



Dom (The Miami King #2)

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Category: Urban

Description: Dominic Royal is done playing by the rules.

With enemies lurking and El Blanca making bold moves, Carmen isn't just his legal shield or the face of his empire anymore.

She's the calm in his storm, and the fire that burned through his darkness.

For the first time, he's ready to fight for more than just power he's ready to fight for her too.

Dom may be a little toxic, but Carmen knows that toxicity is only for her even when he tries to hide it.

Carmen's learning fast that being married to a cartel king means walking a line between devotion and destruction.

She never expected to fall this deep, but now that she's in, there's no turning back.

When bullets start to fly, Carmen must hold her own while guarding the only man who has ever made her feel safe.

Carmen's torn between being the cartel's backbone and saving what's left of her soul.

When the Feds come knocking and enemies start making moves, she's forced to prove that she's more than just a boss's wife she's the ultimate weapon.

In Miami, every move costs and in Episode Two, the Royals are coming for everything.

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I couldn't breathe and the hood over my head was tight as hell, smelling like sweat, Baccarat and motor oil.

My wrists were zip-tied in front of me, and the same for my burning ankles and every bump the car hit damn near rattled my bones.

As bad as I wanted to think this was a prank I knew better.

I wanted the cameras to pop out any minute yelling that I'd been punked, however, it wasn't shit fake about this and it didn't feel like a warning either.

It actually felt real, too real. I could smell Dom; however, I knew it was just my imagination playing tricks on me because I desperately needed him to be here right now.

My heart was pounding so loud, I could barely hear anything else over it.

Whoever had me hadn't said one word since throwing me in the back of the car, the van, the truck, or whatever we were in.

I ran every play in the book in my head trying to figure this out while knowing that I had to remain calm.

Who would take me? El Blanca? The Dorados?

Was it someone we crossed? I quickly tossed that last thought out because we were always clean and never crossed anybody who didn't cross us first. The possibilities

alone stretched miles long, but none of them would have a happy ending once Dom found out that I was gone.

As a woman, no matter how much I may have been in my feelings, I knew one thing was for certain, and that was Dom didn't play about his Carmen Royal, despite what he did with his personal life or how many little spoiled bitches stuck his dick in their mouths.

I shifted my weight in my seat trying to ignore the object underneath me that was causing my ass cheeks to become sore.

It was either ammo, or a jack or something in that nature but I couldn't be sure.

Fuck! Focus, Carmen. I thought to myself counting the seconds between turns.

Every time we made a left, a right, or a U-turn, I knew and kept track of the seconds from every turn because at least if I ever got free it would help me to figure out exactly where I was, and again, that was something that Dom himself taught me.

We were on the highway a good while before we were hitting the roads again.

It had been almost 45 minutes when we finally stopped, and the doors flew open.

It was a relief to get some fresh air, but the unknown was inevitable.

A pair of rough hands gripped my arms and dragged me out like I was a piece of fucking luggage and then set me down hard on what felt like dirt and gravel.

The air smelled like pine. Just when I was about to start asking questions it was a deafening silence and then there was a low, smooth, familiar voice.

“Take the hood off.” He demanded. On his order, the rough fabric was yanked from my head, and the sun shined down in my eyes while kissing my skin which immediately turned hot.

I blinked hard a few times because, my vision was blurry at first before it cleared and there he was, my fucking husband, Dom, standing there in all black looking as sexy as any other day.

His black Amiri T-shirt was tight across his chest; the sun caused the diamonds in his Patek watch to glisten on his wrist. I could tell he had a fresh, crisp, line up around his perfectly tapered edges as well as his low goatee.

Of course, he had that same unreadable expression on his face that could’ve meant either one or two things: mercy or murder.

At this point I didn’t know whether to scream or slap his ass.

“What the f?—”

“Shut up.” He hissed cutting me off. His voice demanded respect but still had that tone that made a woman’s pussy start to moisten.

I froze, and not out of fear, but because I couldn’t believe he actually had me kidnapped leaving me utterly confused.

He stepped closer, looking me over like he was inspecting his property of something he left in the wrong hands.

“You good?” He finally asked once he was satisfied that I was in one piece.

His people stood around us like this was just a casual fucking Cartel meeting, or just

another day in the world of the Royals’.

We weren’t surrounded around anything besides tall palm trees and dirt. I yanked at the ties on my wrists with anger in my eyes. I never raised my voice but now was the perfect exception because Dom was crazy, but his little Visa wife was crazier if I ever had to be. “You had me kidnapped?!”

“Nah,” he said coolly. “I reminded you who the fuck you are, and who the fuck you married to.”

My chest heaved. “You call that a reminder? While you’re out here getting your dick sucked by your lil Cartel princess?” I sassed, pissed, yet still poised refusing to crack.

“Not sayin’ it’s right, but the difference is, I never let my guard down even when I’m dirty, and you lettin’ your guard down got you right here where you at ‘wifey’ .

” He stepped even closer kneeling down in my face and I could really smell him now.

His cologne mixed with the smoke from his blunt and his glare was powerful.

Dom had the kind of scent that entered your nostrils and shot in between your thighs.

“You out here actin’ like this life don’t come with rules.

Like you forgot the weight of that last name you married into. ”

I shook my head and dropped my eyes into tiny slits. “You’re fucking insane.”

He slowly grinned at me. “That’s funny, shit, I was just thinkin’ the same thing about you.

Dressin' up, lettin' that square ass nigga buy you drinks like we not at war and like I'ma go for that shit.

" He signaled one of his people with the nod of his head and another car rolled up; it was a matte black Charger.

One of his other people jumped out and popped the trunk without a word.

I followed Dom with my eyes as he walked over and lifted the trunk.

My stomach flipped a million times seeing Dru still in the same exact suit he was in hours ago when we were at Opus.

He was knocked out and his hands were tied behind his back.

I also peeped the little blood that was dried up near his temple.

I gasped and immediately frowned at my fucking husband, since that's what he wanted to act like today. "Is he dead?"

"He alive," Dom said. "Well, barely. I could've killed that bitch ass nigga."

I tried to step forward, but Dom grabbed my arm with a firm, yet possessive grip. I nearly fell forward since I was still tied at the ankles and wrist. My eyes shot daggers at him. "Release me dammit!" I growled out of frustration, plus, the gravel and dirt had the bottom of my feet hurting.

Once again, he gestured for one of them to release me. Roman pulled out a sharp pocketknife and within two snips I was free, and now my eyes focused back on Dru as Dom held his grip on my arm.

“Don’t do that,” he said.

“Do what?” I quizzed mad as hell at him right now. How dare him fucking kidnap me to teach me a lesson. I didn’t need to be taught; I needed him to fucking love me out loud; that’s what I needed.

“Make me jealous and then play innocent when it’s smoke,” he replied like it was nothing. The entire time he had this little crooked smirk on his face, yet his demeanor was still hard.

I stared at him, pure furious. I wanted to say I couldn’t believe he also kidnapped Dru, but then again, I could.

He was right, I knew exactly who I was married to and while I should’ve remained furious, his antics turned me on, and I hated it yet loved it at the same time.

“You’re out of your damn mind,” I hissed and shook my head.

“Maybe,” he said. “But I ain’t wrong.” He leaned down, with his full lips, inches away from mine.

“You almost got that nigga killed. All it took was one more smirk from him, or one more second of you lettin’ him lean too close to what’s mine, and I swear on everything I love...

” he paused for a second and his grip tightened just enough to make me feel it, “his wife would’ve been identifying his body in a fuckin’ morgue. ”

I swallowed hard, and he finally released me.

Before I could say anything or attempt to walk away, he looked down at my feet

knowing they had to be getting tore up by the rocks and gravel.

Dom scooped me in his arms cradling me like a baby as one of my arms loosely looped around his neck.

He started walking towards one of the black trucks like this entire situation wasn't insane and honestly, in our world, it wasn't.

What was insane was him kidnapping us. I didn't fight against Dom, and not because I forgave him, but because there was no way that I couldn't.

There was something about Dom and how he fearlessly took control of situations, even when he was dead ass wrong, that pulled me in like gravity.

He opened the car door for me like a gentleman and all I could do was stare at him. I was looking into the eyes of a man who was not only dangerous, but he was also slightly manipulative right now, while being a gentleman at the same damn time... just toxic as hell.

"Let's go," he said once he secured me inside before hopping in himself. His driver was waiting for the words giving him permission to pull off.

"I hate you." I groaned not meaning it at all. It wasn't him that I hated, I just hated the way I loved him because it was in a way that I wasn't so sure he would ever love me.

Instead of taking my insult, he winked at me. "I know. I don't share Carmen. Not my name, not my business, and not my woman."

Once again, I narrowed my eyes. "You don't want me," I snapped. "You just want to own me Dom."

He slightly furrowed his brows. “Same difference in my world, baby.”

I damn near swung on Dom as I balled my fist with my lips tight. However, deep down, I still didn’t want to run because no matter how mad I was... I understood. I understood because I knew what I signed up for, and I knew the game.

“Listen, it could be anybody in the world, just not her.” I sighed.

“I don’t want her...”

It was more I would’ve said, but I chose not to, instead I thought about Dru. I really liked him, and he seemed like a decent guy. I couldn’t let him get killed behind this cat and mouse game with Dom and me.

“Let him live Dom,” I said in a whispered tone with tightened jaws.

“I’mma let him live ‘cause I still trust you, but the second I see a faulty line again-” He leaned in, whispering against my ear as his sexy voice vibrated off my earlobe.

“You won’t recognize what I do to him or the next nigga who forgets who you belong to.

” He then kissed my lips causing a chill to run down my spine in a good way before signaling for the driver to pull off.

We left some of his people with Dru, but I felt better knowing they were going to let him go.

The rest of them followed us as we rode off into the Miami streets in silence.

The fact that Dom was jealous told me everything I needed to know, and hopefully

those barriers of walls would continue to break.

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The ride back was quiet, and it wasn't the kind of silence that came from peace either.

It was the silence full of tension because I knew that Dom really would've killed Dru and then his blood would've been on my hands, and on my end the reminder was loud and clear.

As long as I was Mrs. Dominic Royal, I could never forget my role, and I wouldn't either.

However, I was still a woman and even the strongest of us had a fucking breaking point.

The truck was full of unsaid words, and I couldn't stand it.

It almost felt like a bad storm about to creep up from the clouds that we didn't see coming, or at least that's how I felt.

Dom didn't say shit and neither did I but every now and then I would catch him taking glances at me with a hard, expressionless demeanor on his face.

I wasn't sure if he was full of pride right now, or maybe it was the both of us being full of pride at this moment which is why we didn't speak.

Every time I blinked, I saw Dru's body laid out in that trunk like he was a discarded suit bag or something.

I wasn't scared; I was actually pissed because Dom didn't just draw blood with that stunt he pulled.

He drew a fucking line and was daring me to cross it.

We pulled back into the private garage beneath my building.

My nude YSL heels had been left here earlier when they flew off of my feet during the tussle, trying to avoid being kidnapped.

I was fighting like my life depended on it because in that moment, it did.

However, the heels were nowhere to be found, just like the shattered pieces of my phone or my purse.

It was as if nothing never happened; like the whole damn kidnapping was just a figment of my paranoia or all in my imagination.

That was how Dom did though, he made moves then erased the mess before anybody would notice.

We stepped into the elevator once again silent as I propped my arms across my chest with a blank glare on my face.

I didn't look at him and I didn't need to because I could feel his energy, and he was still very calm while I was piping hot on the inside.

Dom followed me up, and the second the elevator doors slid open, I walked straight to the master suite, peeled my dress over my head and dropped it in the hallway, not giving a single fuck if he watched or not. Which, of course, he did.

I kicked the bathroom door open, flipped the shower on, and stepped under the steaming water trying to wash this morning away leaving it a memory.

I heard him walk in before I saw him as the faint scuff of his Prada sneakers walked across the marble tile.

He was leaning against the wall, with his arms folded.

His tattooed sleeves on his arm were sexy.

I sighed as the water dripped down my spine and over the curve of my ass.

"You got something to say 'husband'?" I asked without turning to look at him.

"Just waitin' to see if this the part where you get loud or smart first, 'wifey'." He replied matching my energy because he knew that I was being sarcastic. "Say what the fuck you gotta say Carmen."

My hand slapped against the wet tile. "That was a fucked-up move, Dom."

He shrugged. "Maybe, it was, maybe it wasn't, but I guarantee that shit worked. You know what it is with me Carmen, so I don't know why you needed a fuckin' reminder."

I slowly turned around as the water slid over my lashes, and then my face. "You think watching me shower is gon' undo what you did?"

"Nah," he replied in a low voice. "But it reminds you I never left and never plan to leave. I don't give a fuck how mad you are at me."

I just stared at him. His Glock was tucked in the small of his waist and his dark,

chestnut-colored eyes were piercing through my soul.

He didn't attempt to move. Instead, he just stood there like a king who already knew the board was his while watching that one piece that still had a mind of her own; the fucking queen.

"You're being a manipulative muhfucka right now Dom." I said as I finally reached for the Vanilla Bean and Pomegranate bath wash.

"And you love it," he shot back unfazed.

It got quiet again for a spit second as the steam fogged the mirror behind where he stood.

"You think I crossed the line?" He asked pushing off the wall and stepped closer, standing at the edge of the glass; he still didn't come in the shower, but he invaded my space without asking for permission.

My eyes burned daggers through his ass. As long as I'd known Dom I couldn't ever remember being this fucking mad at him.

"Yes! You almost did!"

"Almost?" he asked. "I crossed it, stepped over that muhfucka, and did it with both feet."

"And that's supposed to make it better?"

"No. That's just me bein' real. You wanna move like you single, Carmen, like you forgot who you tied yourself to, then I gotta remind you what the last name Royal really means."

"You could've come to me like a man," I snapped.

"And you could've stayed outta bars with clowns in suits thinkin' they had a shot."

My eyes dropped into tiny slits as that familiar warmth shot between my thighs.
"You're jealous?"

He grinned. "You damn right. I'm fuckin' stupid when it comes to what's mine and my name."

I let the water continue rinsing down my face, as my eyes burned with tears that I refuse to let fall. "I don't fucking belong to you."

He finally stepped back and lowered his gaze. "No, baby. You belong with me."

That was the problem right there because somewhere between courtrooms, coverups, bloodstains, the trenches, and power plays...

I did belong with him but at what cost? I shut the water off and grabbed a towel.

I wrapped it tightly around my body as I stepped out after the last drop of water hit the tile.

My eyes briefly locked with his again. Dom didn't try to touch me, kiss me, or none of that.

He just stood there contemplating and hot chills shot down my entire body in his presence.

It wasn't a damn secret that I was still mad...

literally pissed the fuck off, and I wasn't hiding the shit from him.

I walked out of the bathroom wrapped in nothing but a thick white towel, wet silky thighs, and my hair tied in a silk wrap.

Dom always loved a good show, I gave it to him without words, and it wasn't to seduce his ass either, but to remind him that I was never pressed...

not by him or nobody else for that matter.

He followed me out and sat on the edge of my bed with his elbows on his knees, and his eyes never leaving my body.

I breezed past him as I lotion my legs without shame, opening drawers and closing drawers as I searched for something to put on.

All he ever did was watch me and every time it felt like he was purposely doing it so he could learn a little more about me.

Like now, he was learning my emotions of being vulnerable and expressing hurt.

"The war's official," he said finally spoke.

"I know," I replied, unbothered now rubbing shea butter across my collarbone. "I got the text." I rolled my eyes and continued doing me.

He glanced at me. "And yet, you were on your way to meet that nigga Dru for breakfast."

I paused, then met his gaze with my finger pointed at him. "That's where you're wrong. I was going to cancel... but you didn't give me the benefit of doubt before

you kidnapped me to teach me a lesson.”

He didn’t respond and I could tell he was getting a kick out of this shit although his glare was cold.

“I ain’t stupid, Dom,” I continued. “When that alert hit, I was on my way to make that call. I was gonna tell him it wasn’t safe, that I had to back out.

” I turned towards him with my towel still wrapped around my body.

“But you didn’t give me the chance. You kidnapped me before I could prove where I stood. ”

“That still don’t explain why he was even an option,” he replied.

I sighed long and hard. “Because something’s missing,” I said quietly.

“It’s not the lifestyle, not the money, and not the power because we have all of that.

” I then pointed to myself. “I got all that... besides companionship or intimacy that ain’t tied to coverups and bulletproof plans.

” I shook my head. “Sometimes I just want more, and that’s why I entertained Dru.

” I paused once again and then sighed. “You didn’t have to hurt him. ”

At first Dom didn’t reply, and usually his silence said everything. My chest tightened as my thoughts shifted to Dru. If he was dead, it would be all my fault. I still pictured him unconscious in that trunk with his tie loose, and dried blood near his temple. “Is he okay?” I asked.

Dom stared at me with his jaws tight. “He’s alive.”

“Dom, please don’t touch him again,” I said firmly. “Please. It ain’t his fault.”

“The next time you request for me to not touch another nigga like you care, I’mma do it just for fun. Hopefully, it won’t be a next time.” He replied to me not promising shit.

I turned away, grabbing my other phone from the charger I left on the nightstand and read the email when I heard the alert reminding me that Dique had an DNA scheduled today.

For the first time this morning, I smirked slightly and rolled my eyes.

I hit his name in my contacts and pressed call.

It rang twice before his voice came through sounding raspy as hell.

“Wassup, sis?”

“Don’t ‘wassup’ me. I just got the reminder. You better get your ass to that DNA appointment before Keondra has another field day with your ass.”

He groaned. “Man, not this early...”

“I’m not playing, Dique. I went out of my way to get this done asap so handle it.”

“Ight, ight, damn,” he mumbled. “I’m goin’.... she gon’ be there?”

“Hell no,” I retorted. “I can’t have you in there about to kill that girl.”

“Whew, good lookin’ sis. Ight I’m ‘bout to go. How long it take for those results to

come back? I need them muhfuckas back as soon as they swab my mouth. They can swab my dick too if that's gon' speed this process up. I gotta get Kill Bill and her Jr., the fuck out my life."

"Bye Dique!" I giggled before hanging up and turning back to Dom in a stare down.

I couldn't even be angry with myself for being angry with him because these emotions were raw.

I had never felt this strongly until we crossed that line, we swore we wouldn't and while that didn't take away from the true Boss that I am, the truth is, I was still a woman and worth the fight.

"You hungry?" he finally asked breaking the silence once again. Out of all things to ask he wanted to know if I was hungry.

I just blinked at him with a confused look on my face. "Excuse me?"

He cracked a small smile. "Shit, I had to check... you know, since you missed breakfast this mornin' and all."

I rolled my eyes and walked past him, but my mind was racing because no matter how hard I tried to hate him in the moment... I was already fucked up about Dom and always had been. The love I had for his ass scared me more than a damn bullet ever did because truthfully, we all had to go one day.

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Carmen was actin' like she ain't know I'd risk it all for her as she moved around her condo tight-lipped, putting dishes and shit away like they just washed themselves.

That soft silk robe that hung off her body didn't have no business looking that fuckin' good, but she was doing it on purpose, and I knew she was because she had ample amount of time to get dressed and now, she was trying to play it cool while givin' me a glance of what I'd be missing if another nigga had it.

I leaned against her granite countertop with my arms folded across my chest watching her like I had all the time in the world.

The scent of her condo smelled like eucalyptus, along with the warmth from the steam of her shower still lingering.

She made Alexa activate and then in the next few minutes she had her playlist going low in the background as Sade's voice floated around softly through the open space making the moment feel too intimate for my liking.

She ain't say a word. Just clinked a glass into the cabinet and walked past me with this scent of fresh shea butter and patience I didn't have.

I followed her, slow, controlled. She was tryna act like the night before ain't happen.

Like I ain't throw her whole world off when I showed her what real obsession looked like.

Like I ain't snatch that man out the picture and reminded her who the fuck I was.

So, this what we doin'? I thought to myself allowing her to play her lil' game and let her float around her space in peace like she wasn't in my thoughts last night.

.. like I ain't almost kill a nigga hours before over her.

.. like she ain't have my whole chest caved in without even trying.

Carmen knew for a fact this wasn't me because I didn't beg, I didn't chase, and I damn sho' didn't wait around for answers, but yet, I was still here because truthfully, I did care.

I followed her again. This time, I ain't just follow either.

I caught her by the wrist, turned her body into mine, and gently pressed her back up against the wall.

"You done actin'?" I asked in a serious tone with my face inches from hers.

She exhaled hard allowing her chest to heave just a little.

Her eyes soft, yet hard eyes met mine. She probably wanted to fire on my ass, but she held it in.

The perfect line of her jaws were tight, and she had her hand wrapped around the bottle of water like she damn near wanted to take her anger out on it.

I ignored that shit and leaned in. I brushed my lips gently over her ear taking in her scent, which made my dick jump.

"You wanna know what pisses me off the most?" I whispered. Carmen didn't say shit; she stayed quiet with her full lips still tight. "That you still act like you don't

already got me.”

Finally... she exhaled. “You say that shit,” she said.

“But I don’t feel it. You still got ghosts, Dom...

. and you don’t let nobody close enough to feel what’s real.

So how can you even say some shit like that to me?

Yes, I’m tough because that’s how I survive this world.

Yes, I know how to take my feelings out of it.

Yes, I know you technically don’t owe me a damn thing.

You changed my life, and I’ll always appreciate that.

You don’t think I know you’re with other women?

I do! But I never imagined feeling the way I felt actually hearing it,” she spat.

I knew when to stand down and let her vent, so I didn’t say a word.

I stepped back just a little and let her breathe and let it out.

She’s the only fuckin’ female I’d ever do that shit for.

Had it been anyone else, they would’ve been talking to the door ‘cause I would’ve been out that muhfucka.

“I’m not stupid,” she continued. “I see how you protect me, and I see how you watch me but it’s like you’re still scared to give me the one thing I never had. ”

I cocked my head to the side and asked, “What’s that?”

She bit her bottom lip and spoke barely above a whisper. “Your heart Dom.”

My pulse picked up ‘cause this shit caught me off guard like it usually did when she brought it up.

I never dealt with no female as vocal as Carmen so no other woman ever said shit to me like that ‘cause they knew it would never happen but here Carmen was standing strong and vulnerable at the same time.

I stared at her with my own eyes locked in like I was peeping my own reflection.

“You got it,” I said. “Shit, you been had it. You just didn’t know how deep I buried it...

but it’s yours. You think I’m kidnapping you, saving you from wasting yo’ time with a pussy ass nigga if it wasn’t?

I hope any nigga that thinks they can have what’s mine is ready to die ‘bout that pussy, cause I know I am.”

Her eyes watered just a little, but she blinked the emotions away before it could drop.

That was Carmen though, even when she was pissed, she was poised and always knew how to pull herself together even when her insides were on fire.

She ain’t never folded before and she didn’t now.

She stepped into me and slid her arms around my waist before laying her head against my chest. Instead of thinking too much on it, I held her tight.

Like we was both trying to get in tune with each other.

We stood there for a minute, maybe even two just allowin' our bodies to sync and our heartbeats to match.

For the first time I was realizing money and protection wasn't enough 'cause she would always want more. She was trying to stay loyal, but the void needed to be felt, and she wanted what every woman wanted... real love... the kind that I didn't know if I could give.

I couldn't say I was gon' be perfect but I was willing to try to make her feel better if I could.

"I know we in the middle of all this," I said.

"The beef, the plots, the pressure... but I'm gon' make time for you... just us."

Carmen looked up at me confused. Since we'd been knowing each other, we had never done shit together without business being involved. She ain't reply so I continued explaining. "I'ma plan somethin'. Just one day away with no crew, no business, and no fuckin' chaos. Just me and you."

She didn't say yes but she ain't say no either, not that she would. I pulled my phone out and hit Tone's line while Carmen walked over to the window adjusting her robe while staring out over the city like she was tryna figure out how she got so caught up.

"Yo," Tone answered quick.

“You on Victoria watch,” I said. “Me and Carmen gotta disappear for a lil bit tomorrow. I don’t have many details, just be ready though, ain’t no threat.”

Tone knew better than to ask questions unless he had to. He knew if it was danger, we would’ve been said and not on this phone. “Say less. You want a team on rotation?”

