiting for her to wake up for about twelve hours. I took off sprinting toward her hospital room. The hospital staff had got me a knee scooter to get around the hospital better. I ain’t want to use it at first, but I eventually gave in.

Reaching her door, I took a deep breath. I hadn’t heard her voice since she’d passed out on my floor after losing too much blood. I was nervous. The door swung open, and all the girls, Aliza, Monroe, and Contessa, all piled out of the room. They were laughing, so that must have been a good sign.

“Breathe. She’s her crazy self.” Aliza patted me on the arm as she brushed past me. I smirked as I pushed open the hospital room door. Samara’s eyes immediately found mine, and we stared at each other for a minute.

“You’re here,” she said. “And on a scooter, wow.”

“Where else would I be?” I moved closer to her.



She cracked a smile at me, and my nerves were immediately gone. Slowly, I pushed up to her bedside. My hands found hers, and I wasted no time kissing her lips.

“I thought I had lost you,” I said.

“I thought I was dead,” she replied as we embraced. Words couldn’t express how happy I was to see her alive and well. When I thought she wouldn’t make it, my ass couldn’t even fucking breathe. I kissed her again, and she jerked, making me jump in fear I’d hurt her.

“What’s wrong?” I questioned.

“I just thought about my dad. He... is he...”

Her words trailed off the moment my head lowered. I didn’t want to be the one to tell her. Royale had received a call a few days ago, confirming that Julez’s plan to kill his father had gone through. They found him dead in his jail cell. The news had taken a back seat to Samara’s health, but it placed a gray cloud over our heads. Mr. London was a fucked-up man, but he’d been an influential part of our lives, whether good or bad.

“He’s gone,” I confirmed. Her head lowered in sadness, but no tears fell. I didn’t blame her for not crying. Samara’s relationship with her dad was nonexistent. I hated she would never be able to get closure now, but that was the way shit went sometimes. We sat in silence for a minute. I didn’t know what to say.

“They said I can be discharged in a few days.” She broke the silence between us.

“I already found us a house. I figured my place was a no, and yours is too damn small.”

“A new place?” She sounded hesitant. We’d discussed this in Haiti and agreed to go at her pace but after everything that had happened, it was a no-brainer now. I needed Samara in a place where I could keep her safe. A nigga was scared to let her out of his sight. Her facial expressions changed, and I knew she was about to say some shit that was gon’ piss me off.

“I don’t want to stay in Miami.”

“I know. That’s why I found us a house in Coral Springs.”

“No, like I don’t want to live in Florida at all. I want to get as far away from here as possible. Like somewhere people don’t know me as a London.”

I stared at her. I ain’t want to say the wrong thing. Fabian’s words were echoing in my ear. I couldn’t make her do anything. Instead of telling her we were moving into the house in Coral Springs, and that was that, I tried something different. Just listening.

“Tell me what’s going in that pretty head of yours?”

“What if they come back?” she whispered. The fear in her eyes had me ready to retrieve Ashton and Julez’s bodies from the ocean and kill their asses again. I squeezed her hands tighter.

“They gone, Samara. They not coming back either. I made sure of that.”

“But someone else will be plotting on us and looking for your weaknesses. People think our lives are perfect when we are just as fucked up as everybody else.”

She had valid concerns. Samara never wanted to be involved in this lifestyle. Now she’d been kidnapped and shot due to it. I was the man with all the answers, but I

struggled to find the right thing to say to ease her mind.

“Baby girl, whatever I got to do to make you feel safe again, I’ll do it.” I was willing to do anything. I’d blow this motherfucking city up if I had to.

“Leave the cartel.”

Not that , I thought.

“We’ll increase security around you. Move as far away as workable, but leave the cartel, Samara. That’s unrealistic you know that.”

“Why? You said yourself you never wanted to be Capo. Move away with me. We can start a new life. A regular life.”

I stared at Samara. I wanted to scoop her up out of this hospital bed and run away with her, but shit wasn’t that simple.

“Samara, it ain’t that easy. The cartel is weak right now from all this bullshit. I have to work around the clock to get everything back on track. I can’t just leave.”

She stared at me, tears rolling down her cheeks. Her chest was caving in from her sporadic breathing.

“When I leave the hospital and get better, I’m leaving. I’m getting as far away from this hellhole as possible, with or without you.”

“Samara,” I called softly, begging her to change her mind. “Don’t make me choose. I love yo’ ass.”