“Yeah, a shadow only but I don’t want no interruptions.”

“Bet.” He replied, “She been quiet, by the way... but her ass be watchin’ everything.”

“She always is,” I mumbled. I ain’t hate Victoria, wasn’t no need to act like I did. I just didn’t want to be caught up with her ass or her to think for a split second I was about to be her savior. If she wanted somebody to blame, she should blame her bitch ass uncle.

I hung up and walked over to Carmen. I slid my arms around her from the back, and she leaned into me without resistance. That’s how I knew I was still good. My biggest fear was feeling like this shit was a real marriage, but shit was starting to get too complicated and hard to ignore.

“I mean what I said,” I told her, rubbing my lips across the nape of her neck. “You ain’t just my attorney. You my peace... and right now? That’s more valuable than any plug or power move in my eyes.”

She turned around slowly, looking up at me through those long lashes. “Then protect your peace, Dom.”

“I am,” I said before kissing her and not like last time.

I turned her around and gently gripped her neck with one hand before slipping my

tongue in the warmth of her mouth allowing my tongue to explore her mouth and vice versa.

This one was real slow and once again, she ain't fold, she matched my energy.

Carmen was lost in my touch when I slipped two fingers inside of her soaking pussy, I hooked the tip of my two fingers and gently worked her spot for a few seconds.

She allowed a moan to involuntarily escape her mouth before I pulled them out.

Looking dead in her eyes, I slipped my fingers into my mouth and licked her juices.

I would've loved to keep going, but I still had shit to do.

Carmen understood, I saw it in her eyes, and that's why I fucked with her.

What was understood didn't need to be explained right now.

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The second I stepped out of Carmen's condo, shit hit different and not because of the breeze, 'cause Miami always had that hot ass humid kiss, but because my mind was still wrapped around her and it shouldn't have been.

It was the way she looked at me, the way she once again reminded me that she wanted my heart, and that shit did something to me.

But as usual, I had business to handle first.

I pulled off in the black matte GLE that I kept in her garage, already knowing my people were tailing me two cars behind.

I wasn't taking no chances, especially not now with this bullshit going on.

After I made a call to O'Shynn telling her what I needed her to do, I headed straight to her spot.

She stayed in one of the high-rise units over the water too, and her shit was bougie as hell, but she earned every bit of it.

When I pulled up, her guards recognized the whip, and the elevator was already waiting for me like they knew I was coming.

Her penthouse was lit in soft gold tones, the candles was on low, and her silk robe flowed when she opened the door.

My lil sister was fresh-faced, with long red nails, and the dame boss ass energy she

always carried, like a queen who didn't flinch for no nigga.

O'Shynn's penthouse felt like stepping into a luxury museum.

Glass was everywhere with sculptures worth more than most muhfuckas rent but it was her vibe though, that modern, yet dangerous look.

She made sure even her space said she was that bitch.

"Took you long enough," she said, already walking away, with her heels clacking.

"I got caught up," I replied, following her inside.

"You look like you been in your feelings," she chuckled over her shoulder. "Carmen? I heard you kidnapped my girl this morning."

I didn't respond. I just gave her a cold, blank stare so she continued. "Bahamas? Really?" she asked, raising a brow while now scrolling on her MacBook. "You tryna do something sweet in the middle of a war?"

"I ain't ask for your commentary O'Shynn," I lightly smirked slightly running my hand over the top of my waves before adjusting my Glock in the small of my back.

"Just book the jet and make sure she feel like a queen when we land. You know the vibes and all that shit females like. I need flowers, candles, and a private beach villa."

O'Shynn laughed, "Aight, Dom. I gotchu. But you soft as hell right now."

"Nah, just real when it comes to my woman."

She raised a brow. "Ohhh so now she's yo' woman huh? Yeah, shit is definitely

taking a shift and I kinda like it.”

She didn’t say nothing else, but I caught the nod of respect. I wasn’t about to let Carmen think she was out here doing this shit alone. She held me down on the legal side when she didn’t have to. Now it was time I did the same for her emotionally, even if just for 24 hours.

After a few minutes, O’Shynn motioned to the laptop on her island. “I already got options pulled up for the Bahamas. The private jet leaves in the morning. I made sure the villa’s exclusive too with a private pool, personal chef, and enough champagne to bathe in if she’s into that kinda shit.”

My eyes scanned over O’Shynn’s body, and I frowned.

Something about her aura was dark, almost kinky like but I couldn’t put my finger on it.

“What kinda shit you be into O?” I questioned.

With her eyes still fixated on the screen, she smirked and ignored me.

I glanced at the photos on her screen. Shit looked like royalty.

“Dope... and make sure she got them flowers and the balloons too.

Some personal touch type shit. Something she ain't expect.”

O’Shynn gave me a rare grin. “Look at you. The Miami King bein’ soft. Love must got you stupid.”

“Nah,” I said. “It got me focused.”

She tapped in a few things, then turned serious. “We gotta talk about the club though.”

“What about it?” I asked. As far as I knew, the paper was nice, and the club wasn’t flagged.

“Security caught a white Escalade sitting in the cut across the street three nights in a row. It wasn’t no tags, with tinted windows. It’s been posted from 10PM to close. Literally just... sitting and I’m just finding out.”

My jaw slightly tightened. “El Blanca, El Dorado, or a Fed tap?” I asked.

She nodded. “That’s what we think. Dique says it’s got snake energy all over it though.”

“I’ll handle it,” I replied in a flat tone. “Myself.”

“You sure? They might be hoping you get outta character.”

“They don’t know what character is. I am the fuckin’ character.”

Just then, the door opened again. Dique strolled in smelling like Dior Sauvage and weed. “Ayo,” he called out with his gold chain swinging. “I done took the fuckin’ test. I hope that baby ain’t mine or we gon’ have problems.”

I simply nodded my head. “I’m glad you really went.”

“Hell yeah,” he said, flopping on the velvet couch. “Keondra was mad as hell when I walked out with shades on and a straight face. Her ass was waitin’ on a nigga in the parking lot clockin’ me like tea. I told her if that child ain’t mine, I’m changin’ my fuckin’ number.”

O'Shynn chuckled. "You a damn fool."

"But I'm a responsible fool from here on out, fuck this shit. Carmen hittin' her ass with that cease and desist was the best shit she could've done. Ain't no bitch bout to run to the blogs on me."

"You headed back west?" I asked noticing the large Louis Vuitton duffle he was carrying.

"Yeah, only for three days though," he said. "Gotta check the ports and link with them dudes pushin' the bikes and shit. The streets whisperin' too loud right now. I need to shut that down before it gets too loud. I need to check on the new spot off Crenshaw and Slauson too."

"Keep your burners on you," I said. "And don't let nobody follow you."

He stood up before dappin' me up. "Always ten toes slime... you know this."

I nodded. "Let me know soon as you land."

Dique hugged O'Shynn and left. O'Shynn then stood behind her custom bar pouring two shots of Reposado. "Toast," she said, raising her glass. "To love, war, and loyalty... and the fuckin' good life cause this shit don't get no better than this."

I clinked glasses with her and took my shot to the head. "And to keepin' our empire out the feds' fuckin' mouth."

I could feel the lil buzz in the air and it wasn't from the liquor either.

Tomorrow I was taking Carmen out the chaos and into peace, some shit I had never done even if it was only for one day.

I owed her that and maybe I owed it to myself too.

But first... I had to make somebody disappear...

whoever was in that white Escalade was gon' die tonight.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:28 pm

The moment I stepped back into my penthouse it was a breath of fresh air.

Tone was sitting on the edge of the sectional in the living room with his phone in his hand but always alert.

While Victoria was sitting on the barstool with her legs crossed like she wasn't feeling some type of way on the inside, but I knew better.

She tried to act cool, sipping on some water like her world wasn't rattled.

Her vibe was just different, and I could feel it.

I'd been around enough snakes and schemers to know when somebody was trying too hard to act unbothered.

She was bothered alright, but she wasn't bold enough to question me and if she knew what was good for her, she better had played her cards right.

I tossed my keys on the marble counter and gave Tone a quick nod. "You good?" I asked.

"Always," he said with that same low tone he always had. "You?"

I didn't answer, I just looked toward Victoria and then grabbed my phone and shot a quick text to the housekeeper.

I only hit her line when it was time to travel.

She knew what to do, pack light, pack smart, and pack dangerous.

I needed all my shit, my duffle, the Glock, the burner phones, clean IDs, and my preferred colognes and shit.

Twenty minutes later, she was inside, moving like she knew the place like the back of her hand. Victoria watched but didn't ask no questions. She wanted to and I could see it in her eyes. She just ain't have the heart to.... not with me.

"I'm leavin' for a couple days," I finally said, breaking the silence while I leaned on the edge of the couch.

"You'll be here under Tone and the crew's watch.

Don't try shit, don't think shit, and don't let nothin' happen to you.

You get clipped while I'm gone, I'm sendin' yo' uncle a fuckin' gift basket with yo' body in it. "

She pursed her lips together and squinted her eyes while tightening her jaws, but she didn't say a word.

That was a smart move. Right then, my phone buzzed, and El Blanca's name flashed across the screen.

I stared at the name for a second before answering, already knowing what kind of energy he was on.

"Where are we with the Moreno front?!" he barked.

I sat back on the armrest of the couch with the phone tucked between my shoulder

and cheek. “Still scopin’ it.” I said unbothered like a muhfucka.

“You’re dragging your feet, Royal. I said burn the motherfucker down. You slipping?”

“Nah,” I replied coolly. “I just don’t move sloppy. I said I’d handle it so stay in yo’ lane till I do.”

There was a long silent pause and then a dark chuckle. “Seems like you’re pulling away,” he said in a low threatening voice. “Don’t forget who built you.”

I smirked. “You ain’t build me, El Blanca. You opened a door, and I turned that shit into a fuckin’ kingdom.”

I hung up before he could reply because El Blanca had me fucked up.

I was one of the most loyal muhfuckas when it came to him, now he wanted to weigh egos and wipe me out.

By the time the maid was done, and the sun started to fade behind the skyline, my black motorcycle was warmed up and ready to go.

I changed into a full black fit, a black helmet, and had a black chopper tucked under the seat ‘cause it was time to get on my king shit.

The streets always welcomed me like I never left and truthfully, I probably never would.

The wind kissed my face as I cut down through Brickell, past the neon lights and traffic lights that didn’t mean shit to me.

I wasn't obeying no laws tonight. I pulled up near the club, cut the engine off and waited like a thief in the night.

Five minutes... maybe ten later, I saw the white Escalade.

It was the same one security clocked watching O'Shynn's club with tinted windows, sitting low like it belonged in the city but wasn't really from it.

I didn't hesitate 'cause I had no time to waste. I yanked the chopper from the bike holster, revved up the engine, and swerved up to the driver's side. I didn't have time to talk nor ask questions. If you riding dirty around my family, you already chose yo' side so I lit that bitch up. "Pussy muhfuckas!" I growled.

The bullets tore through the Escalade like Swiss cheese.

The windows shattered, tires popped, and metal twisted.

I kept shooting until I saw heads drop. I didn't even wait to see who they were, and I didn't give a fuck.

If El Blanca sent them, they knew what time it was.

If it was El Dorado? Message received... if it was the Feds, I guess we'd soon find out.

I peeled off, cut through an alley, and hit a side street until I was just another bike in the wind.

I wasn't scared of no war 'cause I wasthe fuckin' war.

The effect of the chopper still shook through my arms, but it felt good to me.

I emptied the rest of the clip into the white Escalade as the glass flew like glitter.

The driver slumped to the side; another body dropped in the back.

They might've come with silencers and scope rifles if I'd given them the chance to get too comfortable, but I wasn't giving anybody that chance. This was far from a fucking warning.

I sped off before anybody could even blink and hit a hard right turn through the back alley.

I knew the layout of Brickell like the lines in the palms of my hands.

The city damn near bowed when I rode through it.

The wind once again slapped against my jawline as I dipped beneath the neon glow from the skyscraper windows and blew past tourists who didn't even know death had just rolled through behind them.

My phone buzzed once in my pocket. It was text from Tone.

Tone: You good?

I texted back without stopping: "Always."

By the time I hit the turn into my building's private garage, my adrenaline was still pumping full speed. I rolled my bike into its reserved spot, hopped off, and tugged my helmet off with one arm. I could feel the sweat trickling down my spine, but I wasn't tired.

I glanced at the other exotic cars lined up next to mine.

The matte black G-Wagon, deep gray Ferrari, bulletproof black Escalade, and the Bently truck...

my fleet... my kingdom on wheels. I used my finger to enter the elevator and rode the elevator up to the top floor.

The penthouse doors opened, and the scent of Versace candles my housekeeper always lit filled my nostrils, while the familiar smell of gunpowder still lingered in my nostrils and clung to my clothes.

I dropped the keys in the bowl at the entry, peeled off my shirt, and grabbed the pre-rolled joint from the humidor on my bar.

Lit it with my engraved torch lighter. Victoria was nowhere in sight, but Tone sat in the living room cleaning one of his guns with the phone tucked between his shoulder and his cheek.

I could tell he was going through it with his girl, so I kept walking.

I walked through the living room slow, before I stepped out onto the balcony and leaning shirtless on the railing as the city glistened beneath me.

Downtown Miami sparkled like a muhfucka.

Brickell always glowed, and I could still see the faint blue and red sirens flashing a few blocks down where that Escalade got turned into Swiss cheese, but I wasn't worried.

I took a slow pull on the joint, letting the smoke fill into my lungs before exhaling into the night air.

The warm breeze brushed over my chest, and I stood there like a fuckin' God.

My phone buzzed again catching my attention.

This time it was a message from O'Shynn: Flight's locked and the private jet leaves at 9AM. Everything's set in the Bahamas. Carmen's gonna love it. I think I need a raise.

I tapped out a simple response: "Appreciate you. Keep eyes on the streets... I gotchu."

I leaned back into one of the patio chairs, with the joint hanging between my fingers as my mind drifted to Carmen.

I thought about the way she looked in nothing but that towel earlier.

That slow glide of water down her back and the heat in her eyes from her being pissed.

She moved around me like she wanted to kill me and fuck me at the same time, and I loved that shit.

Even if I'd never admit it. Maybe I was a lil toxic, maybe not.

She'd do time for me, kill for me, and right now, in the middle of this war, she was the only woman whose presence didn't feel like a liability.

Yeah, I planned that trip for her, but if I was being real with myself, it was for me too.

Because for the first time in a long time, I wanted to feel something more than chasing

the guns and the butter.

I took another pull off the joint watching the smoke rise and vanish into the dark sky as I thought about El Blanca's ass.

"He might run everything else," I muttered to myself, flicking ash off the balcony.

"But he forgot who run this Miami shit."

I was mid-pull on my joint again when the sliding glass door behind me slid open, followed by heavy footsteps and an irritated sigh.

Tone stepped out on the balcony shirtless with his joggers hanging low and his big ass Cuban chain swinging.

He had that "my girl done got on my damn nerves" face written all over him.

He ran a hand down his jawline and mumbled, "Man, I swear... this woman gon' drive me to jump off this balcony."

I smirked. "She bitchin' huh?"

Tone flopped into the chair next to me with his phone in one hand.

"She just mad I ain't home again. Talkin' bout how the baby kickin' and I'm missin' all the special moments.

I told her, 'Ma, the only thing kickin' around here is bullets flyin' and bodies droppin'.

" He looked over at me with a serious face. "She ain't find that shit funny."

I nodded my head slowly. “Nigga, you gon’ get stabbed in yo’ sleep.”

Tone shook his head, then cracked a small smile. “She know I love her crazy ass.”

We sat in silence for a lil bit, just listening to shit moving around us.

Then he looked over at me. “So what’s up with you and Carmen?”

You tryna slide past the fact y’all was damn near makin’ soap operas earlier.

” Tone asked. I cracked a half smile but didn’t say shit ‘cause it really wasn’t nothing to say at all.

Tone caught that. “Ohhh, word? You on that type of time now?”

I finally answered, “I’m takin’ her to the Bahamas tomorrow.”

Tone sat up. “On the jet?”

I nodded. “Yeah.”

“That’s romantic as fuck for a kidnapper.” He grinned. “You know you ain’t right for snatchin’ her up like that, right?”

“She was actin’ out,” I said, flicking ash. “Sometimes you gotta pop out and remind niggas.”

Tone nodded, chuckling. “You toxic, bro.”

“And she love it.”

“She do,” he agreed. “Y’all gon’ laugh about all this shit one day. Probably with a baby crawlin’ around.” Tone leaned his elbows on his knees, glancing over. “You ever think you could be a one-woman man?”

I didn’t answer right away. Instead, I took another pull and allowed the smoke to swirl around my thoughts. Then I exhaled slowly. “One day... I’ll find out.”

Tone looked at me like he saw something deeper behind my words, then he stood up, patting my shoulder. “Until then, King, enjoy yo’ last days in the streets... ‘cause once that girl really lock yo’ ass down, you gon’ be out the game.”

He walked back inside, leaving me alone on the balcony again. And for the first time... I didn’t know if I minded that idea although it wouldn’t be no time soon.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:28 pm

As the sun rose, I found myself pacing in front of my laptop as the steam from the coffee in the mug in my hand filled the air in front of me.

The rich scent of hazelnut and espresso was the only thing keeping me grounded as my eyes skimmed the files for one of my high-profile clients, which was another arrogant dope-boy millionaire who thought money made him untouchable.

Although my fingers hovered over the keyboard, my mind wasn't really focused.

It drifted off to Dom, and to Dru as I side-eyed my phone on the desk debating on if I should check on Dru. All it took was one call but just as quick as the thought came, I shoved it back deep into the back of my mind because I was probably the last person he wanted to talk to anyway.

I sipped my coffee and minimized the legal documents so I could pull up the trail I left for the feds.

I smiled when I saw that they were still spinning in circles.

I had them tracking dummy shell companies in three different states.

By the time they realized the leads were dead, Royal Enterprises would have already flipped and cleaned whatever needed to be clean.

Checkmate... again , I thought to myself.

Then, I felt his presence before I even heard a sound. Dom's strong arms swept me

from the leather desk chair like I weighed nothing at all causing me to gasp looking up into his chestnut eyes, the same ones that always saw too deep into me.

“All that work shit is dead,” he said, in a low and possessive tone as his lips brushed against my cheek. “Get dressed. You mine for the day.”

I frowned. “Where we going?”

He smirked like the damn devil himself. “Bahamas.”

I blinked. “Dom... you serious?”

“When did I ever not be?”

That was all he said before he set me down and smacking me gently on my ass. “Go put somethin’ sexy on, ‘wifey’.”

“Humph, I guess I can if you’re really acting like a ‘husband’,” I replied in a sarcastic tone before going to get myself together while also packing my bag.

Forty minutes later, I was dressed in a caramel-colored maxi dress with a thigh-high slit, gold hoops, and shades that said ‘ bitch, I’m money’ just from one look .

Dom was in a black Versace tee, wearing a gold Cuban chain thick enough to fund a whole damn lawsuit, with jeans hugging his muscular frame.

He had his duffle thrown over his shoulder like he was still in the trap, and the Glock under his hoodie told me he wasn’t about to be caught slipping.

We moved like royalty as two blacked-out bulletproof Escalades waited curbside of my building.

Roman stood near the rear, nodding once as we approached the truck.

My heels sounded like drums clicking across the concrete as we slid into the backseat.

By the time we pulled into the private terminal at Opa-Locka Executive Airport, my jaw dropped looking at the red carpet...

a 'real' fucking red carpet lined with scattered rose petals that led to a jet.

The steps were down, and the Royal Enterprises logo shimmered on the side like it belonged to a true boss because it really did.

"Dom..." I whispered, catching my breath in my throat.

He took my hand and kissed the back of it, which was something he'd never done. Him seeing me with Dru must've really done something to him. "Told you... you mine today." He told me as he led me to the jet allowing me to walk ahead of him.

The inside of the jet was a dream come true with white leather seats, plush throw blankets, chilled champagne, with a handwritten note with my name in cursive waiting on the table. Even the walls were covered with nice floral arrangements pinned to them. Everything smelled like vanilla and leather.

As we buckled in, he pulled me close. "You good?" he asked, brushing a strand of hair off my face.

Dom was fine as hell, the finest man I ever seen in my life to be exact.

It was a lot of women who wanted him and no matter how standoffish he was about love, he was here with me which is something I knew for a fact no other female could

ever get from him.

Good dick, maybe... but this kind of treatment, absolutely not.

I nodded. "This is something I've never had."

"You got it now," he said in a serious tone. "So get used to it."

Dom's shadows sat in the back of the jet while Dom and I were caught up in our own world.

Dom smoked a fat joint while I sipped on my champagne.

I spent the most of my life being so hard, that for once I felt like it was okay to walk in my true feminine nature.

It was okay to be a boss but still be hard at the same time.

We arrived in the Bahamas in no time. The sun shined over the pretty water as we landed, and the palm trees swayed along with the breeze.

Two local black trucks were already waiting for us, parked discreetly near the tarmac.

Dom's people followed in the truck behind us and when we got to the villa, theirs was right next to ours.

The villa was a whole other story because luxury wasn't even the word.

We walked into a glass-walled estate tucked behind a lush garden entrance, and of course it was guarded.

It was decked out with marble floors and an infinity pool.

It was an open layout with fresh flowers lined along the entry, and in the center of the room was a bouquet of red orchids and a sign that said, 'Welcome to Paradise, Mrs. Royal.'

Dom saw the way I stopped in place swallowing the lump in my throat. He slid up behind me gripping my waist. "Ain't sayin' I'm perfect, Carmen... but I know what I want."

I turned to him with my brows raised. "And what's that?"

"You." He said not skipping a beat. "I know ain't no other female gettin' this shit but you."

Before I could respond, a chef came in with two trays, respectfully nodding to acknowledge us before heading to the gourmet kitchen.

The smells of jerk seafood and tropical fruits already filled the air but none of that shit compared to the heat in Dom's eyes.

Even in paradise... he was still Dom... still the King of Miami...

still the man every woman wanted but only one had by law.

The island sun hit different when it was kissing your skin in paradise.

It was the kind of warmth that slid over your whole body making it feel like hot silk; while making you forget the chaos you left behind.

Dom and I walked along the shoreline with our bare feet sinking into the wet sand

while the water from the ocean occasionally played peek-a-boo with our ankles.

It was only a matter of time before Dom was paying for us to get on the banana boat and for the first time in a long time, I was laughing... like, really laughing.

“Yo, Carmen, you look like you about to bust yo’ ass.” Dom grinned as he adjusted his life vest, motioning to the banana boat bobbing in the water.

“Boy, please. I’m Trinidadian. I’ve been swimming since I was two.” I smirked, stepping into the water like I wasn’t scared of falling off the damn thing.

We hopped on the banana boat with the Bahamian crew hyping us up, while they sped through the waves. I was screaming and laughing so hard, I had tears rolling down my face. Dom was behind me, holding on, yelling in my ear, “Don’t fall! I ain’t diving for you!”

All I could do was laugh because he did not play about the ocean.

All he kept talking about were sharks and shit.

We fell off twice and got back up both times.

Afterward, we sat on the dock with fresh pineapple drinks in our hands, and the rum inside of them hit just right.

The local vendor with thick dreadlocks and a welcoming smile chopped up conch for a fresh salad conch salad as he tapped the knife against the shell of the conch like he was waiting for something to pop out and when it did, he beat it.

“You have to beat the meat real good,” the Bahamian man chuckled, pounding it with a mallet. “That’s what gets the conch tender.”

Dom looked at me and raised an eyebrow. “You hear that? Beat the meat, wifey. Life lessons.”

I nearly choked on my drink. “Grow up,” I laughed, nudging him.

After that, we hit the local market and Dom let me explore while two of his shadows watched from a distance, posted in plain clothes, seemingly unbothered.

You could tell they were trained to kill, but today, they were just shadows...

protecting us if needed. I bought a handmade anklet from a sweet old lady who had a lot of stories to tell.

Dom let me wander but never strayed far away.

He watched me like I was the only thing moving in a world full of distractions.

When the sun began to settle, we returned to the villa to find a private dinner set up on the beach.

A candle-lit table was surrounded by rose petals and string lights dangled from a low wooden pergola, and there was a full-course meal served to us by a private chef who disappeared after presenting the food.

I had to admit; I was floored. Dom had really outdone himself.

“This you?” I asked, looking at Dom, still in a white linen shirt that was open exposing his chest as his tattoos peeked through with the chains gleaming under the moonlight.

“Nah, this us,” he replied, sliding my chair back for me like a real gentleman. Over

dinner, we ate grilled lobster tails, garlic butter shrimp, and saffron rice with a little citrus glaze to it. The liquor flowed and so did the conversation.

“You didn’t have to do all this,” I whispered, as propped my hand underneath my chin.

“I did,” Dom simply replied. “I needed you to know that I appreciate you. I ain’t perfect, but I’m tryin’, Carmen.”

I nodded as the breeze swept through the curls in my hair. “I appreciate it, Dom... I really do... but I don’t want to keep feeling like I’m just filling time in your life until you’re ready.”

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He looked at me, with that deep glare. “You got my heart already. It’s just been through war, and I can’t promise I’m a be perfect tomorrow. All I can promise is I’m makin’ room for you, and I’m not lettin’ nobody else in it.”

I sat with that for a second letting it marinate. “I get it,” I said. “But while you’re figuring it out, keep your extracurriculars away from me. I don’t need to know, don’t need to hear, and I damn sure won’t wait a decade for you to figure it out.”

He simply nodded his head. “Noted, wifey. Loud and clear.”

Then he made a call, right there at the table, speaking low into his phone. “Push the flight back. We takin’ one more day.” He looked at me afterwards, flashing that cocky smile... that Miami King smile. “I want more time with you... you deserve it.”

For the first time in forever, I actually felt chosen.

After we finished dinner, we went inside the villa and the soft sounds of ocean waves crept through the open sliding doors, along with the sounds of the blending with the faint music playing from the villa’s surround sound speakers.

I stood in front of the floor-to-ceiling mirror in the bathroom, unpinning my curls, letting my hair fall down the middle of my back.

The silk robe laid clung against my body like it was made just for me hugging my shape.

It was a deep red just like all that the wine I’d been drinking.

My heart and mind was still digesting his words from earlier.

I didn't know what it was about this man.

He could piss me off and melt me in the same damn breath.

When I stepped out into the bedroom, he was on the edge of the bed now shirtless, wearing black boxers, and rolling a blunt like he didn't have a worry in the world.

His chain swung low as it rested on his chest, and his tattoos danced under the golden light from the dimmed lamps.

He looked up with his eyes locking with mine. "You always gotta be that muhfuckin' fine when I'm tryna chill?"

I raised a brow and crossed my arms. "You saying I'm stressing you out, King? Can't be."

He grinned as he slowly licked the blunt wrap before sealing it. "Hell yeah... and I like that shit." I chuckled. He sparked it up, took a pull, and patted the spot beside him.

I climbed into bed but didn't lay down. Instead, I sat with my legs crossed facing him. "You ever wonder what this could've been like if we didn't meet under those circumstances?"

Dom leaned back on one arm and exhaled a thick cloud of smoke through his nostrils. "Nah. I don't wonder... I know. You probably would've been mine either way."

I let out a chuckle in disbelief. "You real sure of yourself?"

“I am.”

His words lingered for a few seconds and for a while, we just sat in silence.

The air was thick and familiar how it always got with the kind of energy that couldn't be explained with words.

It had always been like that with us. He passed me the joint.

I took it and slowly inhaled before placing my lips on top of Dom's giving him a shot gun.

I didn't even smoke like that, but something about being with him made everything feel different and safer...

or maybe this whole trip was dangerous to my feelings. I couldn't tell the difference anymore.

“You know the feds gon' be back on your ass soon,” I finally said with my eyes low, and voice mellowed out. “They don't forget, Dom.”

He nodded. “Let 'em come. That's why I got you, right?”

My lips formed into a smirk. “I'm not your fucking shield.”

“Nah,” he said now sitting up and grabbing my waist, pulling me close. “You my weapon.”

Those damn words hit deeper than I actually wanted them to.

That's what made loving Dom dangerous for me.

He could fuck you up emotionally and still make you feel like the most powerful woman in the world.

He slid the robe off my shoulders without rushing and without asking as he kissed along my collarbone, down to my breast and hardened nipples.

His hands roamed my body like it was something scared.

I allowed him to touch me in ways he never did before because this time, I felt the emotional connection and not because I needed the sex, but because I needed to feel close to him... I needed everything to feel real.

Dom then stood up and held me up propping my legs over his shoulders as he gently pushed my backside up against the wall until my bare pussy was positioned right in his face.

I slowly tossed my head back anticipating feeling his tongue on my pussy and when he slithered it over my silky opening, I gasped.

“Ssssss.”

I found comfort in his strong arms, enough to ride his face like I was riding a damn horse confident he wouldn't be dropping me.

The grip he hand on my ass cheeks were secure as he lightly sucked and slithered his tongue right above my swollen slit before resting his soft lips on it gently sucking.

Dom's tongue moved like pro and with his eyes focused, I could tell he didn't want to miss the show.

His face was buried so deep in it I could no longer see his nose.

“Fuckkkkk,” I moaned steadily bucking my hips.

“This my pussy,” he groaned. “Don’t ever forget that shit.”

I felt my eyes rolling in the back of my head.

Dom was doing things with his tongue that I didn’t even know was possible, especially when I felt the very tip of his tongue begin to vibrate like a machine against my clit on the verge of exploding.

The soft sounds of the breeze, the ocean waves and the music had me gone to another world as the headmaster delivered in every single way.

My legs began to quake around his shoulders, and I felt like I was about to slip but Dom wasn’t having it as he secured me again without missing a beat.

All of my blood rushed to the middle as my eyes began to water.

I was so loud, I knew they probably could hear me in all of the other villas, but I didn’t care.

“I’m about to cum Dom, ouuuu King, I’m about to cummm.

Oh, my goshhhhhh!” I cried buckling around him trying to desperately catch my breath and stop the tears from cascading out the side of my eyes, but it was too late.

Dom didn’t stop either, instead he held me tighter and kept licking using the flattest part of his tongue being extremely gentle knowing that it was very sensitive down there. “Dommmmm,” I cried.

“What wifey, it taste good. Shit like water down here... Fiji.”

I damn near had to fight to be let down and when he finally did, I used the tips of my fingers to lightly push his backside on the bed.

His heavy dick print was peeking through his black briefs damn near suffocating.

My mouth began to water while my adrenaline was still pumping and my pussy still tingling. "I wanna taste you Dom," I cooed.

"Do yo' thang then Carmen," he replied waiting on me to make the next move with his hard glare never leaving my body. Dom had the most beautiful, ripped in the right place body I'd ever seen and from the way he ate me up and caressed my body, I could tell that he felt the same.

I slowly dropped to my knees and slid his briefs all the way down until they formed a puddle around his ankles.

Even his dick smelled like Creed, just good, pretty, juicy with the thick veins running through it almost putting me in the mind of a long, thick snicker bar.

Dom never took his eyes off of me as I put as much of his dick into my mouth as the length would allow me to.

I instantly thought about Victoria sucking his dick and almost stopped feeling like I wanted to gag just thinking about it, but I got myself under control.

I closed my eyes and got in the groove using one hand to jack the bottom as my tongue and mouth went to work on the rest. "Mmmm this dick so fucking tasty," I said between slurps trying to give him the nastiest head he ever had in his life.

I wanted Dom to feel the back of my throat which also allowed me to build up more saliva.

Dom gently placed his tattooed hand on top of my head as it bobbed up and down. “Damn Carmen,” he groaned exposing that sexy vein ran down the middle of his forehead when he was stimulated. The lights glistening on his skin made everything look even better. “That’s right, eat that dick up.”

I completely went to another dimension sucking his dick like a pro until I felt his body tense up.

“I wanna taste that nut,” I moaned as both our paces picked up.

I looked like a bobble head while Dom worked his stomach muscles and hips fucking the shit out of my mouth.

Saliva was every damn where making it more slippery.

I could feel myself about to cum again just from knowing he was about to nut but before he could, in one swift motion, he abruptly leaned up, forcibly grabbed me by the waist and sat me on his dick as his thickness and length ripped through my walls.

I began to bounce on Dom’s dick while he controlled the situation never removing his hands from my hips. He lifted me and slammed me down so hard, it was a painful pleasure as his mouth latched against my neck while he sucked there.

“Ahhhh,” I whimpered. “I’m about to cum. I’m about to cummmm.”

The pace picked up and Dom’s dick was so hard, I thought I’d break it.

“Cum then... cum all over this dick,” he growled right before ripping his seeds inside of me.

“Fuck,” he hissed as my own walls contracted around him gripping as tightly as they

could; so tight that they started to involuntarily push him out of me.

He leaned back again allowing me to collapse on top of his chest as the rhythm of our heartbeats found each other.

That was some of the best sex I'd ever had in my life and for a moment right underneath that Bahamian moon, with his hands running up and down my back while stopping to grip my thighs, he almost acted like he was afraid to let go.

Right now, I wasn't the cartel's lawyer.

I wasn't on the feds' radar. I wasn't the woman who had been kidnapped by her own husband, and I wasn't the woman who'd been sold off by her parents or the one who heard Dom with another woman over the phone.

I was just Carmen, and he was just Dom. When it was over, he laid beside me with his arm draped over my waist and my head on his chest.

"You still mad at me?" he asked, in a low sleepy voice.

"I'm always mad at you," I whispered.

He laughed. "Good, that means you still give a fuck."

I wanted to say more, but the waves outside and his heartbeat under my ear drowned everything out. I fell asleep to the rhythm of both, knowing damn well the peace wouldn't last long, especially not in our world, but for the night... I had him his ass all to myself.

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I was suffocating at this point, literally fucking restless finding myself pacing a lot.

Dom's penthouse was everything it needed to be, but it still didn't make it feel like a home to me.

The marble floors and floor to ceiling glass walls meant nothing when you were miserable.

The best part of it was the perfect, skyline view of Miami's finest. It felt like a silent prison wrapped with gift wrap simply disguising what was really going on inside.

I couldn't sit still, I couldn't breathe right either and every second he was gone, my thoughts were louder... but my doubts were even louder.

I hadn't seen Dom since he left in that all black outfit looking good enough to eat, moving like the King of the South just full of confidence, yet so cold, at least towards me.

He didn't say where he was going, but it's not like he ever really did either.

Tone or the crew didn't talk to me much and the silence was killing me inside and maybe even showing on the outside too.

Even when the private chef came over to prepare a meal, not even he would say much.

Even when it was busy outside, it still couldn't drown the noise in my head.

I stood barefoot in the kitchen pacing in nothing but a silk robe that fell to the middle of my thigh.

The only light that bounced off of my skin was the moonlight.

Yes, I looked expensive, and I always did.

I had expensive things, but outside of that, I felt used...

. by everyone around me. My phone vibrated on the counter distracting me from my thoughts.

I grabbed it hoping that it was Dom, but it wasn't, and I should've known that after the way he played me before.

Maybe it was my fault for pushing up on a man who simply didn't want it.

However, he didn't stop me either. I ignored the call from my cousin Magalena and then scrolled to my contacts.

I scrolled to 'Tío El Blanca' and pressed the call button. He answered on the fourth. "Victoria."

"Are you going to tell me what's really going on?" I sassed.

"You're safe Victoria, and that's all that matters."

"I'm not asking about me," I replied. "I'm asking about Dom Tío."

There was a long pause before he replied, and I could tell that he had briefly stopped doing whatever he was doing previously. I imagined him sitting in the office of his

headquarters smoking a cigar. “The Miami King thinks he’s bigger than the crown now,” he said coldly. “He moves like I owe him.”

“Maybe you do,” I fired back with a shrug. I knew better than to speak this way, but my patience was running extremely short.

Again, there was another long pause before he replied. “Careful, Victoria. That tongue will get you hurt.”

I took a long deep breath. “You’re using me.

That’s what this is, huh? It’s a setup. I’m just another chess piece in this game El Blanca and you know it.

You have him watching me so you can watch him .

You want to use me so you can take him out.

You think I don’t see it?” My heart began to pace fast, and I licked my lips trying to swallow the lump in my throat.

I didn’t know what was coming next. He didn’t raise me to be a coward; however, he did raise me to never question or challenge him.

Last time I did that, it nearly cost me my life.

“You weren’t raised to question me.”

“I wasn’t raised at all,” I whispered.

He laughed actually laughed and it was one of those bitter laughs. “You’re an

ungrateful little girl. You think Dominic Royal gives a damn about you? He's probably fucking you with one hand and playing war with the other. You don't know him like I do."

I clenched my jaws. "Maybe I don't, but I know what you are. You are being greedy. You see him rising and it's eating you up inside. You have to end this now El Blanca."

"You're right, El Dorado isn't our enemy," he hissed. "He is."

"Then why do you have me here?" I asked. "You pretended to hide me like I'm gold when all I am is bait?"

"You're not bait," he said softly. "You're just a warning."

I felt chills run up my spine and dropped my eyes. "I'm not coming back El Blanca."

"You'll regret that mi amor. "

He hung up on me and I stood frozen in place still gripping the phone.

He would never hurt you Victoria, I said to myself.

My heart was beating so hard, I could feel it pulsating through my rib cage.

That was the first time my uncle ever spoke to me like that...

. not as a niece... but instead as a threat as if I were really one of his enemies.

I was no longer his legacy in this moment.

I'd called him out and was a liability now.

My hands were shaking when I tried to call Dom, but it went to voicemail.

I stared at the screen like it had betrayed me too. Where the fuck are you, Dom? I thought.

"You alright?" Tone's deep voice came from behind me causing me to jump. He was sprawled across the living room couch with one ankle resting on his opposite knee and half smoked blunt in between his fingers.

"I'm fine," I lied nearly mumbling.

"You don't look fine." He replied.

I turned to face him. "Where's Dom?"

Tone grinned like I was a kid asking grown folk business with those teeth shining. "He out handling boss shit. You know how he move."

"Do you?"

He just gave me a hard look but before he could reply to me his phone suddenly began to ring.

His entire energy shifted when he saw the screen.

"Shit," he quickly answered the call. "Yo," he paused.

"What you mean cramping?" he asked in a low tone.

“Bleeding? How much?” He was up on his feet now and I could see his muscles tense a little.

“Stay calm, I’m on the way.” He ended the call and grabbed his keys.

“Yo, my girl, at the hospital. I gotta go.”

“Go to her,” I said.

He looked at me like I should’ve known better. “Got me fucked up princess. You comin’ too.”

“I’ll stay here...”

He gave me a look. “Bring yo ass on, and that ain’t me askin’. Dom’ll kill me if I left you in this bitch. Fuck no.”

Five minutes later, I was in the back of a bulletproof black Suburban with a fucking attitude as my mind spun out of control trying to figure out where I go from here when all of this was over, because my mind was made up.

I was never going back to El Blanca and from the looks of things, he didn’t want me back right now either.

Riding through the Miami streets, Tone sat beside me, with his jaws tight the entire ride.

Two of Dom’s hitters were in the front with their Glocks tucked and eyes on every car that we passed.

I glanced out the of window with my chin propped in the palm of my hand.

The streetlights looked blurry through the heavily tinted windows and my stomach had knots in it from my nerves being bad.

tint. I couldn't shake El Blanca's voice because I knew it was a warning that echoed through my mind.

You'll regret that. What did he even mean by that? Like, what was coming?

Tone hadn't said one word since we left the penthouse. He was chewing his bottom lip in deep thought. "You okay?" I asked softly.

He looked at me. "Nah. But I'ma be."

"You really love her, huh?"

"Yeah... gotta get to my girl Shona."

When we pulled up to the hospital, he looked over at me. "Stay close and don't say nothin' to nobody. Don't do nothin' either... and whatever you do, don't trust nobody but me while we in there. You feel me?"

I nodded my head and followed close to him. The doors opened, and we stepped into the hospital not knowing what we were heading into.

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The hospital smelled like bleach and death as the bright lights bounced off the white floors as we walked through the lobby.

The sound of our footsteps echoed through the hallways, as I continued to walk behind Tone while his people walked behind me so I couldn't bail even if I wanted to.

Plus, Tone was walking faster than I'd ever seen him walk before.

I could tell from the looks on everyone's faces that they knew Tone and his crew were power.

His jaws were locked tight, and his fists were slightly balled but I can tell that he was trying to play it cool.

It was funny how men could be so hard until it came to the woman they loved. Meanwhile I was just... here.

By the time we reached his girlfriend, Shona was in a private observation unit on the second floor.

As soon as the curtain swung open, her eyes locked onto Tone like she'd been waiting for him, and she was beautiful might I add.

Her chocolate skin was glowing under the lights, and she had sharp cheekbones with her hair slicked back into a long ponytail.

Even with the worry wrinkles on her forehead, she still looked like one of those Instagram models without trying too hard.

Tone rushed to her side. “You good ma? What about the baby?”

Shona weakly nodded her head. “They say it’s just dehydration, but I been cramping, Tone. I ain’t never felt nothing like it.”

I stayed quiet, standing off in the corner like a Casper the ghost. However, just like most women, her eyes found me very quick. It was something about my looks that made me noticeable even when I wasn’t trying to be.

She gave Tone a funny look like she was ready to go off. “Who the fuck is this?” Shona asked dropping her eyes into tiny slits.

Tone didn’t flinch nor did he seem bothered. “It’s business and I’ll explain later. Right now, I need to hear this lil’ heartbeat.”

He then leaned in close as the monitor picked up the thumping sounds of his child’s heart.

His whole demeanor shifted, and I saw it.

I could tell Shona still had questions about me, but the moment between Tone and his child was more important to her.

It seemed like all of the women around Dom and his crew specialized in remaining poised yet dangerous.

Tone, this big dangerous man with gold teeth and huge hands had gone soft in the face for a short second.

His eyes welled up a little and for a minute, I saw the man underneath the killer.

“Damn,” he whispered with a little smirk. “Lil Tone really in there.”

Just then, the doctor walked inside and quickly eye balled us all with his clipboard in his hand trying to remain casual as if he could sense he was in a room full of killers.

“She’s going to be just fine. She came here with severe dehydration which triggered some light contractions and minor spotting, but the baby’s heartbeat is strong. We’ve got her on fluids for now.”

Tone looked up with a raised brow. “You sure that’s all it is? ‘Cause if not, I’m blowin’ this whole floor up Doc.”

The doctor nervously blinked. “I’m positive sir. We’ll discharge her within the hour.”

Tone nodded his head and then leaned over and kissed Shona on the forehead. “I’ma have one of the guys drive you home. I’ll be there soon as I wrap this up. I promise ma. I’ma have the nanny come over there too. I don’t want you alone.”

“You better,” she replied, with her eyes still burning a hole over me.

She slowly ran her tongue against her top teeth giving me a warning look and I knew what that meant, however it wasn’t Tone that I wanted, it was the boss who I craved.

Tone was so different around her. We stayed up until she was discharged and he catered to her every need.

However, once we were out the room, Tone had one of their hitters, a guy named Shan with the dreads and a gold grill, come up and get Shona so he could take her home. When she was situated, we loaded back inside of the truck and was back in the

streets; Tone had his killer face on again.

“Aye, go to the chicken joint, I’m hungrier than a muhfucka,” Tone grunted from the seat. “I need somethin’ greasy after all that stress.”

From what I heard them talking about, the spot we were going to was one of the best. We pulled up to the Royal’s favorite hood spot, Crispy’s fried chicken and double parked like they owned it, and knowing them, they probably did.

Me, Tone, and the other two hitters hopped out.

As a matter of fact, I had just stepped out when I heard it.

The shots erupted fast, and they were close too.

I hit the ground hard with my heart damn near leaping out my chest. Tone spun around with his Glock in hand, already shooting shots.

The other two were as well. People screamed, glass shattered, and bullets were flying through the air almost like firecrackers.

“Victoria, move!” Tone yelled, shoving me behind a car while still shooting.

In the midst of the chaos, I caught a glimpse, of a hand holding a pistol as the car sped off down the alley.

There was a tattoo on the middle knuckle of a black scorpion wrapped around a dagger.

It felt like the blood was draining from my body and I went cold.

That was one of El Blanca's men. We scrambled back into the truck, and I felt my arm burning, that's when I looked down and saw the blood running.

I tried not to panic, because people who panicked, died. "I'm hit," I said quietly.

Tone's face went from wild to furious. "Fuck!" he barked.

He immediately grabbed the phone to make a call. "Yo, Doc! We pullin' up... one of ours is hit but it don't look fatal."

I had no clue who Doc was, but I knew 'what' Doc because my uncle had plenty of his own on payroll.

Doc was an off the grid medic set up in a gated mansion on the outskirts of the city.

When we got there, we got out and walked all the way around back where a large metal shed stood.

It looked like storage, but inside it was a fully stocked private ER that looked upscale and better than most hospitals.

It had white walls, steel trays, anesthesia and everything.

Doc was already gloved up, waiting for me.

"Sit her down," he said, nodding at me. "Let's patch the princess up."

I wasn't sure how he even knew who I was, but then again, I guess it wasn't many people in the world of cartel who didn't know who El Blancas beloved niece was.

I winced in pain as he pulled the bullet from my arm with the grace of a pro and

stitched me like he had done it a million times before.

He was a handsome older guy with dark skin, bald head, and a salt and pepper beard that was trimmed perfectly.

He looked well-kept and smelled really good too.

I had never been shot in my life, but it hurt like hell.

I got lucky it was just an arm shot because had it been anywhere else, I probably would've passed out.

"You're lucky," Doc told me. "It's a clean wound and no major damage. You'll live."

Tone stood over me, with a hard look on his face once again in deep thought.

I could look in his eyes and tell that he saw the same thing that I saw, it was a direct hit from El Blanca which meant he wasn't hiding his hands anymore.

I couldn't help but to think it was all my fault for calling him out and blowing his cover.

Maybe I shouldn't have said anything at all.

I finally spoke. "You saw the tattoo," I said softly. "It was my uncle's men. He tried to kill me." I whispered in disbelief.

Tone didn't respond right away. Then, he said what was on his mind. "That's a declaration of war right there. The gloves are off, that muhfucka struck and didn't hide behind another cartel this time."

I looked down at the stitched gash on my arm, but the pain was nothing compared to what I felt inside. “El Blanca’s not my family anymore,” I whispered. “He just made me his enemy too.”

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The sun was high over the Bahamas, pouring heat like I'd never felt before.

I mean, Miami was hot, but this shit was a different type of hot.

I knew damn well this couldn't have been the heat our ancestors picked cotton in, ain't no fucking way.

Me and Carmen had just finished breakfast on the villa terrace.

We had fresh fruit, thick ass pancakes, and imported mimosas.

I wasn't the kind of dude to drink mimosas but my taste buds ain't complain.

Carmen had on this soft peach bikini under a silk cover-up that clung to her body in all the right places.

I couldn't lie, seeing her like that, all happy and glowing made me forget the kind of shit we was really dealing with back home.

For once in my life, I was able to finally get away and just be Dom for a day or two, but I was smart enough to know that paradise didn't last always.

She laughed at something dumb I said, while brushing her hair behind her ear as we kicked our feet in the pool.

"You really know how to surprise a woman, Dom," she said, sipping out of her pineapple like she was straight royalty, and she really was.

Carmen was bad, and truth be told wasn't too many bitches fucking with her.

It wasn't just about her looks though 'cause you could have the baddest bitch in the world and her mind might be straight dumpster juice, or her pussy could be trash, or she could be downright fuckin' dumb.

Some of these bitches didn't even have one survival bone in their bodies without a man providing it.

Carmen took what I gave her and ran with it.

Even if she ever left the Royal family, she had built her own empire to take care of herself as well.

I leaned back and took a pull from the joint. "I ain't even pulled out all the stops yet."

We were finally breathing with no cartel talks, no trenches, no blood sheds, no shadows fuckin' with us although they were here, they were out of the way.

It wasn't no talks about El Blanca... it was just us outside of work.

I was in my head with good thoughts, and then my phone rang.