“If it’s even a choice, you’ve already given me your answer. Please go.”

“Baby girl, come on. You’re getting all worked up over nothing.” I was trying to reason with her.

“It’s something to me!” she yelled. “Please go, Demetrius.”

Slowly, I turned around on my scooter and left her room. I was pissed, but I wouldn’t do this with her right now. She was recovering.

“I love you, Samara. That ain’t gon’ change,” I said before I exited her room. She was traumatized. She just needed a few days.

Four Months Later

“Are you coming, bruh?” Polo asked as soon as I swung open the front door of the condo I’d been staying at.

“By the way this nigga look, I’m gone go with no.” Royale came around the corner, revealing that he, too, was a part of this mission. I glanced at their asses, annoyed. I didn’t know why these niggas had popped up over here attempting to drag me to Samara’s going away dinner. They knew damn well I wasn’t going. Going away dinners were supposed to be a happy occasion. There was nothing happy about Samara leaving.

“I told you niggas on the phone, no.” I huffed. I thought I would breeze past this day, but here they were. I moved away from the door and headed toward the couch, plopping down.

“So, you just gon’ let her go?” Royale questioned, hovering over me. I stared at him. I didn’t know what he wanted me to say. It had been four months since Samara had put me out of her hospital room. I thought she needed a few days to cool down, but she was standing on business. She didn’t want anything to do with this lifestyle

anymore. Now, she was going through with her plan to leave Florida.

“Yeah, who am I to stop her?” I shrugged. I was ready for these niggas to leave. I had just called one of the strippers from the club to come over and keep my mind off Samara.

“I don’t know... her fucking husband, maybe?” Royale replied. He’d been on my bumper about stopping Samara from leaving. I didn’t know if it was because he didn’t want to see his sister go or if he was rooting for our relationship. Either way, he’d been preaching for me to end this.

“Bruh, I don’t be in yo’ business, but come on. This is some ho shit. Get yo’ ass up and go get your fucking wife. This ain’t even like you,” Polo fussed.

“I’m in a new era. I’m not forcing myself on anybody. I’m good.”

“Yeah, whatever. You scared, nigga.” Royale sat down next to me. “You doing the same shit you did with Navaeh, running.”

“This ain’t nothing like that. I didn’t even love Navaeh.” I waved him off.

“I guess you don’t love my sister either?”

“You know I do.”

“I can’t tell,” he replied. A weird silence fell over us. I appreciated my boys coming, but my mind was already made up.

“You know, I never thanked you for stepping in and taking over my duty to the cartel. I never apologized either. I didn’t consult you on the matter. I just handed you off my burden like a fucking gift. I’m sorry, bro.”

I stared at Royale. I didn't know where that had just come from. He didn't consult me before naming me head of the cartel, but he didn't need to. I had his back, whether I wanted the responsibility or not.

"I'm sorry too, bro. If you ever thought you had to make certain decisions because of me, I'm good, bro," Polo added. I stared at them both. Two apologies I never expected because I never knew I needed them. I knew what they were trying to do... Give me an out. I didn't know if I was ready to say goodbye to the only profession I'd known.

"I appreciate y'all, but the cartel isn't a burden. This is my life. If Samara wanted me, she'd understand that."

Royale stood from the couch with a disappointed look on his face.

"This is the part where you have to make a decision."

"We'll be at the party, nigga," Polo added as they walked out, leaving me in my thoughts. Grabbing my phone, I shot Raina a text, canceling her visit. I wasn't in the mood anymore. I had a lot of shit to figure out.

Samara

Two weeks later

I stared at my empty apartment. It had been four months since I'd been released from the hospital. A bittersweet weight lifted from my shoulders as I stood in what used to be my living room. I hadn't been here in a while. When I was first released, I went to Monroe and Royale's house. When I was a little better, I went to Rebecca's. I didn't want to come here or anywhere near Demetrius. After our dispute at the hospital, I had him moved to my banned visitor's list. What happened to me wasn't his fault, but

my brain at the time didn't see it that way.

He came to get me settled at Royale's and delivered my things to Rebecca's, but he didn't speak to me, and I didn't push it. It was most likely for the best.

Today was the day. I was finally freeing myself of the endless cycle of drugs, crime, and drama that seemed to haunt me since I was born. Miami wasn't my scene anymore. As long as I was here, I'd be associated with the London Cartel, and I didn't want to go through that anymore. Grabbing the white envelope on the counter, I glanced at my apartment one last time. I had one stop to make before my flight left.