The minute I was his name, I knew something had gone wrong 'cause Tone would never call while I was on vacation unless all hell broke loose.

I stepped away from Carmen, answered. "Yeah."

His voice came through deep but with a sense of urgency. "Dom, we got hit."

My trigger finger began to itch, and I felt that knife in the pit of my stomach as I grit

my teeth. “By who?”

“El Blanca’s people. We was leaving the hospital ‘cause Shona had a scare with the baby. I took Victoria with me ‘cause I couldn’t leave her alone. Them muhfuckas sprayed the truck. One of ‘em had a tattoo... with El Blanca’s mark on it, that’s how we knew.

For a second, I felt my body heat up. “She good?”

“She took one to the arm but it ain’t fatal, Doc patched her up. But Dom... she said it man... El Blanca tried to kill her.”

Now that was the part I didn’t understand.

El Blanca trying to kill his own niece? What the fuck did he think she knew or may have told that he finally decided to show his hands.

I knew the muhfucka was a snake, but would he really try to take Victoria out?

That shit was insane but not too much of a surprise in this world, and that’s why the Royal family was big on loyalty before dishonor.

I could care less about who did and didn’t love me.

Fuck love, I rather take the loyalty ‘cause people who loved you would still hurt you, but people who were loyal to you would never hurt you and that was just a known fact. I looked out at the clear waters and the crystal blue skies.... Just straight paradise. Yet back home my kingdom was under attack. “I’ll handle it... I’ll be there.”

“You want me to move her again?” He asked.

“Nah,” I said dryly. “Put extra eyes around her at the spot and get someone inside Blanca’s crew if we can. We ain’t askin’ no more questions.”

“Say less.” He responded.

I simply hung up and just stood there, letting the sun beat down on my burning skin.

Carmen came around the corner with worry all over her face and a brow slightly raised. “What happened?”

I looked at her... my wife, my lawyer, my rider. This trip was supposed to about peace and it was but now it was time to snatch all that shit away and get back to reality. “El Blanca finally made his move with his mask off. He ain’t hidin’ no more.” I told her. “Victoria got hit too.”

She straightened up a little bit and that softness disappeared. I knew she didn’t care for Victoria, but Carmen wasn’t bitter either. “Is she alive?”

I nodded my head. “Yeah. She got grazed in her arm. Tone said it wasn’t fatal.

She’s patched up, but it’s what this means.

.. he really not hidin’ his hand no more...

it’s on now. Fuck them taco, el nacho eatin’ muhfuckas.

El Blanca thought he could have me by the dick but ain’t.

nobody fuckin’ me. If anything, I do the fuckin’.

Carmen nodded with not an ounce of fear in her eyes. She simply nodded her head

and adjusted her cover-up. “What do you need me to do?” She asked. That’s why I kept her close ‘cause she never folded under pressure even if it cost her life or her freedom.

“We flyin’ out now,” I said. “I’ll need you to file a few things when we land. Some shit need to be smothered on paper while I set some other shit up. You know we never intended on this day to come, but we ready for it. El Blanca ain’t the only one with tricks under his belt. We too powerful now.”

Another thirty minutes later and we were packed up, and my shadows moved with us but still at a distance, but always ready.

Carmen didn’t complain not one time, while most females would have just for the trip being cut short.

We were leaving later on anyway after dinner, just didn’t plan on leaving this early.

She knew the world we lived in, and what was understood didn’t have to be explained.

At the airport, the private jet was already prepped but this time it wasn’t no roses and red carpets and shit.

I made one call, and they added an extra flight attendant for us too, and that’s all that I requested.

It felt wrong to end it this way but the streets ain’t never knock as long as I been in the muhfuckas.

In no time we were in the sky. Inside the jet, Carmen sat beside me, glancing out the window, with an unreadable expression on her face.

I could feel the vibe change because we were back in the game now and the romance was over while strategy took over.

Her laptop pinged breaking the silence and she pulled it open, while furrowing her perfect shaped brows.

“What is it?” I asked.

She didn’t answer right away ‘cause she was too busy slowly scrolling. Then she turned the screen toward me with a ‘oh shit’ look on her face. “It’s Dique’s DNA results.”

I leaned in and read the shit. It was 99.9 percent that Dique was indeed the daddy. “Fuck...” I groaned. That fuckin’ kid is his? I thought to myself. I was mad for the stupid nigga. He needed to keep his dick in his pants from here on out.

“Looks like you got a niece, Dom.” She smirked.

I shook my head, leaned back, and let out a dry chuckle before taking a pull of the joint allowing a thick cloud of smoke to swirl above my head. “That girl don’t look shit like us, but I guess DNA don’t lie.”

“We’ll wait to tell him,” Carmen said. “After he’s back and we deal with this El Blanca mess.”

I nodded in agreeance. “Yeah.... he got enough on his plate right now. I know one thing, bet not no other female pop-up talkin’ bout Dique the daddy or I’m fuckin’ that nigga up my damn self.

” I was as serious as any other time. Carmen chuckled and then she leaned her head on my shoulder, just for a split second.

I kissed the top of her head. “I know this trip didn’t end like I wanted,” I said in a low tone, “But I’m gonna give you more of this and not no fake peace.

.. I’m talkin’ real shit... one day... I just need you to bear with me. ”

She looked up at me. “You always say ‘one day.’ Just don’t wait ‘til the war ends. It might never happen if one of us gets killed.”

I took that in, but I didn’t respond. Instead, I just looked out the jet window as the Bahamas shrank behind us getting tinier and tinier.

Ahead of us, we were traveling back to the beautiful concrete jungle.

Yeah, war was waiting on us... but this time.

.. I was waiting too ready to kill everything in my way.

The wheels hit the runway smooth, but my mind was anything but that.

Just knowing we had unfinished business had me ready...

because we did. I looked over at Carmen and her eyes were forward, but again unreadable.

Even after a trip like that, she was still in defense mode, and I wasn’t mad at it.

Shit, we were back in the lion's den now. The door of the jet dropped, and I stepped out into the humid Miami air. It was just a disrespectful heat but even the smell in the air hit different. Three matte black Escalades were lined up on the tarmac, with the engines still running. My hittas were outside, posted like they were doing the mannequin just waiting on the next instructions. All of them were rocking the Royal-

issued drip, armed, alert, and ready for whatever. The Royal Cartel didn't just move and that's why El Blanca was mad...

we shifted the whole atmosphere when we touched down.

One of my lieutenants, Ruck, nodded at me. "Everything tight, boss. We got eyes from the strip to the muhfuckin' city."

I hit him with a chin lift and pulled out my phone. The first call I made was to Dique. "Yo," he answered, laughing in the background, probably laid up.

"You still in Cali?" I asked.

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“Yup, done handled my business and enjoyin’ the sunshine, bitches, and my last day of peace before you muhfuckas drag me back to the madness.”

“Keep talkin’,” I said dryly. “War done touched our front door and I need you back. ASAP.”

He got quiet and serious now. “How bad is it?”

“El Blanca just made it official. He shot at Tone, Victoria, and two of our people.”

“Damn,” he mumbled. “Alright slime, give me twenty-four. I’ll be on the next thing smokin’.”

“You better be.”

“And yo,” he added, “that test come back yet? Sis ain’t said shit?”

I paused before responding. “We gon’ talk when you get here.”

“Oh shit...” He said in a low tone. “Don’t tell me I’m somebody daddy.”

I ignored his comment. Now wasn’t the time to tell him he’d be dealing with Keondra for the rest of his life. “Twenty-four hours, Dique. Don’t make me come get you.”

Dique must’ve felt it in his gut ‘cause he hung up. He was probably sweating bullets right now. I made a call to Keondra next, and the phone rang twice before she picked up with that familiar ghetto fabulous voice.

“I didn’t do shit this time Dom!”

“I’mma keep this simple Ke. You bet not hit Dique with them results. Don’t call him, don’t text him, don’t tag him in no memes... I mean that shit.”

“I wasn’t even about to...”

I cut her off. “I said, you don’t say shit. I’ll tell him when it’s time. You remember that cease and desist?”

“Yeah,” she mumbled.

“Good. You wanna keep eatin’? Play yo’ part.” I could sense an attitude coming, but she knew better. “And tell me somethin’ else, Keondra. Who the fuck that baby look like? ‘Cause it ain’t us, but DNA don’t lie.”

She sighed long and hard. “She look like my great granddaddy, okay? Everybody says that shit. He was light skinned, big eyes, them strong ass features. What you want me to do... it ain’t my damn fault but I always knew Dique was her daddy. I’m ghetto, not a ho, I know who I lay down with.”

I shook my head, chuckling under my breath.

“Yeah whatever. I’ll be in touch soon.” I hung up.

It wasn’t shit else to talk about as far as I was concerned.

Dique fucked up, but it was now our duty to make sure that Keondra and my niece were taken care of.

Dique having a kid out there for real was scary, ‘cause and that meant any child with

the Royal blood would always have to be protected. Having a niece scared me just like me having my own child did. If the enemy knew your weakness, they knew what to attack. I needed to have a talk with him when it was time, and now wasn't it.

Carmen hadn't said a word during either call. Instead, she stood there beside me in her all-black travel fit... it was sleek leggings, a fitted cropped jacket, Hermes slides, and the dark-ass Chanel shades that hid her eyes, but they damn sure didn't hide her mood.

"You good?" I asked her.

She slid those big ass shades down just enough for me to see her pretty eyes. "Always," she said. "Let's go."

I wasn't surprised that she wasn't just beside me, she was with me watching everything around us like my third eye.

She knew when to stand down and let me handle my business without doing much talking.

We hopped into the lead truck. I sat shotgun, and she slid in the back.

As soon as the doors shut, the convoy of trucks pulled off looking like some shit out of a movie like we always did.

We moved through the city fast as the bright sun hit the tinted windows.

People were turning their heads when they saw us glide by in awe wondering who was behind the tints of the trucks.

Of course they didn't know, however, the way we moved screamed power and

importance.

By the time we arrived at the penthouse, the valet was already waiting to park the trucks as soon as we entered the private garage.

We didn't have time for shit else besides to get inside.

The building staff snapped to attention the moment they saw who stepped out.

Upstairs, the penthouse door opened and that familiar Royal scent hit me...

it was a mix of expensive cologne, leather, and Cuban cigars.

I took a slow breath as I stepped inside lowkey glad to be back home.

Carmen followed behind, unzipping her jacket as she kicked off her slides at the front door.

Everything was in place, the same as I'd left it and the security cameras were blinking, meaning that they were doing their jobs.

My backup guns were still stashed in key spots, the bulletproofed windows still crystal clear, showing off the Miami skyline like a damn painting.

I stood by the floor-to-ceiling windows for a second, watching the city.

Carmen came up behind me and spoke in a calm tone as she folded her arms across her chest. "What's the next move?"

I looked down at her, with a hard gaze. "You know how we do... and we start by makin' sure El Blanca knows.

.. I ain't the one to be played with. Get the Mayor on the phone when you can.

He needs to know his city is about to be bleedin', and he needs to do what he's paid to do, stay the fuck out of the way. ”

She nodded. “Will do.”

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The moment we stepped off that jet and slid into the convoy of blacked-out trucks, I felt the new energy and reality set in that paradise was officially over.

The air was just different and full of tension, and I knew that shit was back in motion.

Dom's jaws were tight when he stepped off.

His soldiers were already posted on the strip wearing black hoodies, dreads tucked in fitted tightly, and gold chains peeking from beneath their crewnecks.

They wasn't smiling either and everybody looked like they were ready to slide if he gave the word.

By the time we got to the penthouse, the calmness I felt in the Bahamas was long gone.

My slides hardly made a noise against the floor as I glided inside.

By the time Dom and I exchanged a few words and turned around, Victoria was already sitting on the couch, with her left arm wrapped and bandaged.

Her eyes were red and full of jealousy or betrayal, but nobody had betrayed her besides her uncle.

Tone rounded the corner and stood nearby with his arms folded, watching it all play out with that look that said he was tired of everybody's shit.

Her eyes were focused on us and her mouth popped off like we owed her something.

“While I was taking a bullet, you were out in paradise somewhere? I overheard you were out of town, and you’re supposed to be watching me. Because you weren’t, I got shot!” she spat at Dom.

Dom looked at her like she was annoying and an inconvenience, but he still had that dangerous look in his eyes.

His face said, ‘who the fuck she thinks she’s talking to’ and that slow burn in the way the intensity in his eyes grew would make anybody fold if they knew any better.

I stayed quiet, but I felt myself flinch just a little.

She didn’t know who she was talking to. Dom didn’t say a word, so she continued.

“You think this is funny?” Victoria snapped again. “I’m under fire and your people have to call in a fucking emergency in to get me treated and you were somewhere in swim trunks. This isn’t fair.”

I didn’t give her the satisfaction of raising my voice; it wasn’t my style. She may have been a brat with El Blanca, but in Miami, that shit would never work. I slowly stepped forward making sure my tone was cool as ice. “You might want to watch your tone, sweetheart.”

Victoria turned to me next with a distasteful, yet arrogant look on her face. “And you... what are you? The assistant? You go everywhere he goes, huh?”

Dom’s hand went up and he slowly licked his lips trying to remain cool.

It wasn’t in a threatening way; it was just enough to stop the madness before it got

ugly.

He wasn't trying to hear that shit. His voice was deep when he spoke.

"She not the assistant," he said dryly. "She my fuckin' wife.

So while you in my crib, under my roof, protected by my crew, you gon' speak on her name with respect. "

Victoria blinked a few times, and I watched the color drain from her face. Whatever come back she had was long gone and she was shocked. "W-wife?" she stammered trying to get it out.

"Mrs. Royal," Dom repeated, staring her dead in her eyes.

The entire room fell silent almost like she was hesitating or thinking about what to say.

I didn't smirk or throw it in her face. Instead, I just stood tall and let my presence speak for itself.

Victoria slowly sat back and was quiet now.

Her mouth may have been closed but her eyes were full of confusion.

I didn't hate her, she didn't know I was his wife, but now she did.

Once she pulled herself together, Dom gave her the floor.

"Tell me exactly what was said between you and El Blanca before the hit."

Victoria slowly licked her lips. “I called him, and I told him I wanted answers. He flipped out and told me you weren’t loyal anymore...

that you were pulling away.” She explained.

Dom didn’t flinch. He just leaned on the counter and stared like he was already thinking ten steps ahead.

Victoria looked down and continued. “He told me I’d regret it if I stayed with you...

I think I’ve been a pawn this whole time. ”

“You sure the men had the tattoo?” Dom asked.

She nodded. “It was definitely one of El Blanca’s. I’ve seen it all my life all over the compounds, the mansions, and the shootouts.”

That was all Dom needed to hear. His silence was loud as hell.

I could see the killer instinct behind his eyes.

He was already plotting. While Dom and Tone exchanged a quick look, my phone vibrated in my bag from an unknown number.

It could’ve been someone at the office or someone about business especially on this line.

I stepped a few feet away with the phone to my ear and cautiously answered. “Hello?”

“I ain’t heard from you,” a familiar voice said in a low tone. “You really got me in

some shit huh?”

Hearing Dru’s voice caused my stomach to drop but I kept my face straight. Dom was still in my peripheral, while talking low to Tone. I slightly turned my back to the room. “Dru, this ain’t the time...”

“You gon’ tell me what that was? I got knocked out and I was tied up, Carmen.

My head still hurt from that shit. What the fuck is goin’ on?

I damn sho’ feel like I’m owed an answer.

Go figure, I meet a bitch at the bar and end up kidnapped a few hours.

I didn’t even sniff the pussy. Who the fuck are you for real ‘cause niggas aren’t comin’ like that unless its behind somebody important. ”

I sighed. I didn’t owe him a damn thing, but maybe I did, who knows. All I knew was that now wasn’t the time at all because we had bigger fish to fry. “I’ll explain everything, I swear... but not now. Don’t call this number again. I’ll reach out when it’s safe,” I said, keeping my voice emotionless.

Dru started to say something else, but I ended the call and silenced the ringer just in case he called back.

My heart was pounding loud in my chest, but I walked back like I didn’t just get caught playing with fire a few seconds ago.

Dom’s eyes landed on mine, and it was a quiet but knowing glare almost as if he knew something.

He didn't say anything, but I could tell he knew something was up.

I exhaled and straightened my top before looking over at Victoria who was now fully aware of how deep this family shit ran.

She wasn't just dealing with Dom; she was dealing with The Royals and that came with a price.

Victoria sat there quiet now, still processing what Dom had just revealed.

She wasn't stupid. The name "Mrs. Royal" sat on her chest like a weight.

Dom leaned back against the marble island, with his arms folded across his chest waiting for her to gather herself with the same serious expression.

"Call him," he ordered. Victoria looked up and frowned. "El Blanca," he said. "Call him now."

She slowly nodded her head, pulling her phone out of the front pocket of her sweats.

Her hands trembled as she hit the contact and put it on speaker.

We're sorry, this line is no longer in service.

She blinked and tried again. "No, no," she whispered, fumbling with the phone.

"That don't make sense..." Victoria's chest heaved up and down like she was trying not to lose it.

She rushed to grab her tablet off the table, tapping at it furiously.

Dom, Tone, and I watched her without moving.

She opened one banking app and then another before realizing they were all at zero balance.

“W-what the fuck...” Her voice cracked. “He emptied my accounts... all of them...”

Her hand shot up to her mouth as tears welled up and she dropped down onto the couch.

The tears were coming slowly at first and then they broke loose, and she was ugly crying with a lot of panic behind it.

For a split second, Dom’s jaw tensed, and I saw it.

He didn’t move to console her, but his energy gave off some type of pity.

That stone-cold heart of his cracked just enough to acknowledge what this meant.

Victoria was now his responsibility. El Blanca had officially thrown her ass away.

I stood quietly for a second before I stepped over to her. “Victoria,” I said, in a sharp yet calming tone.

She looked up at me with hatred in her eyes, and it was the kind of hatred because I had everything she wanted.

I had the freedom, the man, the life, and the throne.

It was born from jealousy, confusion, and humiliation.

That woman wanted to be me, and I saw it clear as day, but I didn't bring it up because I didn't give a single fuck.

"Come talk to me for a minute," I said, gently, but firmly tugging her by the arm.

Her eyes shot down to my hand on her arm.

She didn't want to follow me, but she did anyway just to save face in front of Dom.

We stepped into the hallway right outside the living room and she folded her arms across her chest trying to hold onto whatever dignity she had left, but her eyes were still wet and bloodshot red.

Her cheeks were flushed too but still couldn't deny how pretty she was, and I never would because that's the truth.

"I see the distaste in your eyes," I said calmly.

"That shit doesn't move me." I said. She rolled her eyes but didn't say anything and that was the best thing that she could've done.

"You thought you were doing something, huh? You thought sucking Dom's dick was going to give you a piece of the kingdom?"

"I leaned closer, and lowered my voice, however I wasn't spitting venom, at least not yet.

"Let me give you some game, woman to woman. That was the first and last time I'll ever offer it.

"I told her. Victoria's breath got caught in her throat and I continued.

“If you want to play in a big girl’s world, stop crying like a weak ass lil’ girl.

Ain’t nobody going to save you out here, and damn sure not in this life.

You want to be safe? You build your own shelter.

You want to be powerful? Learn how to move without a leash. ”

Her lips began to quiver. “You knew?”

I slightly tilted my head to the side with a smirk on my face. “Baby, I always know and don’t think for a second it fazed me,” I said, stepping even closer. “Because at the end of the day, when it comes to Dom, there’s only one woman he’s protecting with his life and you’re looking at her.”

Was I pissed about their encounter? Of course I was, but rule number one... don’t ever let the next woman know that the right side of the heart is fucked up about the left. Victoria didn’t respond because she knew she couldn’t and plus, she’d swallowed too much of the truth at one damn time today.

I leaned back, still calm. “Get your shit together and boss up. That’s the best advice you’ll ever get from me and the last.” I said before turning around and strutting out the hallway without looking back.

I walked over to Dom next. He hadn’t moved from his spot and his eyes never left me.

I leaned up for a second and kissed him on the cheek before leaning into his ear.

“I need a shadow... I’m heading home. I’ll be ready for tomorrow’s meeting.

” I told him. He simply nodded once because it was no words needed in this moment.

We’d had a beautiful time of him really treating me like his wife and now...

it was over, back to business. With that, I grabbed my bag and left the penthouse like a queen leaving the throne room.

I didn’t even look back. Victoria could cry all night if she wanted but this wasn’t a life for tears.

I learned that the hard way years ago, and right now, I had shit to do.

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The blacked-out SUV pulled up in front of my high-rise just as the city lights started flickering on and the pretty colors started to paint the sky.

I could feel the trouble in the wind, like the streets were whispering our names or something.

The ride from Dom's penthouse had been way too quiet and my mind drifted to Dru, but again, I pushed them to the back of my mind.

He was going to want answers, but I didn't owe him anything at all.

The only reason I even felt just a twinge of guilt is because he simply got punished for trying to get to know the wrong woman.

I sat in the backseat with my arms folded over my chest watching the world watch me.

Everything looked like a blur out of the tinted windows, but something didn't sit right with me.

I had a funny feeling in my bones like eyes were on me.

I glanced in the side mirror more than one time catching glimpses of taillights that stayed just a little too close for me but when I blinked again, they were gone just that quick.

My mind could've been playing tricks on me, but maybe not.

I didn't say a word because I had shadows in the SUV behind me two with me. Just like Dom, I trusted them. Hell, I had to... but still... something in my spirit just didn't feel right.

When we pulled into the private garage beneath my building, I scanned the concrete corners, then looked up.

The camera lights were still blinking, and security was still intact but that didn't mean a damn thing if whoever was watching knew how to move in silence.

Inside my place, the lights came on automatically.

I made sure that it was always clean, and quiet.

Sometimes when I was lonely, I felt like it was a little too peaceful.

I kicked off my slides and took off my crop coat.

My Glock was still in the holster on my thigh.

I didn't undress all the way at least not right away. Instead, I stood barefoot in the kitchen and poured myself a glass of Patron because my nerves were wired. I pulled out my buzzing phone staring at Dru's number once again.

I let my thumb hover over it debating on if I wanted to pick up but after two rings, I answered.

"Aye, Cee?" He said into the phone before I could even say hello.

I hung up and blocked the number right away.

What the hell was I doing? That chapter was dead before it ever had the chance to breathe.

Right then, my door buzzed. I looked at the security monitor and saw O'Shynn posted up in a caramel-colored trench coat, some oversized shades, and a slick low bun. She had her signature Chanel tote in one hand and a bottle of Dusse in the other like she was coming to have ladies' night because she just read my mind to know I needed one.

If I could be back in Bahamas, I would within a heartbeat.

I opened the door with a smirk on my face. "You always show up like a damn movie scene. What do you want bitch?"

"And you always look like you need a fucking drink," she replied, inviting herself in. "You good?"

I gave a quick nod, locking the door behind her. "Yeah, but I'm not going to lie... something don't feel right, O."

She kicked her heels off and flopped down on the sectional. "We at war, Carmen. Nothing gon' feel right for a minute. We just have to stay ten toes down like always."

O'Shynn and I sipped and talked while she asked me fifty million questions about the Bahamas.

I knew what she was getting at, but she didn't do too much probing, she kept it light and kept the teasing light, especially because it was the first time Dom and I had ever gone away together on that kind of vibe.

Everything with me and O'Shynn always had a real sister type of energy.

We laughed, talked about all kinds of shit including her freaky ass escapades.

Hell, we even danced a little to Mary J.

playing low from my speakers. The vibe was a good one but like any other good vibe in our world it was short lived.

Her phone buzzed, and I saw the look on her face instantly change as she read the message.

O'Shynn was a lot like her brothers the way her facial expressions could go from zero to a hundred.

"What's up?" I asked.

She shook her head. "It's the club. One of the new accountants tried to move some funds without authorization and now my name got flagged on a transfer sheet. I gotta handle it."

I stood up, walked into my room, changed into some jeans, a trench, and a pair of Givenchy boots. "Let's go then." I told her when I returned.

O'Shynn raised a brow. "You sure? This ain't your mess sis."

I grabbed my gun, tucked it under my coat, and looked her dead in the eyes. "Girl please, the family's mess is always my mess."

O'Shynn shrugged and headed out the door, of course the driver was already waiting for us, but we didn't request a shadow, although we knew one would follow anyway. We didn't ride in my or O'Shynn's G-wagon either. Of course, we hopped in the truck with the driver because the truck was unmarked.

“Take us to the club,” O’Shynn instructed.

At a little past 2AM we pulled up to the back of the club.

Two hitters from the cartel stood by the door.

One nodded at me, the other kissed his teeth like he wasn’t expecting to see me out tonight...

he always did that when I came around because they knew they would have to work twice as hard making sure that nobody laid a finger on me on their watch.

Oh well, that was too damn bad because that’s what they got paid to do.

Inside, the backroom lights flickered overhead as we confronted the stupid ass accountant who was trembling in front of O’Shynn like he didn’t know what was coming next.

“You tried to reroute twenty racks?” O’Shynn asked, standing with her arms folded. He started mumbling something about payroll. A whole bunch of nothings that O’Shynn didn’t want to hear.

“You don’t even got clearance to breathe in this bitch without my signature,” she fussed.

I stepped forward, opened my tablet, and had the banking logs up within seconds. I confirmed it was a false transfer but it’s easily trackable. “I’ll clean it up now,” I said. “But fire his ass pronto.”

O’Shynn didn’t even blink nor think twice. I knew she would’ve fired him even had I not said it. “Security, get his dumb ass outta here.”

He looked hopeless as the big dudes escorted him out while all eyes were glued to him wondering what happened.

He was paid good every single night and had possibly just fucked up the biggest bag he's ever seen in his life for a simple mistake that he should've known better.

We left through the same door we entered thinking that we were in the clear and had cleaned up tonight's mess, but we were wrong...

that's when the real show happened. A black Crown Vic whipped around the corner and screeched to a halting stop right in front of us as the doors flew open before we even touched the concrete good. What the fuck? I thought to myself.

"FBI! Hands in the air!"

The lights flashed and the guns were drawn aimed directly at us.

One wrong move and they would've been ready to light us up and we hadn't even done anything.

I barely had time to breathe. O'Shynn's coat flew open, but her piece never made it out because a red laser beam sat on her chest before she could even lift a hand.

They didn't want us dead, because they would've shot first without questions.

This was deeper than that. I stepped between them like a reflex with my hands up, as my eyes burned through the agent's.

"Who authorized this?" I asked, in an ice-cold voice.

"It's a federal sweep. Your names came up on new financial laundering

investigations,” the woman agent said. She was a blonde head and slim built. It looked like she was trying to play good cop.

“Really?” I asked. “A sweep without warrants? This illegal as fuck.”

“You want to test me in court?” She hissed.

“You better pray it gets that far.” I shot back. They took our guns before we were cuffed. “I want my shit back after this. Those guns are clean, registered, and Florida is a stand your grown state so it’s not illegal to be carrying a weapon.”

O’Shynn and I were finally cuffed... they weren’t rough, but it didn’t matter.

This was deeper than a regular raid. This was surely a message, but for what?

I wasn’t sure yet. As they led us to the cars, I saw one of Dom’s street runners’ men posted in the alley.

He gave a little nod, and I knew he’d get word to Dom.

I didn’t have to say anything at all. Inside the SUV, cuffed next to O’Shynn, I kept calm, but my mind was already in strategy mode.

Dom was going to blow a hole through somebody’s city for this bullshit because now they weren’t just coming for the empire, they were coming for his Queen.

The car rolled down the rugged streets of Miami with the sirens wailing low in the distance.

The scent of cheap leather and stale cologne tickled my nostrils.

I sat cuffed with my back straight and as cool as a cucumber expression on my face, but my blood was literally boiling underneath my skin.

The female agent riding in the front kept glancing at me in the rearview mirror like she was waiting for me to fold or something, but she had the wrong bitch.

I broke the silence giving her the same exact energy she was giving me. “You do realize that this arrest is illegal as hell, right?”

The man sitting on the other side of me was some corny looking ass Fed with a badge that probably came with a handbook he never read before... hell they usually didn't. scoffed. “You can explain that at the station, ma'am.”

“I'm not a ma'am, I'm an attorney and you're going to be out of a job by the time my lawsuit is filed.”

He chuckled trying to play it off, but I saw the uncomfortable shift. Yeah, I had him nervous alright. I turned to O'Shynn and she too looked cool as ever, and unbothered as her eyes were locked out the window like she was simply bored. She surely wasn't scared.

“They think we're soft,” I mumbled enough for her to hear me.

She smirked and shook her head. “They always do.”

I slightly leaned forward and said something again.

“You violated my civil rights the moment you laid a hand on me without a warrant. You're transporting me to a station with no charges read, no Miranda rights stated, no call to counsel, and no explanation for this little circus.”

” I explained letting them know that I knew my rights.

The blondie in the front simply cleared her throat.

I continued, “Oh, don’t get shy now,” I added.

“Because by tomorrow, I’m going to own your badge, your pension, and whatever dusty little retirement beach house you’re saving up for. ” I winked.

O’Shynn chuckled. “Not the beach house, sis.”

“Nope, she’s going have to Airbnb that shit out just to pay legal fees.” I replied.

The car grew quiet once again except for the sound of the engine and the occasional crackle of one of their radios. However, my honest feelings, I was so pissed I could strangle somebody. I ‘am’ the law so how the hell was I know handcuffed like a criminal without even knowing why?

“This is a scare tactic,” I said. “You think because we’re women, we’ll fold, cry, or beg just so we can tell you whatever you want to know so we can be let go.

Well, let me put you on crooked assholes on game.

You’re not looking at the weak ones. We don’t fold for the streets, the Feds, the courthouses, or your fat, sloppy, donut eating, ass bosses either. We don’t rattle; we retaliate.”

O’Shynn finally turned her head toward him allowing a small grin to form on her lips. “You sure you wanna keep this energy? Because ourbossdon’t like this kind of play and believe me when I tell you, you don’t want to see him on a bad day.”

They weren't replying to anything we said. However, that didn't stop the look of discomfort on their faces. I locked eyes with the woman in the front. "You really think this little grab and snatch going to get you some kind of intel? Please... you'd get more info trying to interrogate a brick wall."

She didn't respond, but I knew I struck a nerve and that's when it clicked.

This wasn't even protocol, and they weren't looking to charge us.

They were fishing for information and maybe trying to figure out who the hell Carmen really was to Dominic Royal outside of a piece of paper...

or if O'Shynn was more than a pretty face running a club. They thought they'd catch us slipping or snitching but it was too bad. They kidnapped the wrong women.

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Carmen had been long gone and now, here I was with Victoria.

The nurse was gentle, but her hands were too slow for my patience.

She stood over Victoria carefully changing the bandage on her arm like she wasn't the same woman who'd been on cartel soil all of her life.

This should've been easy for her. I was posted up at the kitchen bar with a half full glass of Don Julio.

The bottle sat beside me like an old friend I only called when shit got real, which was often 'cause that was my go-to on any given day. Tone had already left to check on Shona and he earned that. He had bigger fish to fry at home, but he was still loyal to the Royal. She was carrying his seed and dealing with cramps and scares in the middle of all this shit, and I knew it wasn't easy.

If it were up to me, I'd have Tone stay home with her until the baby was born, but this life was all Tone knew.

Two of my hittas, Phat and Lou, stood near the door in silence simply watching and posted like statues and shit.

My space stayed protected, even when it felt like the walls were closing in and right now, that's how it felt.

My eyes shot to Victoria. She was fine as hell, and it was no denying that.

Her skin was still flawless and even under the circumstances, it didn't take away from that.

Her thick-ass thighs, natural full lips, and perfect had seen too much, too young just like the rest of us.

However, but beauty didn't mean shit in my world... trust did... and I didn't trust her yet.

The nurse finished with Victora and then said her polite goodbyes.

After I paid her, she bounced, and I walked out on the balcony.

No sooner than the door clicked shut behind her, Victoria stepped out on the balcony like she'd been waiting for the moment to be alone with me.

The night air was humid and thick as fuck.

I took another slow sip of my drink and waited for her to speak.

She leaned on the railing with one arm folded across her midsection while the other arm rested in the sling.

"I don't know what I'm supposed to do now, Dom," she admitted in a voice a little softer than her usual.

I could tell she wasn't playing games, unfortunately this was just her fucked up truth.

I looked her over entire body. Victoria had this raw energy about her.

A bad bitch that still had a story to tell.

But the look in her eyes was deeper than cartel beef or family betrayal.

She was lost and for a split second, I almost gave a fuck...

almost. "You ever seen a lion feed a stray cat?" I asked her.

She slowly turned. "No."

"Exactly... I ain't got the time nor the space to keep folks around who don't know who they are. You wanna live? You better figure that shit out fast." I said and I meant every word.

In my head, I could've easily put a bullet between her eyes and chalked it up as just another casualty of this game.

El Blanca would be tight, but that bridge was already damn near burnt anyway.

Sending her on a flight back was still an option...

if I was feeling generous, but before I could say anything else one of my phones began to buzz and the encrypted line lit up.

The only people that had access to that phone was my street runners, only the top ones.

"Yo," I answered with one hand with my other hand already setting down the glass.

"Boss," the voice on the other end said, "it's the girls' man. Carmen and O'Shynn just got snatched up by the Feds."

It felt like the muhfuckin' air in my chest stopped moving. It felt like my heart

skipped a few beats. I could deal with one of my people getting snatched up, but my sister and wife was a no go. “What?” I growled.

“Yeah, they got picked up outside the club without no warrants, no cause and not even a heads-up. They cuffed them and everything, but it’s some shady shit goin’ on.

That was no regular detain if you ask me.

Carmen looked me dead in the eyes, she knew I’d get the word to you.

You know how them folks operate; they won’t even let them use the phone the first forty-eight hours to notify nobody. ”

I hung up before he finished talking and stood still for two long seconds with my jaws flexing while feeling like my temples were about to explode.

My next move was already lined up in my head.

I didn’t panic though, that wasn’t my style and that’s the same thing I taught my people.

Don’t never panic ‘cause when you panic you die or get caught up in the cross. That’s what separated a king from pawns.

First, I pulled out another phone, the one who had the lawyer on speed dial.

“Yerrr,” the smooth voice, of Emilio Serrano, one of the coldest and most powerful attorneys in Miami.

Muhfucka wore expensive suits and custom ties.

However, everyone knew he was courtroom killer and also just so happened to be one of Carmen's mentors from back in her rookie days.

I also so happened to have him on container just in case anything ever happened to Carmen. "What's the word, Royal?" He asked.

"I need you to meet me down that the federal station, now." I let him know.

He didn't bother to ask questions because it wasn't any need to. He was coming either way and would ask questions later if needed. "I'm already on the way."

The next call I made was to the Mayor. This is another reason he was on payroll. My hefty donations made it possible for him to keep his job. "Dom," his voice came in sounding like he already knew he was about to owe me something major.

"Your Feds snatched up Carmen and O'Shynn. You got fifteen minutes to meet me in front of that station or this shit's gon' get nasty."

"I'll be there." He replied before hanging up. He was probably over there sweating bullets because if this shit didn't end well, he could forget about a lot of contributions.

I turned to Phat and Lou and told them, "Get the trucks. I want every vehicle deep and the motorcycles too. This bout to be a power pull-up."

While they got on the move, Victoria stood frozen behind me, with her eyes wide and her lips parted just a little waiting for me to say something to her. "What happened?" she asked with a face full of concern.

I glared into her eyes. "The women you should be learnin' from just got pulled into some shit they ain't even gon' flinch about."

Now watch how we handle this.” I said to her to get her stuff before we walked out.

The doors flung open behind me as I stepped into the night like I owned the city, because I did.

As we rolled up to the Federal building, the black trucks were in formation, and the engine from the motorcycles roared.

I finally got another call from one of my people on the inside.

“Boss,” my hitta said, “they’re being questioned about a hit.”

I didn’t say shit at first. The only hit they could have been questioning them about was mine when I sprayed that white Escalade and the hit was clean...

too clean and too quiet. They must’ve been Feds in disguise or some informants on a low-key assignment.

Now they were sniffing around and trying to shake down my females thinking they’d get a slip up but the muhfuckas didn’t know Carmen and O’Shynn were trained and loyal to the bone.

I stepped out of the lead truck first and I knew my energy was felt.

Serrano met me at the entrance, adjusting his cufflinks like he was about to go fight for a million-dollar client because he was.

The Mayor stood beside him, sweating through his tie like I knew he would, and the Cartel was behind me.

“You got five minutes to find out what’s goin’ on,” I told them. “I want Carmen and

O'Shynnout of that station, or we makin' this a fuckin' war zone. I'll lay my life on the line and die about those two."

Serrano gave me a nod and walked straight into the precinct like it was a fucking boardroom meeting awaiting him on the other side.

The Mayor scrambled behind him, while stuttering and apologizing to nobody who was listening 'cause I know I damn sure wasn't.

I didn't budge at all. I stayed out front with my crew and we was deep too.

The windows on the trucks were slightly cracked.

Every nigga standing with me was loyal and every chain around a neck had been earned in blood.

The officers on duty outside the station were nervous, their radios buzzing nonstop with chatter they couldn't control.

They kept glancing over at us, unsure if they should call in backup or just stay out of the storm entirely.

Phat lit a cigar right there on the sidewalk, blowing smoke in the direction of a nervous-looking rookie who looked like he wanted to shit his pants.

Lou checked his phone, then looked at me. "Nothin' yet."

"We gon' wait," I said calmly. "We ain't goin' nowhere till my wife and my sister walk out that muhfucka on their own feet."

This wasn't just about family anymore, it was about the principle.

Carmen Royal wasn't just my wife, she was Miami's sharpest female criminal attorney with a respected name in and outside of courtrooms, and they had the audacity to drag her down here on speculation ?

Nah, fuck that... and O'Shynn ran an empire of her own, and they thought they'd break her because she was pretty and sharp?

Nah... ain't no way. These Fed niggas forgot who the fuck they were dealing with.

Minutes turned into hours, and the sun got even hotter, burning down on all of us like a spotlight from the heavens.

Sweat ran down my temple, but I didn't move and didn't plan to.

I leaned back against the truck with my arms folded cool as a fan on the surface.

I could feel the weight of Miami watching and in that moment everything around me seemed a little smaller.

The civilians passed by slow walking with their eyes wide and phones out but they hesitant to film.

They knew what this presence meant, and the Royal Cartel don't pull up unless it's personal.

The glass doors swung open, and I felt like I could breathe again.

Carmen and O'Shynn walked out side by side, calm as hell, draped in trench coats like they'd just walked off a runway instead of being interrogated for damn near twelve hours.

They both had on shades, and both had a little smirk on their faces and in that exact moment, everyone who was watching knew that the Feds lost this round .

I pushed off the truck and met Carmen halfway, eyeing her from head to toe like I needed to make sure she was untouched.

O'Shynn's savage ass winked at me before flipping her middle finger over her shoulder in the direction of the station.

Carmen slid her shades down just enough for our eyes to lock.

"You okay ma?" I asked low.

She looked at me with those pretty ass eyes and smiled at me. "Yep, better than ever."

Behind us, the Mayor was trying to save face pretending to answer calls while Serrano lit a cigarette looking like he'd just won his hundredth case.

The presence of the Cartel was strong and the line of black Escalades, along with the motorcycles idling curbside told every single soul on that block the truth about what really just happened...

we run this city, and nobody was about to break what we built.

They'd have to come with a solid case first.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:28 pm

The walls of the interrogation room were a dull gray, and cold.

I was used to it but never from this side of it.

The only time I'd ever entered one of these rooms was because I was showing up on the behalf of a client.

It wasn't a clock in sight or any windows.

It wasn't meant to be comfortable. It was just four corners, one steel table bolted to the ground, and two chairs we didn't ask to fucking sit in.

Me and O'Shynn were dressed in our trench coats fresh off a night where we were only supposed to be handling some quick business at the club and that landed us here. Go figure, we weren't even supposed to be at the club at all tonight.

We were simply having a ladies' night in the sanctuary of my home.

"You okay?" O'Shynn asked in a whispered tone as her eyes stayed steady on the double-sided mirror.

I nodded my head leaning back in my chair with my legs crossed gently resting my arms. "They think we're the weak links."

She smirked. "They gon' learn tonight."

We'd been sitting for what felt like hours and I knew the routine.

They wanted us to sweat, but we didn't plan on breaking and never have.

Finally, the door slowly creaked open, and two agents stepped in.

It was one black man with a shiny bald head that looked like he had an attitude problem, and a white woman with ugly energy written all over her face.

They dropped a thick ass folder on the table like we were supposed to be impressed. I just stared at it.

The bald one leaned forward. "You ladies know why you're here?"

"No," I replied coolly. "But what I do know is you have about fifteen minutes to either charge me or get the fuck out of my face. This little game you're playing won't end how you think."

The woman cut in this time. "There was a shooting a few nights ago outside of the club. Does a white Escalade ring a bell?"

I glanced at O'Shynn, who blinked slow, just like me. We were already on one accord with each other. I turned back to the woman sounding unbothered. "Ma'am, it's Miami. A shooting in front of a club isn't exactly a unicorn you know."

Baldy flipped open the folder and started sliding his finger over black and white surveillance photos across the table.

They were from a traffic cam pointed toward the side of the club.

One showed a motorcycle, and another showed a muzzle of flashes.

There was another that looked like bullet holes in the Escalade, however, there was

no face for the motorcycle, no license plate, and no proof.

I knew better, that hit had Dom's name written all over it, but I would never tell.

O'Shynn folded her arms. "That supposed to scare us?"

"You own the property," Baldy said looking between O'Shynn and I. Yes, O'Shynn owned the club and yes, our names were tied into it, but we hadn't done anything. "You expect us to believe you didn't know what happened outside? Especially when we know your ties?"

I leaned forward, locking eyes with him. "You ever hear of liability law? Because what you're trying to do is paint suspicion without a canvas. You don't have enough paint, sweetheart."

The room fell silent, but I could feel the tension.

They were hoping for some kind of crack or emotions to flare.

Instead, I fixed my trench and yawned like I was tired.

They tried to separate us next. They took O'Shynn to another room and left me in mine with a new agent who had a clip-on tie and tried to act like he knew something that he didn't.

He leaned back in his chair like he owned the tiny box of a room.

"I don't think you fully understand how serious this is, Ms. Royal," he said.

I smirked. "It's Williams.... Carmen Williams." I was being an asshole. Williams was the name I entered the U.S with but I was surely a Royal.

“Right... Williams,” he said, clearly annoyed that he didn’t get a rise out of me. “You’re affiliated with Dominic Royal, are you not?”

“I’m affiliated with success,” I shot back. “And business....legal business. Do you have a warrant to pull my affiliations out your ass?”

He leaned in this time. “We know who you are Carmen. You’re the gatekeeper. The one who ties it all together. You’re not only the attorney or the wife.”

“Sounds so poetic,” I replied in a dry sarcastic tone. “Are you a writer or something?”

“You have a smart mouth.”

I slightly tilt my head to the side. “And you have a case you can’t prove. Let’s cut the foreplay.” I hissed. After two more hours of going nowhere, I stood up and asked, “Are we under arrest?”

“No,” the woman finally admitted when she came back in right on time.

“Then this whole shit is illegal,” I said. “And you’re about to lose your damn pensions fucking around with me. I’ll sue this whole department into retirement.” I warned.

“You need a lawyer?” she asked, trying to flip the script.

I smiled. “I am the lawyer.”

Just then, the phone rang, and the male agent answered.

“Yes sir... yes, they’re both still here... understood.

” He hung up, with his jaws super tight and I knew it was ‘that’ call I’d been waiting on.

Next thing I know, he’s standing up opening the door.

“You’re free to go.” He didn’t give any apology nor an explanation.

But I already knew... it had to be the Mayor’s call.

As I stepped out, O'Shynn reentered the hallway just as I was sliding my coat back on.

“You okay?” she asked.

“I stay good,” I replied. “They thought we were going to crack and start singling like birds; however, they can’t challenge a woman who’s in tune with the law.

We don’t crack... we are the fucking cement.

” As we walked past the agents on the way out, I whispered loud enough for them to hear, “Don’t make this mistake again.

You might not walk away with just your pride bruised next time... I’m still thinking about that lawsuit.”

Their faces said it all and had they not known my importance before, they knew it now, and most importantly, what I was capable of.

As the last door buzzed open and we were finally told we could leave, the station's fluorescent lights still flickered above our heads. O’Shynn adjusted her coat and ran her hand over her sleek bun to make sure that every hair was still in place.

I straightened my own trench, smoothed the wrinkles out of my skirt, and slipped my shades on.

The air in the hallway smelled like old coffee and a bunch of fucking egos.

I wasn't even mad; I was just disgusted.

I prayed like hell I didn't make the headlines tomorrow when word got out that they actually had the audacity to cuff me.

"You ready O'Shynn?" I asked. My eyes were disguised behind my shades.

O'Shynn nodded her head. "Hell yeah, I was born ready."

As soon as the final set of double doors swung open and the sunlight hit our faces, that Miami heat met us with open arms nearly kicking our asses.

It was bright, bold, and unapologetic as hell about the disrespect.

Dom was standing directly in front of the station like something out of a cartel royalty, fine as well, and rough around the edges, but perfectly polished at the same time.

His all-black linen shirt was unbuttoned at the top, his Cuban links were hanging heavy around his neck, and that gaze in his eyes said it all.

He had one foot leaned against the matte black motorcycle next to him, and his gold-framed Cartier shades hid everything except his power.

On the right side of him, one of the most expensive criminal defense attorneys in all of Miami confidently stood in a navy-blue Italian imported suit.

He was one I respected and one of my mentors.

He was Cuban American, with a loud reputation, and even louder victories.

Beside him, the actual Mayor of Miami, stood with his arms crossed, and his face was tight.

He was clearly pulled into this situation with a simple call from Dom.

Hell, he was on payroll and Royal Enterprises gave back to community year around and he surely didn't want to do anything to ruin that as well.

Behind them all was a line of blacked-out cartel trucks with shiny chrome, and bulletproof windows tinted to hell and back with the load engines still running.

To top that off it was two more motorcycles...

inked up and strapped too... right outside of the Federal building waiting for us and it wasn't shit they could do about it.

Me and O'Shynn gave each other a look, then walked out together taking step for step, and shoulder to shoulder, as our boots clicked sharply on the concrete.

We made sure to keep our chins up and remained poised.

I could feel the agents inside watching from behind the glass, and I wanted them to see every second of this.

We weren't victims and we weren't afraid either.

We winked at each other... just two bad bitches in the midst of one cartel.

Dom pushed off the bike as we approached with that sly grin on his face that was barely visible.

“Y’all cool?” he asked, like nothing had happened, but I knew he was pissed.

“We’re always good,” I replied, cool as hell, even though on the inside I was running hot as well. Now wasn’t the time to be a clingy wife.

O’Shynn gave him a nod. “Thanks for pulling strings bro.”

He looked at the both of us and then directed his attention to the lawyer. “Aye make sure the city understands not to ever put my family through this type of disrespect again or embarrassment again.”

The lawyer nodded, already working on spinning the story before it hit the news cycle. The Mayor was quiet because he knew what this was as well as he knew ‘what’ it was knowing better than to speak on it.

Dom turned to me and removed a piece of hair that was becoming unruly from my face as he leaned in close enough for me to hear. “You held that shit down like I knew you would wifey. I love that for you.”

I slid my shades down just enough to meet his gaze. “What else you expect from a Royal?”

He simply kissed my forehead, then pulled my hand into his. “Let’s ride.”

And just like that, we were gone. The sounds of motorcycle engines rumbled low, and the trucks rolled out in formation behind us.

We were definitely loud as the loud sounds ripped through the Miami streets as the

Royal Cartel reminded the whole city what real power looked like as well as what it could look like if you fucked with the wrong people.

I noticed how Dom was getting more comfortable with showing me public affection, but I wouldn't dare speak on it because all it let me know was, I was slowly breaking the barriers of that heart of his.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:28 pm

I hadn't slept in two days, and my body was starting to feel it but between the shit with El Blanca and the streets, I was wired.