I pulled up to the divorce lawyer's office to seal the deal on the last thing that bound me to the cartel. My marriage to Demetrius. Fortunately, I still had the papers he'd signed before his accident. Climbing out of the car, I took a deep breath. I was ready for a fresh start. Pushing open the door, I froze.

"Took yo' pretty ass long enough, baby girl," Demetrius said. He was sitting on top of the receptionist's desk. It was the only area in the room not covered with roses. I couldn't believe my eyes. Demetrius was the last person I expected to see here. Quickly, I glanced toward the street. An old-school Cutlass was parked directly across the street. He was tracking me. I should have known.

I wanted to curse him out. He didn't get to do this, disappear for four months, and ruin my fresh start—not after choosing himself. My emotions were overflowing. When I looked into his eyes, I couldn't deny the love in them. I couldn't deny the love I had in my heart for him.

"This is the last time I'm going to track you, promise."

"What are you doing here?"

“I don’t want a divorce, baby girl.”

“It’s not about what you want, Demetrius.”

“You’re right. It’s about what you want. I’m out. It’s done. The London Cartel is no more.”

My mouth dropped at his confession.

“We can start over together.”

A whirlwind of emotions flooded me. I was so tired of this lifestyle, but seeing him there, laying it all out, made me wonder if maybe, just maybe, things could be different.

“I’m not too late, am I, baby girl?” He approached me as he lowered to one knee.

“Samara London, the first time you asked me, but that didn’t make the journey any less valid. I love you, girl. You are every fucking thing to me. You came into my life and made me see better for myself. I want to be better for you. For all the little crumb snatchers we’re going to have. You saw the man in me before I saw that nigga in myself. So, would you do me the honor of not divorcing me and being my wife for real this time?”

I was speechless as tears rolled down my cheeks.

“Come on, baby girl. Don’t leave me down here. I’m creasing my Forces and shit.”

“You’re really done? The cartel... It’s no more?”

He nodded his head.



I didn't respond to him as I lowered myself down to the ground with him. He pulled me in, and our lips collided.

"Yes, Demetrius. I want to be your wife." I nodded my head. He didn't waste any time pulling the divorce papers from my hand and tearing them up right in front of me.

"We ain't ever getting a divorce, baby girl. I love you."

"I love you too."

I sniffled as he held me close. At that moment, I hoped we could leave all the mess behind us and start anew. We kissed, leaving all the hurt and mistakes in the past.

"Where we going?" he questioned.

"I was headed to Richmond, Virginia." His face twisted up.

"Richmond?"

"What? I needed a clean, drama-free place."

"What about Haiti? I'm kind of the new CEO of Augustine Brew." He held up a Haitian business license.

"Oh wow. Congratulations, Mr. CEO."

I barely got my sentence out before Demetrius swooped me up swiftly. He stood with me, cradled me in his arms, and carried me bridal style out of the office.

"Haiti it is." I giggled.

“Let’s go start our new life, baby girl.”

“Wait, my plane ticket is for Richmond.”

“We fly private.”

“Regular people don’t fly private, Demetrius.”

“We not a part of the cartel anymore, but it’s never giving regular, baby girl. Yo’ husband got his investments and shit.”

“I guess.”

He carried me to a black SUV and sat me inside the passenger seat before climbing into the driver’s seat. As we hit the open road, I knew every day wouldn’t be easy, but it would be worth it. For the first time in a long time, I felt like maybe, just maybe, we could make our marriage work.

“Tell me your secrets, baby girl,” Demetrius requested as he took off toward the landing strip.

“I love you.”

“I love you, too, baby girl.”

Demetrius

“Shit!” I moaned as I grabbed a handful of Samara’s hair. We were just supposed to be having a first look before the wedding. I don’t know how I ended up with Samara on her knees and my dick in her mouth.

“Just like that, baby girl.” I coached her. She was taking me to the back of the throat like it was nothing. I would have to pay her makeup artist extra to fix her beautiful makeup. She had black shit running from her eyes and down her cheeks. I forced her face down on my dick the way she liked it. They said it was bad luck to see the bride before the wedding, but there was nothing bad about the way Samara was gulping my dick. I needed to feel her insides on me now. I didn’t care that we were running late. It was our wedding. Their asses couldn’t start without us anyway.