I was so alert that the moment I felt my eyes closed it's like something clicked in my head telling me to get my ass up.

So, when I pulled up to Royal Enterprises headquarters, the block was already swarming with my people.

The black Escalades were lined up like a presidential run.

Tone was leaning against one of the trucks as his cold eyes swept the lot.

Dique had just touched back down from the West Coast and was dappin' up a few of our people.

I stepped out of the bulletproof whip in slow motion as I slightly ran my hand over the waves of my brush cut.

The gold Cuban chain was heavy on my chest per usual and it was silent...

the kind when a boss enters the room. That's what the parking lot felt like as I walked through the glass doors into the boardroom with O'Shynn and Carmen nearby.

Today it was all business. My wife's heels clacked on the side of me and her all-black fit hugged her curves in all the right places.

I hadn't had none of that pussy since the Bahamas and craved it now.

My sister had that fire in her eyes too, and you could see the same blood in both of us...

it was that Royal blood. Once inside, we ain't waste no time and got straight to it.

"All right," I said, stepping to the head of the table. "Let's get into this shit."

Tone closed the door and stood near it like a damn Doberman. Dique was already cracking his knuckles, half-playful but serious. "Tell me where to go. I'm on whatever time you on."

"That's what I like to hear," I nodded. "West Palm and Homestead, those are two of El Blanca's biggest money chains in Florida and tonight we hittin' both. Fuck em."

O'Shynn tapped her iPad, pulling up blueprints and satellite footage of the West Palm warehouse. "The shipment comes in every Wednesday at midnight. We already confirmed it and they moving weight by the tons."

"And Homestead?" Tone asked.

"It's a stash house man. It's not just product but intel. It's all kind of shit in there from flash drives, burner cells, money counters, and all kinda shit El Blanca don't want touched."

"Fuck El Blanca... blow that bitch off the map," I said. "I don't want no witnesses."

Carmen cleared her throat beside me. "I've already sent word overseas."

El Blanca's supply in the Dominican Republic is one of his biggest ports and is also

getting fucked up tonight.

” She explained. I was proud of Carmen because this wasn’t even her specialty.

She’s only supposed to be on the legal side but that fact that she knew how to maneuver all sides said a lot about her dedication.

Dique let out a laugh. “Boy, we tappin’ that man’s pockets from three sides. He gon’ fold slime.”

“Or go to war,” Tone added. “But he started this shit anyway. This what he asked for. We ain’t runnin’ from shit. It’s funny how muhfuckas wanna see you do good but not better than them. El Blanca can eat a dick with taco sauce.”

I looked at my crew... my family and it was clear as day how deep in we really were and wasn’t no turning back no time soon. This was personal now. “Let’s bleed this muhfucka dry,” I said. “Make him regret ever thinkin’ he could try to sun me.”

Everyone nodded. Carmen glanced over at me, her expression was unreadable, but I knew her.

I felt her energy like electricity, and I knew she was with me ride or die.

We stepped out of the conference room and into the Miami night only to be met with hell.

Before anyone could react, gunshots rang through the sky before the door even closed behind us.

“Get DOWN!” Tone shouted, pushing O’Shynn behind a car.

It was a full-blown ambush. “GET COVER!” I growled, yanking Carmen behind the pillar near the main entrance. “Kill these pussy ass niggas.”

My hittas moved fast returning fire. I ducked behind a blacked-out SUV, pulled the MAC from my waistband, and lit up the block.

The brass shell casings bounced off the pavement like rain.

Carmen was blasting too and shawty dropped to one knee behind the front wheel, cool as ever, head-shotting a muhfucka without blinking.

“WHERE THE FUCK THEY COMIN’ FROM?” Dique barked, unloading his clip.

“They tryna box us in!” Tone shouted.

That’s when I saw Ramon go down. He was one of my day-ones and he got hit twice in the chest and dropped like a sack of potatoes.

I rushed toward him, but I was too late.

His blood started to pour out onto the sidewalk as he lay lifeless.

My vision turned red, and another maniac switch flipped on inside of me.

“Light they bitch asses UP!” I roared.

My crew did just that. The fuckin’ block lit up like fireworks on my lead.

They were outnumbered and wasn’t Royal smoke on our own turf.

The tires screeched as El Blanca’s people tried to dip but we clipped one of their

trucks and flipped it over the curb, before setting that bitch on fire.

I scanned the chaos and saw Carmen ducking behind another car.

I ran to her with my heart beatin' like a fuckin' drum.

“You good?!” I yelled, crouching down, grabbing her shoulders.

She looked up at me with her face covered with smoke, and a little blood on her cheek but she was still focused while breathing real hard. but them eyes? Still focused. “I’m good, Dom... I’m okay.” She said licking her lips trying to catch her breath.

Something in me broke and healed at the same damn time.

Next thing I knew, I was pulling her into my chest right there behind the truck.

Fuck the sirens, the smoke, and the last of the gunfire popping off, I held her tight and told her how I felt.

“I can’t lose you,” I whispered in her ear.

“I don’t care about no crown, no turf, no cartel...

if somethin’ happened to you, Carmen, I’d burn the whole fuckin’ city down. ”

She pulled back just enough to look me in my face. “You already know I’m not going nowhere husband,” she whispered back. “I’m not just your lawyer, your rider, or your wife. I’m your fuckin’ shadow. Wherever you go, I’m there as long as you need me.”

It was chaos around us, but in the stillness, I knew my ass was falling in love with

Carmen.

Some shit I swore I'd never do. It was deeper than attraction, and deeper than just fuckin'.

It was that deep, dangerous kind of love that could get a man killed if he wasn't careful.

I leaned forward and kissed her right there and I ain't give a fuck who saw it.

The streets could burn down around us, but she was safe and now El Blanca had another reason to fear me.

Because a man like me, in love? That's the deadliest shit ever.

I had a reason to always want to stay alive.

The sirens were still wailing somewhere off in the distance when I crouched next to Ramon's body.

He wasn't even cold yet; blood the blood was still wet under him as it soaked into the concrete.

I had seen plenty of bodies, but this wasn't just another body.

This was my soldier, my youngin', and one of the most loyal hittas in my circle.

"Get the fuckin' car," I growled to anybody listening. "We not leavin' him in the street like he was nothin'."

The rest of the crew had already started to peel off, watching the corners, and making

sure the block was clear in case El Blanca's people doubled back. I wasn't no fool and I knew the risk of staying too long.

But Ramon? He gave everything for this cartel and for me.

He wasn't no stray that deserved to be left dead in the street and forgotten.

I owed his mama more than that. One of the black trucks pulled up slowly with the plates swapped and a fresh paint job with a burner phone tapped on the inside.

I nodded to my guy 'Red' in the front seat.

He was one of my clean-up men. "Drop him at the Hospital's back door.

Tell 'em he was shot in a robbery and then burn the whip. I want that drop to be untraceable."

Red nodded his head and two more of my hittas helped him gently lift Ramon into the backseat.

It took everything in me not to lose it in front of my crew.

I stared at the back of that truck until it disappeared down the Ave.

I pulled my phone out and dialed straight to Miss Twyla's number but couldn't even hit the call button yet.

She ain't even know her baby gone. I pinched the bridge of my nose and exhaled again tucking that grief deep in my chest where it had to stay.

I had a war to finish. My phone buzzed in my hand on the private line with a status

update on the hit. I swiped the call and answered, "Talk."

"Everything's smoked out in West Palm and Homestead. Yo' other crew in Colombia hit that shipment on the water. The estimated damage is just over two mil."

I flexed my jaws and stared out over the Miami skyline. "Good... let El Blanca feel that pressure. Make sure they know the name 'Royal' is who stepped on they fuckin' neck."

"Copy that."

I hung up and immediately opened the encrypted Royal app.

One touch and a black map expanded on my screen.

I pinged every Royal Enterprises location from South Beach, to ATL, to L.A.

I then tapped into the command thread and sent a message: Code black in all locations.

I need all extra open and every spot beefed up with extra eyes.

The response from my lieutenants came in no time with a confirmation from every coast. I stepped into the elevator alone with blood still dry on my white tee, and bulletproof vest underneath.

I didn't feel the pain until the elevator lights hit just right, and I caught a glimpse of red soaking through my left side.

I pulled up the tee when I got in the penthouse and sure enough, I'd been grazed.

"Fuck," I mumbled, chuckling to myself as I stared in the mirror.

That adrenaline really do have a nigga moving like he invisible.

The wound was ugly, but it wasn't deep. The skin was torn, but it didn't break through my muscle.

It burned like hell when I poured some whiskey over it, hissing through my teeth as I held a towel to my flesh.

That shit stung worse than I thought it would.

I taped it down myself, instead of calling the nurse.

I'd call but I needed a minute with just me and my thoughts.

Ramon's name echoed in my head, and I couldn't stop it.

Miss Twyla's face flashed in my mind too.

She used to send food up to the shop for the crew years ago and always believed in her baby.

I texted my banker who was also a good friend and knew everything without me ever having to say a word because he kept up with the Cartel in any circumstance and any time messages when out, he received them too: Pull 50K and put it in Twyla Davis' name.

I'll cover the full funeral cost, and that house she been living in.

Pay it off quietly. I don't want her to worry about nothing.

When I finally sat down with my shirt off and bleeding bandage, I lit a blunt and stared at the city from the balcony until Victoria found me.

She had to stay here with one of my people and it seemed like whenever I returned it was never long before she showed face.

Carmen and the crew had gone home. O'Shynn went to her place and so did Dique.

When Victoria saw the bleeding bandage, she gasped and rushed to the back before returning with a few things.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:28 pm

Every time the balcony doors were slid open, the smell of Miami's salt from the ocean lingered around in the breeze.

He sat there shirtless and bleeding from the side as his skin glistened under the moonlight.

He smoked the blunt like it was more so soothing to him than anything else right now.

That bullet wound on his torso was and I could tell but he didn't show any signs of pain, instead he looked unbothered like he was invincible.

However, I could see the weight behind his eyes.

"Dammit..." I whispered, rushing back inside.

I wasn't a nurse by a very long shot, but I'd patched up enough wounds in my life to know when something needed cleaning and rewrapping.

Growing up the niece of El Blanca, I was raised around pain, so my hands learned how to be steady even while my heart raced, I had to remain calm when cleaning a wound because it was like a second nature.

I grabbed a clean towel, a first aid kit from the bathroom, along with a bottle of antiseptic, and some gauze, then returned to him.

Dom watched me, without saying a word to me at first. He was just holding that blunt

between his fingers.

When I knelt in front of him, he looked down at me, as his chest rose then fell.

“I ain’t ask for a nurse,” he said.

“You didn’t have to,” I replied, gently pressing the towel to his wound. “I’m just trying to help you... you’ve done enough for me without even realizing it.” I explained.

The moment the alcohol hit his skin, he flinched just a little, but his jaws remained tight. “You’ve done this before?” he asked, glaring down at me through those thick lashes of his.

I shrugged. “More times than I actually wanted to.”

“You ever thought about going to school for this shit?”

I laughed. “Not unless patching up killers counts towards a degree.”

He nodded his head at that, but then his face got serious.

“If you stay here... you gon’ need to do somethin’.

I’ll give you a job at one of my legit spots...

the spa, salon, or whatever. But understand this...

you won’t be nowhere near the cartel business.

That’s not a door I’m openin’ for you. Not until you prove yourself... if ever.”

I nodded slowly while keeping my eyes on the bandage as I secured it. “Understood.”

“And you can’t stay here forever,” he added, in a low tone. “I’m married.”

I froze for a quick second. Yeah, I knew he was married when he told me even though he didn’t wear a ring but hearing him say it once again cut me deeper than I expected and I didn’t know why.

Dom never gave an indication that he would ever give me a chance.

It was me holding on to wishful thinking.

Everything about him screamed protection and I gravitated to it.

“I wasn’t asking to stay forever,” I whispered.

Dom stood up, towering over me now. He tossed the blunt off the balcony and his demeanor said he was done with this conversation. I rose to my feet with my hands still smelling like peroxide and blood. “You mad?” he asked.

I shook my head no. “I’m not mad. I’m just... tired.”

There was a long pause as he glared at me. I could feel my breath getting caught up in my chest waiting for his response. “Then go to bed,” he said in a low tone. “Ain’t nothing more for us to talk about tonight. I appreciate you dressin’ my wound.”

I didn’t move right away. I just stood there staring at him not knowing what to think because he was the man who was becoming harder to read by the hour. Dom wasn’t just ruthless, he was complicated.

I replied after a brief pause. “I don’t know what I’m doing, Dom. A least not

anymore. I spent my whole life being told what to do, who to trust, who to hate... and now, none of it feels real.”

His eyes flicked to mine. “Then start over.”

I blinked. “Just like that?”

He stepped towards me again, allowing his energy to fill the space between us.

“Ain’t shit ‘bout this world easy, Victoria. But the difference between people who survive and the ones who die out here, is the ones who survive, learn when to let go. You either gon’ hold on to yo’ past and let it kill you... or let it go and build somethin’ new.”

I swallowed the lump in my throat. He was right. And I hated how much I needed to hear that from him. “I want to build something,” I whispered.

“Then stop cryin’ ‘bout the foundation that crumbled and start layin’ new brick then.”

I just looked at him in the eyes of a man who stood on the edge of two worlds caught between violence and vulnerability as he turned and disappeared back into the penthouse, leaving me on the balcony under the moonlight, I realized something else.

Dom Royal might’ve been a monster... but he was the first monster who ever looked at me like I could be more than a legacy.

He looked at me like I could be free. I was tired of being babysat.

Every time I turned around, one of Dom’s people was lurking in the corner or watching me like I was gonna run or snitch.

I had nowhere to go and no family left. I no longer had any loyalty owed to El Blanca, but I still wasn't free.

Right now, I was just tolerated and sheltered like some fragile little thing on house arrest. I walked through the penthouse barefoot, as my eyes bounced between two of Dom's people posted at the front door.

They weren't even trying to be low with it whenever they were watching me.

I rolled my eyes and not at them but at the whole situation.

I just wanted to feel like a regular person again.

I found Dom in the kitchen leaning against the island with a glass of water in his hand.

His gauze was looking intact wrapped tight around his side like a professional had done it.

He looked tired but still like a force to be reckoned with.

That was the thing about him, he was intimidating without even trying.

Even when I wanted to, I didn't raise my voice and didn't storm in or act out.

That's not how I dealt with him, and he taught me that.

With Dom, respect was a two-way street, you showed it if you expected it. So, I kept it calm and cool.

"You know, you really shouldn't be on your feet so much," I said, stepping toward

him.

“I know you feel like you’re made of steel or whatever, but even steel can get worn down.

” I told him. He looked at me with those deadly but sexy eyes and he didn’t say a word.

“I taped a piece of wrap over your gauze. That way it won’t get wet when you shower,” I added, holding it out to him.

“I figured you wouldn’t think of it... or wouldn’t care even if you did. Either way, here it is.”

He took it from me with a simple nod and eyes lingering for a second like he wasn’t used to someone thinking about the little stuff although I knew that wasn’t the case, that’s just what I wanted my mind to believe.

“I’m gonna cook something,” I said after a few more seconds.

“Nothing crazy. I just want to make something warm to give me a sense of normalcy. That way your chefs can sit this one out.”

“You don’t gotta do that,” he replied. His voice was smooth when he spoke.

“I know I don’t,” I said, glancing at him, “but I want to. Besides... I need something to do other than pace this damn house.”

Dom stared at me for a little bit longer before letting it go for now. What I was talking about was the least of his worries anyway. “Do what you want,” he said before heading off to shower.

I turned to the stove and felt alive again when I did.

Something about moving my hands, seasoning meat and sautéing onions made me feel grounded.

It reminded me of simpler times, before life just got this complicated.

By the time he came back out, his towel was slung over his shoulder and his sweats were hanging low on his hips.

I had the kitchen smelling delicious. I set a plate down on the counter and stepped back.

“I’ve been thinking...” I started as I wiped my hands on a dish towel, “about that job you offered. If it still stands, I want it. I know I’m not exactly at the top of your trust list, and I get it...

but I’m willing to prove myself. I don’t want your pity,” I continued, “and I’m not asking for handouts.

Just a chance to figure out where I fit in this new world. ”

Dom’s face didn’t change, but something in his eyes did. He set the towel down and walked past me, brushing my shoulder with his as he picked up the plate.

“I’ll think about it,” he simply replied and that was more than enough for me.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:28 pm

I t'd been a few days since all hell broke loose, and the streets had gone silent for now, but I knew that wouldn't last long, that's why when it was too quiet it didn't sit well with me.

It felt like the calm before another deadly ass storm.

My body was still healing from the chaos, and the soreness in my ribs reminded me that I wasn't bulletproof.

Still, I got up and moved like I was simply ignoring it.

I had motions to file, cases to prepare, and a life to keep pushing even with the weight of the world on my shoulders feeling like bricks.

I had just left the courthouse downtown.

The judge approved my motion for a continuance for a trial in the making, which gave me more time to work my angle of the case.

My suit jacket was draped over my forearm, and my heels were clicking against the concrete with every step as I made my way to the car.

With every step that I took, I could feel eyes watching me.

I scanned the street twice, but nothing looked off to me.

However, I still couldn't shake the eerie ass feeling that rolled down my spine.

When I made it to the penthouse, I locked the door behind me, kicked off my heels, and stepped out of my dress allowing it to form a puddle around my ankles before I stepped over it.

That damn underwire in my bra had been cutting into me all day.

I slipped into a tank top and some boy shorts before brushing my hair up into a messy bun.

I wasn't trying to be sexy. I just wanted to be comfortable...

but when Dom showed up fifteen minutes later, his eyes said otherwise.

"Still hurtin'?" he asked, with his eyes gliding over my body.

"Yeah, but who cares? I'm breathing, so I'm okay with that." I gave him a dry smirk and nodded toward the couch. "Sit down and let me check that damn wound. You stubborn as hell."

Dom peeled off his shirt like it was nothing and my pussy began to throb at the sight of his ripped frame.

That scar was healing, the dressing was wrapped good, real good.

I knew it was still painful, but that man wouldn't dare say a word about it.

Hell, he did everything in silence. He loved in silence, hurt in silence, and sometimes popped off in silence.

I gently pressed my fingers around the gauze as I peeled it back to see it. "This shit looks like it hurts like a hell." I winched.

He chuckled through clenched teeth. “Ain’t shit but a graze. I can’t let it slow me down.”

I gave him a look and raised a brow. “You a lie.” I knew it had to hurt.

That man sat there like a damn statue while I applied ointment, cleaned the wound again, and rewrapped it.

“You done?” he asked, gazing at me with that look in his eyes.

“Yup.”

“Aight good... now let me check on you.”

Before I could even roll my eyes or play hard to get, he pulled me down into his lap, like he owned my body.

My sore thighs naturally wrapped around him and within minutes, his dick was out, my boy shorts were pulled to the side, and I was riding him like I had something to prove and maybe I did.

I tossed my head back making sure not to brush against his wound.

With my bottom lips tucked, I rode Dom’s hefty dick like I was riding a wave as he stared in my face with a dominating yet satisfying look on his face and in his eyes.

I could tell the feeling of being inside of me was taking his mind off of his wound and that was the plan anyway. I don’t know if it was the pressure between us both with everything going on around us, but before I knew it, we were both cumming as I squirted all over him.

“Mmmmm! Fuckkkkk!” I squealed with my eyes shut tight feeling my thighs quake around him.

“Damn girl,” he groaned with his hands plastered on my thighs allowing his dick to pulsate through my warm walls.

It took me a few minutes to gather myself but if it were up to me, I would’ve never moved.

I rested my head on Dom’s shoulder while he wrapped his strong arms around my body.

I had wanted this kind of attention from him for so long, I was afraid that it would just disappear one day.

I didn’t know if Dom was just going through a phase or if he was actually truly opening up to loving me.

I did know it didn’t feel forced. When I finally peeled myself off of him, I barely made it to the kitchen before my phone rang.

I was going to get Dom and I some water.

As soon as I answered, Dique’s voice came through.

“Y’all better not be late,” he said as soon as I said hello. “You know Ma be mad emotional on her birthday... and don’t come empty-handed neither. I told her you was bringing the banana pudding.”

“Boy, I will throw you off a bridge. I didn’t say I was bringing that.

” I laughed. “But we on our way.” I let him know as I peeked over at Dom.

Shit , I thought. With all the chaos going on, I nearly forgot about my own mother-in-law’s birthday cookout today.

I was excited to see the look on her face when she received her gift from her children though.

Later that day, we rolled into the hood in two trucks as the shadows followed.

We pulled up to one of Dom’s cousins’ houses on the northwest side, where the block was alive.

Music was bumping and kids were running around with water guns as the meat on the grill was smoking.

As soon as we stepped out, I felt eyes on us.

Not in a dangerous way... but in that ‘Damn, they fine as hell’ kind of way.

Dom had on a black Amiri tee with matching jeans and white low-top Forces.

He was very simple today. I kept it casual too with jean shorts, a cute little crop top and a pair of New Balances.

Dom dapped up some of the old heads, he hugged his aunties and handed a stack of cash to one of his little cousins running who was running the Kool-Aid stand.

You could just see in everyone’s eyes the respect they had for him.

Every block boy that saw him gave that same nod because they knew when the King

was around, they were good.

Mrs. Delores was glowing and aging backwards.

She had a plate in one hand and a Solo cup in the other.

She was already two drinks in and talking shit at the spades table with one of Dom's uncles.

"Y'all don't know nothing 'bout running a Boston!" she screamed across the table.

"Me and Tony been doing this since before yo mama had her first perm!"

We cracked up and it felt good to be around regular shit for once.

O'Shynn pulled up fashionably late, wearing a fitted sundress and huge hoop earrings, already with a plate of ribs in her hand and Dique was on the side, rolling dice with a few of the OGs.

The air was filled with Miami bass, BBQ, and joy.

"Carmen!" one of Dom's cousins yelled. "Come get in this spades game! I need a real partner."

Dom walked up behind me and slid his arm around my waist. "Don't let her fool you, she ruthless with the books."

"Ruthless?" I looked back at him. "I'm a shark, baby."

For the most part, we sat, we laughed, and we danced.

For a few hours, we weren't lawyers or killers or shadows caught up in a war.

We were just family... just regular people and it absolutely felt like something worth protecting.

As the sun started to set behind the clouds, I sat back and looked at Dom across the yard.

He was laughing, had a drink in hand, and showing that carefree smile I only saw in rare moments like this.

He was far from perfect, and that's what made me love him even more.

Everything I'd done for him; I'd do it again and again.

The sun had set just enough for the citronella candles to flicker around the yard as the warm breeze surrounded our bodies.

The laughter still bounced from the dominoes table, and Delores was somewhere talking shit and hugging necks while truly enjoying her day.

Pops, Dom's father was busy on the grill most of the time and O'Shynn had the Bluetooth speaker on fire playing some old-school Trick Daddy.

A few minutes later, Dom stood next to me with one hand on my waist and the other nursing his drink.

Dique came strolling back from the dice game, stacking his little wad of cash and cheesing like he'd just robbed a bank.

"Yo," Dom called out, low enough so only our circle could hear. "We need to holla at

you.”

Dique slowed his step, immediately clocking that it was serious. “What’s up slime?”

“Let’s take a walk,” Dom said, already leading us toward the side of the house, past the grill and the cousins smoking by the gate.

We landed near the back fence, away from the noise and I could tell from the look in Dom’s eyes, he didn’t want to say it, but this was something that couldn’t wait.

We had danced around it long enough at this point.

Dom took a slow sip of his drink before setting it on the edge of the concrete wall. “Look... we got the DNA results back.”

Dique squinted. “DNA? You mean Keondra?”

Dom nodded his head. Dique scoffed, but it was all for show. I could see the way his hands curled into fists at his sides. “Man, I already told y’all that ain’t my...”

“She is,” I cut him off. “The test came back. Keondra’s little girl... she’s yours.”

Dique stared at us like we just sucker-punched him. “The fuck?” he mumbled in disbelief. “Nah. That girl don’t even look like me. I done been around her, and I...”

“That’s what we thought too,” Dom said cutting him off once again. “But DNA don’t lie.”

It got real quiet till the point all we heard was the muffled sounds of the music coming from the yard but back here, it was a different vibe right now.

Dique looked away clenching his jaws. For a second, I thought he was going to swing on Dom out of frustration, but instead, he kicked the brick wall with the side of his foot.

“So what y’all tryna say?” he finally asked. “That I’m a fuckin’ daddy now? Overnight?”

“You been one,” Dom said. “You just ain’t know.”

“And we aren’t telling you to go run over there and start playing house,” I added. “But you have a daughter now... a real one. That baby deserves to know her father.”

Dique slowly turned with glossy eyes and not from tears, but the kind of pressure that starts in your throat when you realize your whole life just fucking changed. “She got my blood?” he asked Dom in a low tone.

Dom nodded. “She a Royal, homie.”

Dique looked down, placed his hands on his hips and then let out a long exhale.

“Shit...” he exhaled. Dique always came with the jokes but right now this was as serious as I’d ever seen him unless he was shooting at somebody.

He wasn’t angry anymore; he was just shocked and processing it.

He may have been proud but just wasn’t ready to admit it.

“You gon’ be alright,” Dom said, looking his brother dead in the eyes. “But don’t say nothin’ to Keondra yet. I already called her ass and made it clear we’d handle it.”

“And she knows about the cease and desist,” I added.

Dique smirked, but it didn't reach his eyes. "Y'all muhfuckas really be out here runnin' the streets and the legal system, huh?"

I shrugged. "Somebody has to do it."

He gave a dry chuckle still shaking his head. "Damn... a kid, though?"

"I told you, you got this," Dom said again. "But it's on you how you move now nigga."

Dique nodded, more to himself than us. "Aight... say less."

As we turned to head back toward the party, Dique lingered behind for a second, staring up at the sky like he was waiting for a damn answer.

I knew that look. It was the same one I had the night I realized Dom would change my whole life.

This was the beginning of a new chapter for all of us and now we had a baby Royal to worry about.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:28 pm

The smoke was still floating through the backyard air although night had fallen.

The ribs were gone, all of the Hennessy bottles were almost dead, and the Uncs were halfway slumped over in lawn chairs, talking 'bout some 'Back in my day shit' for the fifth damn time today. I swear, my mama knew how to throw a cookout and a lot of times she wasn't Delores, she was Candy-D as the streets knew...

but she didn't play. The kids ran around with snow cones, old school music blasted through the Bluetooth speaker, and the OGs was still deep in a spades game slamming cards like it was life or death.

In the spades game, it got intense. People would get they ass beat over a good spade game.

Even with all that laughter and music, I could see it all over Dique's face, he was still processing everything.

He was standing near the grill with a drink in one hand and the blunt in the other, but he wasn't vibing like his usual self and wasn't cracking no jokes.

He wasn't even flirting with the neighborhood shawty's.

He was quiet, was just too damn quiet. I slid up next to him, watching the smoke rise from the last of the hot links on the grill.

"You gon' say it or you need me to pull it outta you?" I asked.

His eyes scanning the yard. “I’m just waitin’ for everybody to cool down slime... but yeah... it's time.”

A few minutes later, as everybody started cleaning up or packing to leave, Dique stepped up on the back porch. The rest of the family, my ma, my pops, O'Shynn, me, and Carmen were all sitting around, winding down from the long ass day.

“I gotta say somethin’,” he started, scratching the back of his head like a little kid about to admit he broke some shit.

Ma raised an eyebrow. “Lord, what now? You ain’t knock nobody up, did you?”

Everybody chuckled but Dique didn’t. That smile didn’t crack at all and if anyone knew Dique, he usually always cracked a smile. “I ain’t knock nobody up,” he said. “But... I did take a DNA test recently tho,”

O'Shynn leaned forward, with a strawberry frozen cup in her hand. “From that girl in Liberty City... Keondra?”

“Yeah.” Dique nodded. “I took it.”

Pops sat forward. “And?”

Dique swallowed hard. “The baby’s mine... she’s three.... been mine.”

Everybody got quiet at first. I knew how bad my parents wanted a grandchild, I just didn’t know if they wanted it like this.

All you could hear was the cicadas in the trees and the ice clinking in Ma’s cup.

Carmen touched my leg beneath the table like kids did when somebody was about to

get in trouble just waiting.

Ma finally spoke up as her lips parted like she wanted to curse, then she closed them again, and then opened them one more time.

“Three?” she finally whispered. “Three years old, and we didn’t know nothing? We have a grandchild?”

“She didn’t push the issue until now,” Dique told her. “She always claimed it, but I was out west most of the time. I didn’t believe her... for different reasons. But it’s real. I seen the test and all. That lil girl got our blood.”

Pops leaned back and rubbed his hands together slowly like he always did when he wanted to think before he spoke. “So, what you gon’ do now?”

“I already called her a few minutes ago I told Keondra I’d come see them tomorrow,” Dique replied. “But I told her don’t start no shit. Ain’t gon’ be no Instagram posts, no ‘Royal bloodline’ hashtags. She a fuckin’ loudmouth but she just don’t know, this shit real, and dangerous.”

Ma stared at her Dique with glossy eyes. “You sure she ain’t just tryna use the baby to keep you around?”

“I don’t think so. She still on bullshit, yeah, but I can’t front on the kid, blood don’t lie... she mine for real.”

O'Shynn shook her head slowly. “What’s her name?”

“Kaylani,” Dique said. “She just turned three last month.”

Ma rolled her eyes. “Keondra better keep that baby low ‘cause if them people get

wind she ours? They won't come for Keondra, they'll come for Kaylani. That baby gon' need security."

"I know," Dique said. "I told Keondra already, don't tell nobody shit... at least not yet."

I took a deep breath, still processing this shit.

Everybody around me was just slanging dick.

Tone had a baby on the way, and now Dique was a confirmed father.

Bringing these babies into our world was dangerous.

It reminded me that I should start strapping up with Carmen before we end up in the same predicament.

"So now what?" I asked. "You ready to step up as a father or what?"

"Hell yeah," Dique nodded. "I ain't never ran from shit in my life. I should've run from Keondra's lil sexy ass though, but I'll be whatever the baby need me to be."

Pops slapped his heavy hand on Dique's shoulder. "Then be that... and don't let nobody put her in harm's way."

Ma wiped her face with a napkin. "And if Keondra tries to be messy, we'll deal with her too. Ain't no time for sloppiness in this family. However, I'd like to meet my grandchild."

Carmen glanced at me. "You think we can trust Keondra?"

I shook my head. “Nah.... but we control the narrative.”

Then, before anybody could say more, Ma squinted at me and Carmen. “And what’s going on between y’all?” she asked. “You two been making eyes at each other all day like some teenagers.”

I didn’t say nothing, so Carmen did first. “He’s... working on it,” she said with a half-smile. “We got bigger things to handle first though.”

O'Shynn looked at me playfully. “About time your ass slowed down for somebody.”

I simply nodded my head. “She ain’t tryna get kidnapped again.”

In this moment, as the family gathered, we felt stronger than ever, even in the middle of war.

I looked around and knew we had a legacy to protect now even harder especially when babies are involved.

Real blood was on the line, and I’d be damned if anybody touched what belonged to the Royals.

The cookout was still going, but the music had calmed down and the folks who were still around had started settling into that post-plate, post-Henny haze shit.

Chicken bones sat in foil trays, dominoes clacked on beat-up card tables, and cigars and weed smoke filled the air while some shit talking going on.

The hood was out heavy for Ma Delores's birthday, and you could feel the love through the yard.

That Royal blood ran deep through this block and deep through our people.

I leaned back in a lawn chair, watching Carmen laugh with one of my cousins over spades.

Her crop top and shorts hugged her curves just right, and the Cartier frames on her face covered her eyes.

She made peace look good. O'Shynn was off by the grill, arguing with our uncle about who burned the last pan of ribs earlier, while Dique stood with his carryout plate piled high, holding court like he always do.

Everybody had their red cups in their hand and the speakers were softly bumping Frankie which was tradition.

I was patiently waiting on Ma's surprise to show up and a few minutes later it did.

A white flatbed truck pulled up slowly into the driveway, and everybody turned their heads.

On the back was a brand-new pearl white Benz GLE truck wrapped in a gold bow with a big ass banner tag that read: For the Queen of the Royals – Happy Birthday Mama D. The whole yard lost it.

“Maaaaaan, y'all showin' out now!” Aunt Nita screamed, fanning herself with a paper plate.

Ma's hand flew over her chest. “Oh my God! Y'all didn't!” she yelled as the tears welled up in her eyes.

O'Shynn, Dique and I stepped up together arm-in-arm smiling like some big ass kids.

Ma damn near cried when she walked up to the car and opened the door, revealing the red interior guts with the name Candy-D stitched into the seats.

Pops came around the back with his glass of dark liquor and a smirk on his face. “Y’all done good,” he said, in a proud tone. “Real good... I ain’t gon’ lie, y’all make a man proud. All my damn kids came up.”

That meant everything. I ain’t even the emotional type of dude but hearing that from him...

felt like something I didn’t even know I needed.

The night mellowed out after that. After a while, the kids were tired of running around and were sitting down drinking Capri Suns trying to fight their sleep and the grown folks started getting wild off the Crown Royal.

Just as I stepped away to light up a blunt and sip my third glass of tequila, my phone vibrated in my pocket.

I looked at the screen and saw Victoria calling while debating on if I wanted to ignore it or answer it. “Yeah,” I said, keeping my voice.

“Hi Dom... I wasn’t bothering you, was I?” Her voice was soft and cautious. “I just... I was online looking up a few courses. Psychology, maybe nursing. I just figured I’d ask when I could start doing something. I don’t want to keep sitting in the house like a hostage.”

I sighed, staring off at the sky. “You not a hostage, Victoria. But let’s not act like it ain’t people out there ready to paint the streets with yo’ blood and put it on a fuckin’ canvas just cause of who you’re related to.

You wanna move? You gon' move under shadow, that's it.

You wanna work? I'll allow that... but understand, one slip-up and it's you' life. ”

She was quiet for a minute. Then she whispered, “Thank you... I just need to feel normal again.”

I nodded, even though she couldn't see it. “Get yo' shit in order. I'll make sure you got what you need, but you gon' earn it.”

I hung up and stepped around to the side of the house, away from the crowd. My jaw tightened as I pulled up El Blanca's number. I knew I was poking the bear. ...but fuck it. He answered on the third ring.

“What the fuck do you want?”

“That was a bold ass move,” I said, in a calm voice. “Goin' ghost on yo' niece like that. You got her out here in limbo... no money... no direction. What's the play?”

“You and your fucking questions. She isn't mine anymore. She's yours now since she thinks she has it all figured out. She's dead to me.”

A smirk crept across my lips. “Say less.”

El Blanca started barking more threats, but I pulled the phone from my ear and stared at the stars with the devil in my eyes, letting his rage fill the void. He ended the call, and I stood there for a moment, as the humid breeze swirled around me until I calmed myself down.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:28 pm

The sun barely cracked through my curtains, but I was already up, ass naked, and gliding across my bedroom floor like I was the only girl in the world.

I'd left the balcony doors cracked just enough for the Miami breeze to blow in lightly wisping through my hair.

The scent of chicken souse filled the air from the kitchen, with that rich and citrusy scent, making the whole condo smell like a restaurant.

"Alexa, play 'Come Over' by Aaliyah," I yelled. My voice was still a little raspy because I'd just woken up.

As the beat dropped, her smooth voice filled the condo as well.

I hopped in the shower and was out in ten minutes.

I grabbed my favorite sweet almond and rose body oil started massaging it into every curve of my body.

I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror and smiled.

I knew the camera was somewhere, but Dom had it hidden real good.

That first time, I was low key pissed about it.

.. but now I could care less. I grabbed the remote and pointed it to adjust the lights and the glow hit just right.

I sat on the edge of the bed, spread my thighs and then slipped my hand between them real slow wondering if he was watching.

If he was watching, I wanted him to suffer knowing it was nothing he could do about it right now.

Yes, I moaned as I played with my pussy, but my moans weren't for the camera, they were just for him.

I took my time massaging my swollen clit making it look real sexy, while a little messy at the same time until my legs began to quake like a striper on the damn pole.

The phone rang and I had a feeling it was Dom. "Yeah, I'm watchin'," he said, in a dominant tone. "Don't clean that shit up. Put yo' fingers in yo' mouth and taste what's mine."

I did what he said, moving real slow and teasing him as my eyes locked on the black dot in the corner of the ceiling. "Good girl," he said, in a possessive voice. "That's how I like you."

When I caught my breath, I slid my robe on and laid across the bed, with my chest heaving and my skin glistening. "I miss you," I whispered.

"I know," he said. "I miss you too. But listen, I need you to do somethin'.

" He informed. Here we go, I thought to myself as he continued talking.

"I need you to get Victoria moved into another condo. It don't have to be nothing fancy.

Just a regular spot, something in the Royals' name so it's tight on paper and we don't

have no issues.

I'm done havin' her up in my shit," he said. "I'm not used to it."

I rolled over on my side, staring out the window, being sarcastic. "Oh? What happened? The little cartel princess ain't fitting in with the King's lifestyle no more?"

"You funny," he replied, unbothered. "But nah... she needs her own space. I'll have shadows on her.

She's still a target and I ain't stupid.

Also... set her up with a job. I want her at the front desk at the spa...

it's safer that way and keeps her out of our business.

Have the paperwork fixed too. She can't live in Miami with that Blanca name. That shit gotta die."

I sighed, even though I already knew I'd handle it. "Okay," I said. "I'll get everything in motion by this afternoon."

"I appreciate you," Dom he let me know. It was something about his voice that always got to me.

Before I could respond, my stomach turned hard and fast like something I'd never felt before. "Damn," I mumbled to myself. "What the hell was that?" It was damn near like bubble guts.

It passed after a moment, and I wrote it off as stress.

I needed to start taking my vitamins and getting back in the gym on a consistent basis.

Sometimes, I forgot to take care of Carmen, especially when business came first. I brushed the feeling off, threw on some biker shorts and an oversized tee, slid into my sneakers, and headed out.

Making sure that I was strapped, I left without grabbing a shadow.

I just needed a quick run to Starbucks to get a medicine ball tea and clear my head.

Miami felt weird today though. Even with the sky blue and palm trees swaying, it was something in the air and I always felt it.

Those hairs stood on the back of my neck with that feeling like somebody was watching me but keeping their distance.

I brushed my hand across my gun in my purse just in case.

I was waiting for my order when I heard someone call my name.

“Cee?”

I turned around recognizing that voice and there he was.

Dru stood there clean as hell with the same clean fade.

He wore a white tee and had a Diamond stud in his ear.

He still had that lazy ass confidence and fine-ass smile that got him in trouble.

He looked better than the last time I saw him, but I'd be lying if I said my heart didn't skip just a little. He walked up slow and taking his time.

"I knew that was you," he said. "Damn... so what's up? You disappeared on me."

I gave him a look and tried to keep it light. "I been busy Dru."

"Yeah, I can tell," he said, stepping closer. His cologne invaded my nostrils. "What's the deal though? You ain't just 'busy.' You moved like somebody wit' secrets. You know I ain't stupid, Cee."

I glanced around before replying. "Dru, you don't know what you think you know. Just leave it alone, please."

He leaned in slightly getting to close for my liking while lowering his voice. "You got me laid out in the trunk like a sacrifice... then vanished? You think I ain't gon' want answers?"

I shook my head because I couldn't say Dom's name... not even if I whispered it. I'd never tell Dru shit. "You don't need to know nothing. What happened... it was deeper than you and trust me both, trust me. It wasn't your fault."

He stared at me for a second. "You dangerous, Cee," he replied with a grin. "And I must be a sucker for punishment, 'cause I ain't even mad. That just made you more interesting. Shit, if these niggas trippin' over you like that... you gotta be worth it."

I exhaled and shook my head. "Don't call me again."

"You blockin' me?" he asked, laughing but serious.

"I'm saving you," I whispered. What part of this shit doesn't he get? I thought to

myself. He doesn't even know who kidnapped him because if he did, he surely wouldn't be in my face right now. He'd be trying to stay as far away as possible.

He watched me walk off, not knowing I was doing him the biggest favor of his life.

As I climbed into my AMG 63, I looked in the mirror one more time and still had that eerie feeling, but I wasn't scared especially not when I was strapped.

Hell no, scared of what? I was a Royal. I had just pulled out the Starbucks parking lot when I noticed Dru's reflection in my rearview mirror.

That damn smirk was back on his face, and this time, instead of walking away, he doubled back toward the truck like he had something to prove.

He gently knocked on the tinted window like he had all the time in the world.

I rolled the window down just enough for my voice to carry. "You don't listen. I told you, stop popping up on me."

His dimples were deep as he leaned on the door with his eyes scanning my face like he missed it more than he was willing to admit. Dru didn't even know me. We had one interaction, and he was acting obsessed. "You ain't tell me you was married to the game, Ma. I could've handled that... maybe."

"You couldn't handle shit," I said sarcastically, but in a softer voice. Truth was, Dru wasn't a bad guy, at least not that I knew of. He was just in the wrong place at the wrong time and caught up with a woman whose life was tied up in more chaos than he could begin to understand.

He slid his hand into his pocket. "I'm a sucker for punishment, Cee and if a nigga had to get tied up and damn near smoked just to learn that... then maybe it was worth it."

His tone turned serious. “You good, though? For real?”

I stared at him for a little, letting his words linger before I gave him the smallest smile.

My eyes shot to the ring on his finger. “You’re cute...

but this isn’t the fairy tale you think it is.

” I rolled the window back up slowly and pulled off, leaving him standing there looking like he didn’t know whether to chase me or let me go.

No more than two minutes later, my phone lit up with a call from an unknown number. I smirked, already knowing who it was before I even hit answer. “You’re so predictable and persistent.”

His voice came through smooth. “You left me mid thought. You always do that.”

“You always say shit you shouldn’t,” I replied, still amused. “You shouldn’t be talking to me at all.”

“I’ll be around,” he said before hanging up.

I sighed, shaking my head. Dru had no idea the type of fire he was playing with, but my amusement didn’t last long.

That nausea came back, and it was stronger this time.

It felt like a deep roll in my stomach that made me have to grip the steering wheel with both hands and take a deep breath through my nose.

The tea had settled wrong, or at least that's what I kept telling myself...

even still, I had to ignore it because I had things to do.

I headed across town to the Midtown condo; it was the one I decided would be best for Victoria to settle in.

It was clean and modern, and nowhere near as flashy as a penthouse, but it was discreet and heavily surveilled.

I walked in and was greeted by the manager, who handed me the access key cards.

I did a quick walk-through to make sure it was clean and still fully furnished.

It was two bedrooms, high-end appliances, a small balcony with a city view, and already stocked with all the essentials she would need.

I could've easily said fuck Victoria, but I had never been a bitter woman in my life.

The place was perfect and wasn't too lavish, but comfortable enough to make Victoria feel like she wasn't a prisoner, even if she'd still be under watch.

From there, I drove off to my real mission to the storage unit.

I parked in the back lot of a nondescript warehouse and used the code to enter the side entrance.

Once inside, I passed down a row of dimly lit corridors before stopping at my unit.

I had always been proud of this place. It was one of my most sacred possessions and couldn't be tracked because it wasn't in my name.

It was damn near like identity central in my unit.

I went to the black file cabinets which always held everything Dom and I ever needed to disappear or help someone else disappear.

I pulled the drawer open and dug through until I found a folder labeled, 'Valerie Mercado', a new alias I had for a while that I never got to use.

It took me a little over two hours to prep that file for Victoria to become Valerie, but I did it.

The file had everything from birth certificate, social, driver's license, credit cards, fake work history, even a LinkedIn page that painted her as a spa coordinator who relocated from Denver.

I ran my fingers along the edge of the manila envelope before sliding it into my Chanel tote bag.

I stood there for a second as my eyes bounced around the unit with nothing but the cold air around me.

That damn stomach of mine did it again and even harder this time.

Something deep and low in my gut that made me lean against the file cabinet.

My mind screamed tea, stress, maybe hormones...

but my body whispered something else. I ignored it once again.

There was no room for weakness in my life.

I locked the unit, slid my shades back on, and stepped into the Miami heat all calm, cool, collected, and ready to handle anything else that I needed to do.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:28 pm

I lit the joint as the flame from my lighter flickered against the tinted glass of the Escalade as I leaned back in the seat, watching the condo come into view.

Victoria was in the truck behind me with two of my hittas, and her bags were packed and ready too.

She was about to get her own place. It wasn't gon' be no more hovering around my damn penthouse like a lost lil' puppy with too much lip and not enough experience.

Carmen was already inside waiting to pass off the documents that would make Victoria a new woman on paper.

That was the only way she could survive in Miami now.

El Blanca had made her a target the second he disowned her.

When I stepped out the truck, I adjusted my chain, tucked the strap at my waist, and walked up to the condo lobby.

My face stayed stone cold. Carmen held the folder in one hand and her other hand was holding a tote bag as she leaned against the marble front desk.

Her hair was pulled up into a messy bun, and even in her chill fit, she looked like money.

Victoria stepped in behind me, with her eyes scanning the place.

The lobby was bougie with plush velvet seats, designer art, and a scent of fresh lavender lingering in the air.

Carmen handed over the documents and gave Victoria a quick rundown of her new name, new social, and new ID.

“Don’t flash it unless you have to and if anyone asks, you were born in Denver and, moved down here. ”

Victoria took it all in, but I caught the hesitation behind her eyes with that fear of uncertainty. She was finally standing on her own two feet, and the reality of what that meant was written all over her pretty face. She was afraid, and I knew the look.

“What’s wrong, you good?” I asked her.

“I will be,” she replied in a soft voice.

Carmen turned to me then to her and her expression was a little off. I could see it all in her eyes, she was tired and might’ve been overworked. She moved like a machine and her brain never rested.

“How you feelin’ wifey?” I asked her, stepping into her space. I slid my hand around her waist.

She gave a weak smile, shaking her head. “I’m just... not feeling too well. I think I’m coming down with something. I’m heading home after this to lie down.”

I kissed her on the lips right in front of Victoria...

tongue and all. I ain’t have shit to hide from her.

That was all me and I didn't give a fuck if it made Victoria uncomfortable.

This wasn't a show. This was real life....

my life, and Carmen had earned more respect from me with her position at my side tenfold.

Victoria looked away, clutching the folder, looking awkward as hell, but she didn't say nothing.

Once Carmen dipped, I walked Victoria through the condo.

It was modern, clean, and minimal, just enough for her.

It was two bedrooms, floor-to-ceiling windows, luxury kitchen, and it was fully secured.

I had my people already assigned. Two would be on the roof, one in the garage, and another on the hallway surveillance rotation.

"It's yours," I told her. "But listen, you don't leave outta here unless it's work related. And even then, you'll be with a shadow. This ain't a vacation. You fuck around and get comfortable, you gon' end up dead. Ain't nobody gon' cry over that but you."

She nodded. "I understand."

"Good." I turned to walk out but paused before I hit-the-door. "And Victoria... you do good, I'll move you up. But one wrong move and I'll know about it. You're not untouchable. Don't forget that."

I hit the button for the elevator and pulled out my phone when I got the call from one

of my soldiers. “Yo, King. It’s the shipment.”

My heart slightly dropped. “What shipment?” I asked with a raised brow.

“The overseas whip drop to the Miami port. We saved half, but El Blanca’s crew got the rest. The estimated value of what we lost... was a lil over a mil.”

I clenched my jaw as I pinched the bridge of my nose. The whole damn shipment was worth ten million. We salvaged maybe five, but it still burned my fuckin’ chest. “Anybody dead?” I asked.

“Nah... but they was ready. We got ‘em back, and lit they side up.”

“Alright,” I said in a calm voice. “Time to push the next hit forward then. I want El Blanca bleedin’ more than money.

I want him to feel it in his fuckin’ soul.

” I hung up and dialed Carmen next, but she didn’t answer.

I knew she was probably knocked out at home.

I stared at the screen for a minute before calling another number.

“Dom,” he snarled when he answered.

“El Blanca...” I said in a cool ass unfazed tone.