“Bend over! I want to sample this pussy before you become my wife for real this time.” I pulled her up by her hair. Now, I was going to pay her stylists extra too. She slid her white, tight-fitted wedding dress over her waist and did what I had told her to do. She was careful as she leaned over the balcony. She was cautious not to hit her growing baby bump.

“Arch that motherfucker some more,” I demanded as I slapped her on the ass. She lowered her body and stuck out her ass, creating the perfect arch in her back. I couldn’t believe that in four more months, we would be parents. My constant shooting the club up had finally paid off.

“That’s what the fuck I’m talking about.” I approached her. Using my hands, I spread her ass cheeks.

“You’re so fucking beautiful right now.” I entered her. I buried every inch of my dick inside her. Her wet, pregnant pussy engulfed my dick. Pleasure wasn’t even the word for how good this shit felt. Her juices were coating my dick, causing me to thrust into her harder.

“Fuck!”

“Yes! Fuck... Yes!” she screamed. I increased my strokes, pumping harder and harder into her.

“Oh... my... fucking... God!” Her body quaked, and her knees buckled for a bit. She was cumming, and I wasn’t too far behind her.

“Aye, Meechie. It’s time. Polo out there about to spaz out on Contessa and this stud chick she done brought—” The sound of Royale’s voice sounded as our bedroom door was pushed open.

“Oh my God!” Samara shrieked as she tried to move, but I held her ass in place. There was no way I was ending this session without a nut. The way we were positioned on the balcony, Ro couldn’t see shit but my black slacks at my ankles.

“Aye, we coming, bro!” I shouted, slowly pumping into her.

“I bet y’all nasty asses are.” He fired back as he turned to leave the room. “Hurry up, motherfuckers is waiting on y’all.”

The bedroom door closed, and I went back to work assaulting Samara’s pussy.

“It’s time to cum on this dick, baby girl. We late.”

“I... I’m... cummin’ s-shit!” She was tongue tied. I was fucking her so good. Leaning down, I placed kisses on the small of her back.

“Tell me your secrets, baby girl.”

Samara’s head flew back in pleasure.

“I’m cumming!” she shouted. Her walls tightened on my dick, pulling my nut right from my soul.

“You ready to be mine forever?” My voice was deep. This was our eighth anniversary, but considering how we’d done it the first time, we were newlyweds.

“Forever!” She moaned in response as I pumped into her a few more times before letting my nut coat her walls.

“Fuck.” I pulled out of her and helped her stand up straight. “Come here so I can clean you off. We got a wedding to attend.” I lifted her and carried her back into our bedroom.

Samara

I made my way to the makeshift aisle in our backyard. Royale awaited me at the end of the aisle.

“You and that nigga are nasty.” He greeted me as I neared him. I couldn’t believe that my brother had walked in on us having sex. I was embarrassed as hell, but at the same time, I was finally getting the wedding of my dreams.

“How you think I got this bump?” I giggled, rubbing my belly. Royale smiled down at my baby bump. He was so happy to be an uncle. He called me every day to check in on me. He was almost as bad as Demetrius.

“You look absolutely beautiful.” He offered me his arm.

“Thank you,” I replied as we walked down the aisle.

I felt a rush of emotions as we headed down the aisle. I took in the scenery around me. Everything was perfect. Monroe, Rebecca, and Aliza looked gorgeous as my bridesmaids. I smiled as Polo finished making the flowers rain at the other end of the aisle. As he requested, we’d let him be the flower boy.

“Oh my God!” I gasped as Polo let a handful of flowers go on Contessa and her date before joining his brother at the end of the aisle.

“This nigga,” Royale mumbled as we continued to walk down the aisle. This was the wedding I always wanted with the man I tried my damndest to avoid. I couldn’t believe how good our life together was going. I was so happy and in love. Augustine Brew was doing great. Demetrius had just secured a nationwide distribution deal for it. I had been working as a nurse at a local hospital, but after the baby, I was taking an extended leave of absence. My husband’s orders.

When I reached the end of the aisle, Demetrius’s eyes locked with mine.

He reached out and took my hand, a mixture of love and excitement shining in his eyes. “You ready to marry a nigga again, Mrs. Augustine?” he whispered.

“Been ready.”

I allowed him to lead me to the altar. My eyes immediately flooded with tears. I’d spent so much time self-sabotaging our love. I’d almost missed out on this very moment. Staring up at him, I was so glad I had finally allowed him to bodyguard my heart.

The End!