“You’ve got balls calling me, perro. What, do you want, more bodies in your street?”

I smirked as I paced in front of the condo entrance. “Just wanted to hear you cry

about that lil' hit I put on yo' port. You losin' money fast, old man."

"You think this is over?"

"I think you better pick which casket you wanna die in muhfucka," I said coldly.
"You turned yo' back on yo' own blood. That tells me all I need to know."

"Victoria is dead to me."

I didn't say shit else. I enjoyed taunting his bitch ass.

He started this shit and I damn sure was gon' finish it.

He was worried about me having too much power, and now he left me no choice but to show him that power.

We could've continued to eat together but no, just like a snake he wanted me out the game.

El Blanca hated to see a black man in the cartel having grown more powerful, richer, and respected day by day.

I slid my phone back in my pocket. Before I left the condo, I reached in my jacket and pulled out two phones.

One was a black iPhone fresh out the box with a new SIM and a number only my people would know.

The other was an encrypted cartel burner with a GPS override, backdoor message mirroring, and signal clocking.

My tech guys made sure of that just so I could see her every move, her every text, or call.

I set them both on the counter in front of Victoria.

“This one...” I said tapping the iPhone, “is for business and basic shit. This other one... is for emergency contact only. If it rings, you answer. Don’t lose it, and don’t fuck with it and most importantly don’t ask no questions about it.”

She blinked started at them before picking them up. It wasn’t shit she hadn’t seen before. “Thank you, Dom.”

The way she said my name, all soft and drawn sounded out, like she was tasting it, I could already feel the heat in her stare.

She still wanted me and that’s the only part that wasn’t new about all of this, but it wasn’t her want that caught me off guard, it was her need.

It was loud as hell in her eyes. She needed something, and someone to hold on to and right now, I was the only thing familiar in her upside-down world.

“Keep the phones locked at all times and use face ID only. If you change anything, I’ll know.

” I told her. She nodded her head letting me know she understood and then I continued.

“I’m settin’ you up at the spa front desk.

You’ll be trained with a legit paper trail under yo’ new identity.

Ain't no more Victoria Blanca. That name don't exist in this city no more. ”

She looked up at me again. “You didn't have to do all this...”

“I didn't,” I said, stepping closer. “But I did... so don't make me regret it.”

I could tell she wanted to say something else, maybe some sweet shit, maybe another thank you, but I had already read between the lines, and her gratitude wasn't just about the phones or the job...

. it was for me. It was for not turning my back on her like her own blood did.

I could feel her desire for me the way her energy bounced, and she fought her suppressed thoughts.

I didn't let that shit faze me, because the truth was.

.. Victoria ain't got shit to offer me right now but a pretty face and some wet pussy and I got more than enough of both swimming in my city.

Until she learned how to stand on her own two feet, she wasn't nothing but a body with a past and a name that couldn't be said out loud.

Fuck no, I didn't have time for that shit.

She looked back at me with them soft brown eyes, trying to keep it clean, but I knew that look.

Victoria was bad and her face card never declined.

Her waist was small, and her body was stacked like her ass should've come with a

warning label.

However, wanting me and being worth me were two different conversations.

Right now, all she had to offer was a body and a pretty face.

She ain't had shit to give herself yet, let alone me or anyone else but I wasn't heartless and if she stayed in her lane, I might just help her build something and not for me but for her damn self.

I just looked at her a second longer before I turned to go.

Two of my shadows nodded at me as I walked past the elevators.

They'd be posted outside her condo twenty-four-seven.

Victoria wasn't moving without one of my people shadowing her, even if she didn't know it. I didn't trust her... not yet at least.

Once I got back in the truck, I exhaled hard.

My mind was already somewhere else... on Carmen.

She said she hadn't been feeling right, and she was going to lie down.

I could hear the exhaustion in her voice and something about that didn't sit right with me.

Carmen didn't get sick like that for as long as I could remember.

I told the driver, "Take me to the crib," but before we even hit the next light, my

other phone vibrated with Keondra's name on the screen.

I already knew this wasn't gon' be a smooth convo. I answered on speaker. "What's up?"

Her voice came through all loud. "What's up is Dique trippin'... talking 'bout I gotta move! Dom, I pay two hundred in rent on my voucher... two hundred! You know what type of come up that is? Y'all not finna uproot me like I don't got no say."

I exhaled once again, then nodded at the driver. "Change of plans. Take me to the hood."

I let her keep talking while we rolled through the streets heading to the city.

When we got in her area, the kids were playing barefoot in the dirt patch out in front of the corner store bringing back memories of the kind of shit we did when we were little in the hood, we made our own fun.

This was Keondra's world, this shit was her whole kingdom, wrapped in Section 8 paper.

When I pulled up to her duplex, she was standing on the porch with a bonnet on.

She was still on the phone when I stepped out of the truck, with the phone pressed to her ear until she realized I was right in front of her.

"Dom..." she blinked, lowering the phone. "Oh fuck, you really pulled up?"

I walked up slowly, not on no rah-rah shit, but she could feel the heat. "You lucky I did."

She sucked her teeth and crossed her arms. “So, I’m just supposed to pack up and go like I ain’t got history here? All my peoples are here.”

“You got history,” I said, “but you ain’t got no future here.”

She opened her mouth to say something, but I cut her off with a look.

“I’ll make this real clear,” I said, stepping closer to her so she could look deep in my eyes and understand how serious I was.

“You got a child that’s connected to my family now...

to the Royal name. That makes you part of somethin’ bigger whether you like it or not.

This hood? This two-hundred-dollar setup?

Man, that’s over. Dique don’t want his kid growin’ up on these corners, around them rats and broke niggas that hang on porches...

and I don’t either.” I explained the most direct way I could.

She stared at me, trying to match energy, but I could see the gears turning and she knew not to say shit.

I continued, “I’m givin’ you a way out for a better life.

You should be grateful, because the other option...

?” I paused and then spoke again. “Keep poppin’ off, I’ll make you disappear and keep the child. Ain’t nobody gon’ miss a loudmouth.”

I could see the way her energy shifted as she processed what I said knowing that I wasn't bullshitting while she tried to weigh her options of pride or survival. "Fine," she said finally. "I'll go."

"Good," I said, stepping back toward the truck.

"Your new spot gon' be secured and you'll be watched.

If you act right, you'll be taken care of.

Act stupid... you'll regret it." I got back in the Escalade and the driver pulled off.

The second we turned the corner; my mind went back to Carmen.

She was the only woman I cared about in a real way right now.

I had to make sure she was straight, so I told the driver, "Take me to my wife." And that's exactly what the fuck I meant.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:28 pm

The steam floated around me, as I sunk deeper into the tub.

I had filled it to the brim, letting the Epsom salt, coconut milk, and a splash of lavender oil soothe the ache that lingered in my body from the shootout that night.

Rose petals floated on the surface of the water while soft R&B played from my Bluetooth speaker on the counter.

My eyes were closed, but my mind was far from closed off.

That feeling in my stomach was still there.

It wasn't a sharp pain, it was more like a dull, nagging discomfort I couldn't shake.

I pressed the palm of my hand to my belly and slowly exhaled letting the water do what it could.

When I finally got out, I wrapped my robe around me and made my way into the kitchen.

I already had my pot of chicken souse reheating and seasoned to perfection with lime, onions, celery, garlic, a little scotch bonnet, and that splash of vinegar to make it hit right.

The smell filled the penthouse giving it a warm and nostalgic feel.

I poured myself a ginger ale over ice, grabbed a spoon, and took a seat on the edge of

my bed with the blackout curtains slowly sliding shut behind me after I pressed the button.

I pulled the comforter over my lap, turned on a movie deciding to watch 'Bad Boys: Ride or Die' for the third time, and started eating.

The souse went down warm, but the ginger ale I could feel fizz in my stomach a little and of course, I tried to ignore it.

A FaceTime call came through and I answered seeing that it was O'Shynn.

She was posted up at her place with no makeup, a comfortable fleece warm up with bonnet on, and her legs kicked up.

"You look like you just got out the spa," she said with a grin.

"I did.... except it's my own damn tub," I chuckled.

"You good though?" she asked, as her own voice showed a touch of concern. O'Shynn always knew when something wasn't right with any of us.

I hesitated. "I'm okay, I'm just tired and then my body is sore. It's probably a mix of everything."

She nodded but didn't press the issue. We chatted about her new dancers at the club, a money count mishap from one of her girls, and a few names from our past that popped up on her radar but halfway through our convo, the security camera alert pinged on my phone. I tapped the screen, and saw Dom.

He was looking too damn fine for his own good, standing outside my front door with his hands in his pockets like he wasn't a whole cartel kingpin.

I told O'Shynn I'd call her back and hung up, setting my bowl aside.

When he entered, I could tell he was trying to read me.

His usual cold stare was softened a little as his eyes roamed my entire body.

"You alright?" he asked, "And don't bullshit me. What's goin' on with you?"

I didn't answer him. Instead, I patted the bed beside me signaling him to come join me.

He slipped off his shoes and climbed in without a word, laying down as I rested my head on his chest. It was like an immediate warmth and comfort for me.

I let myself be vulnerable and melt into him.

His cologne mixed with the scent of my oil tickled my nose.

My fingers found his chest and I found myself tracing the outline of the scar near his collarbone.

"You never pull up unless something's wrong," I said.

"You not feelin' good," he replied. "You don't show that unless it's serious."

"I'll be fine. I'm telling you, it's probably just stress, and that damn ginger ale isn't helping," I said with a weak smile.

"You need to go see somebody."

I chuckled. "Coming from you?"

He didn't say anything to that, instead he just held me closer.

The silence between us wasn't awkward, it was actually peaceful.

His chest rose and fell beneath my cheek, and every beat of his heart felt like confirmation that whatever this was between us...

it was real, even if neither of us wanted to say it out loud just yet.

"I missed you," I suddenly whispered. I was thinking it, but I didn't mean to say it.

His fingers slid along my waist, gripping gently. "I'm here."

At some point, I drifted off in his arms and fell into a deep sleep with my face tucked into the curve of his chest but when I woke up, the vibe was different.

My eyes fluttered open to the dark room, with only the glow of the TV still lighting the room.

I didn't move at first and Dom hadn't either, but his eyes were wide open, and he was staring dead at me.

I blinked a few times adjusting my vision before turning my head to look up at him.

"What?" I mumbled, in a groggy voice. "Why you looking at me like that?"

He didn't blink nor did he flinch. He just tilted his head and said, "When the last time you had a period?"

I froze and my brain took a full five seconds to register the question. Then I found myself scrambling trying to do the math trying to remember. I slowly sat up, with my

robe falling off my shoulder a little as I rubbed my face.

“Shit...” My stomach dropped.

“Carmen,” Dom said again, more serious now. “When the fuck was the last time?”

“I don’t know!” I snapped, not out of attitude, but pure panic. “I... I haven’t even been paying attention like that.”

He sat up with me as his tattoos flexed along his chest and forearms and he rested his elbows on his knees. “You sick... you tired. You emotional as hell. You been eatin’ a lil weirder and I ain’t never pulled out of you.”

I side-eyed him hard. “That’s your fault, king of pull-out games.”

He didn’t smile nor smirk. This was one of the few times I saw real worry in Dom’s eyes. “I’m not sayin’ it is,” I said quieter, rubbing my temple. “But we gotta be sure.”

He stood up and reached for his phone. “I’mma send the driver to get a test. Sit tight.”

While he was on the phone, I slid back into the bed, staring at the ceiling like it might give me answers.

Dom paced the room like he was planning a damn hit.

I guess in a way, he was. He walked back over to the kitchen counter, lifted the lid off the pot of chicken souse and scooped some into a bowl like we wasn’t just discussing a possible pregnancy.

I watched him from the bed shirtless with his tattoos glowing under the low kitchen light, as he ate spoonful’s and chased it down with D’USSé.

He didn't say much and neither did I. About twenty-five minutes later, there was a knock at the door. Dom opened it just enough to grab the bag, and nod before shutting it again. His guy never stepped inside. He tossed the box onto the bed in front of me.

"I ain't leavin' the room."

I sighed and pulled myself up to my feet. "I didn't ask you to."

I walked into the bathroom, took the test, and came back out still holding it with the little window flipped toward me, ticking down the seconds like a fucking bomb.

I sat down on the edge of the bed, and Dom sat next to me, not touching me or talking to me but just watching.

Three minutes went by and that's all it took for my whole world to change.

It read 'Pregnant'. I didn't breathe, didn't blink, and could hardly speak.

I just stared at it like it might change if I glared long enough.

I wasn't a woman of many tears, but after a short while, they came, and it was the ugly cry too.

I covered my mouth with one hand and dropped the test with the other.

My whole-body shook, and I felt like my own damn body betrayed me.

I just knew I had never cried in front of Dom... ever! Until now.

He sat still for a second before reaching over and wrapping both his arms around me

and tightly pulling me into him. I buried my face in his shoulder and sobbed like I was a five year old child. Every piece of control I ever had was gone right now.

“I’m scared,” I finally whispered. “I haven’t ever been scared a day in my life, Dom... until right now.”

He didn’t say nothing at first because it seemed like he had to gather his thoughts too.

I watched every emotion flicker across his face.

I knew he wasn’t happy about it, but it was only because of his fear of anyone ever coming after his child just to get to him.

A few minutes later he just kissed my temple and held me close.

Then finally, he said, “You ain’t gotta be scared. You not alone.”

“I swear to God, I’ll have an abortion if you want me to. I know the risk of keeping a baby in our world. Do I want babies eventually? Yes, I do, but I’m not going to have baby, if my husband isn’t happy about having one with me.”

Dom glared at me through his thick lashes and I could tell he wasn’t feeling me mentioning that.

“This shit wasn’t planned for neither one of us, but I’ll be damned if I kill off what’s mine just to appease other muhfuckas.

I don’t want kids, but if I had to have one, it wouldn’t be with nobody but you. We’ll figure this shit out.”

I didn’t believe in fairytales. I didn’t even believe in happy endings but in that

moment, I believed him and for me that was enough right now.

As vocal as we both were when it came to the world of crime, this was a moment where we sat in our shit, processed it, owned it, and took it for what it was.

I knew there was so much more to say, but right now some things were better left unsaid and what was understood didn't need to be explained.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:28 pm

I laid on my back in the dark with one hand behind my head and the other holding the remote I wasn't even using.

My body felt like it had been stomped out by life itself.

My chest was heavy, my nose clogged, and that damn chill in my bones let me know I was coming down with something real bad.

Shit, probably the flu or a cold. Either way, I wasn't built to be laid up sick or not.

Miami didn't stop moving for nobody, especially not for a king.

One of my chefs were in town from Haiti was in the kitchen throwing down on some pepper soup...

that real roots and fire. It was that thick, spicy kind that cleared your nose and sinuses and had your soul feeling brand new in thirty minutes.

He was muttering prayers and shit over the pot too and while I wasn't too fond of it, I respected it.

I was just starting to doze off on the sectional when my phone rang.

"Yo," I answered with a hoarse voice.

"Aye bruh, I'm 'bout two seconds from puttin' myself on child support!" Dique barked on the line, and the background noise made it sound like a fuckin' WWE

match was going on behind him. “I’m talkin’ automatic withdrawal from my shit and everything... garnish me. Fuck it.”

I rubbed my eyes. “Man, what now?”

“She talmbout I can’t take my daughter nowhere unless she bringin’ her fake-ass couch set, broke TV, and her see-through dresser from Dollar General. She actin’ like I’m tryna kidnap the baby and traffic her across the border or some shit.”

I groaned and slowly sat up. My fuckin’ head was pounding.

“I’m comin’.” I hung up before he could say shit else.

I exhaled long and hard. This was the same baby mama he swore up and down was chillin’.

Now she acting like she the Queen of Section 8.

I threw on a black thermal, slid into some sweats, and laced up my Forces.

I grabbed the Glock and tucked it before leaving.

Sick or not, ain’t no such thing as being caught slipping.

About forty-five minutes later, I pulled up in the truck behind the heavily tinted windows.

As soon as I turned on the block, that familiarity was there again.

Rusted bikes laid across the sidewalk, the corner boys posted up near the store, and shirtless lil boys were running through the front yards.

Dique's deep voice echoed from the duplex porch before I even got out the truck. "I'm not takin' the ashtray, Keondra! I don't give a fuck if yo' uncle carved it in prison."

I climbed out and even though it was hot outside, my body had chills and body aches. However, cold or not, my presence warmed the block. Two of my hittas were in a second truck behind me, ready for whatever.

"Dique!" I called out as I walked up. "Man, what the fuck is this?"

He turned and smiled like I was the messiah showing up to end his pain. "Bruh, this girl really think she movin' out with the whole hood. She got candles with no tops, a broken fan, and five bags of old clothes for a baby that's three."

Keondra popped out the screen door with a silk scarf covering her long hair with one hand on her hip. "Who you talkin' to like that, Dique?! I'm the one who pushed your daughter out, remember that! You don't run me!"

I stepped between them, not in the mood for this shit. "Keondra." I said in a tone full of authority. She blinked at me, and I kept talking. "You done?" I asked.

"Excuse me?"

"I said... are you done? Or do I gotta remind you who you yellin' at?"

She took a step back, allowing the realness in my tone to straighten her ass up. I wasn't Dique, I didn't fuck the girl and make a baby, and I wasn't about to allow her to disturb what I built 'cause she wanna be a loudmouth.

"Look," I said. "You gon' get taken care of and the baby too, but all this rah-rah shit?"

That stops today. You got a \$200 voucher, and you cryin' about movin' out the hood?

Bitch, count yo' blessings. You got a Royal's baby.

That child is a legacy, which means you gotta move smarter than this.

"I told her. She crossed her arms but stayed quiet.

"Talk reckless again, and I'll take custody myself and you won't see that baby unless it's behind bulletproof glass. You think I'm playin'?"

"No, Dom," she muttered.

I turned to Dique. "I'm out here sick as a dog, let's get this shit wrapped up Dique."

Dique nodded. "I'm on it, slime. I'm glad you came 'cause I'd be in fuckin' jail."

"I hate y'all," Keondra mumbled, walking back inside.

Dique shook his head. "Yo, I swear I gotta pray every mornin' before dealin' with her. This what I get for fuckin' with her ass all 'cause she got some good pussy."

"Keep playin', you gon' have another baby." I warned.

"Hell nah, the way my rubber and pull-out game about to be, I might win a gold medal for my shit."

We exchanged a few more words until it was time to go.

The black trucks lined up like a motorcade outside Keondra's dusty-ass duplex.

Neighbors were peeking out their blinds, being nosy like they were watching a damn movie.

A few kids ran behind the Escalades as we loaded Keondra's last box in the back of one.

Her daughter, my niece, was comfortable in Dique's arms with her thumb in her mouth, as her big innocent eyes took everything in. Dique was clowning the lil girl at first, but truth is, she was actually cute, she just didn't look like us. At three years old, her features would've showed if she did.

"Let's roll," I said, adjusting my hoodie over my head as I stepped back into my truck.

The ride to Aventura was smooth and the further away that we got from the bricks, the cleaner the streets got, and the brighter the lights got.

The air started smelling like imported flowers and old money because in my opinion that's all that was in Aventura, a bunch of old, rich folks.

Keondra was in the back truck with Dique and Kaylani, looking like she couldn't believe this was her life now.

We pulled into the private gated townhome community like royalty.

It was the kind of place where every lawn looked uniform, and every house had that new-money look to it.

Her new spot was a two-story townhome with white stucco, black trim, a modern glass door, and her own private driveway.

Inside was fully furnished in cream, mocha, and soft gold colors with clean lines, plush rugs, big mirrors, recessed lighting, and marble countertops.

It was really some classy, grown woman shit...

some shit Keondra ain't never seen before.

She stepped inside and immediately froze. "This mine?" she gasped, almost scared to touch anything.

"Yeah," Dique said. "This the Royal upgrade." He told her. Kaylani waddled toward the stairs, and her little bowlegs were working overtime.

"Let her see her room," I told one of my people ahead of us.

We followed behind, and when Keondra opened Kaylani's room door, I watched her entire energy change.

The walls were painted soft lavender. She had a white princess bed with the sheer netting draped over the headboard that sat in the center of the room.

There were stuffed animals lined up on a bench under the window.

There was a dollhouse in one corner, and a reading nook in the other.

She even had a closet full of brand-new clothes, with all the tags still on.

I was proud of Dique for getting everything situated with the little time that he had.

Keondra covered her mouth with her hands. "Y'all really did all this?"

Dique stepped behind her. “She a Royal. This the bare minimum... ain’t even half, but you gotta stay out my way and out my ear. I’ma take care of what’s mine... in peace.”

The Kaylani climbed on her bed, laughing, and Keondra just stood there with tears welling up but refusing to let them fall. I knew that feeling. That damn, this too good to be true type of disbelief.

I looked her dead in her face. “You ain’t gotta like how I lay down the law, Keondra.

But you gon’ respect what this name come with.

Ain’t no runnin’ ‘round actin’ like a hood rat.

No more porch yelling, no more beef with randoms. You got eyes on you now.

That child? She’s mine too. You act up, we snatch her back. Simple.”

She slowly nodded her head while gently biting the inside of her cheek. “I got it. I swear I do.”

Dique then threw her the keys to a new white Lexus NX parked in the garage that still had the red bow on top. “You gon’ need this to get her around,” he said. “Ain’t no bus rides or Ubers no more. She deserve better than that.”

“Dique...” she breathed, shaking her head like it was all a dream.

He shrugged. “Don’t say I ain’t never gave you shit.”

She looked like she wanted to hug him, but Dique wasn’t with all that shit.

He bent down instead, picked up his daughter, and sat her on the counter.

“Aye,” he said to the Kaylani, lifting her chin so her eyes locked with his.

“Daddy gon’ teach you how to talk real slick one day. But for now... you just be a princess.”

She giggled instead. “Daddy, can I have ice cream?”

Dique gently brushed his hand over her nose and then pulled out a twenty-dollar bill. “You can have all the ice cream you want baby.”

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:28 pm

I turned to head out, but told address Keondra again, “There’s security posted outside.

If you need anything, call Carmen... Dique will give you the number...

but don’t be callin’ Dique with no drama.

That man tryin’ to do right.” I advised her, daring that she play with me.

As I left the house, I glanced back one time and Keondra was standing in the middle of the polished kitchen with her car keys in her hand, and for the first time...

she looked like she believed she was worth something.

The same look we all had when we finally got out of the hood.

Now that this mission was accomplished, it was time to get up out of there.

By the time I got back to the penthouse, my body was begging me to lay the fuck down.

My chest felt heavy, my head was pounding, and every joint in my body ached like I just stepped out of a chain gang fight which, truthfully, I had...

just in the streets. But being sick? That shit didn’t me and it never had.

The chef had already left for the night, but he made sure to leave the pot of the Pepper soup or like most called it, the Soup Joumou on the stove.

I sat at the marble counter in silence, with my hoodie still on, with my socks still on, sipping slow out the bowl like an old ass man.

The TV was off, but my phone was steady buzzing with updates.

All of the updates were security updates, shipment confirmations, and coded cartel communications from all coasts from the east, south, and west. Every hitta was clocked in and every camera angle covered them all.

I got a few more notifications that Miami, Atlanta, L.A.

, even New York was all locked in, ready to light up if needed.

El Blanca had already taken too many L's, and my hittas were on standby waiting for the word if needed but even with the empire moving smooth right now, I couldn't shake the pressure behind my eyes or the burn in my throat.

The only thing that distracted me was Carmen calling me right on time.

I instantly picked up in a low and gritty voice. "How you feelin'?" I asked.

"This morning, I couldn't even keep down ginger ale.

" She explained sounding weak, and I wasn't used to it.

I actually felt bad for her. She only felt like this because of a seed that I planted in her.

Had any other female claimed that they were carrying my child, they'd have to prove it, but I knew I didn't have to question Carmen.

“I’ve been throwing up all damn day,” she said.

I closed my eyes, leaned back on the stool trying to ignore my own issues over here.

“You want me to come over?”

“No,” she whispered. “I think you’re sick too. You sound like shit.”

I nodded my head. “Appreciate it,” I said, through the congestion.

She knew I felt like shit, but I still would’ve come if she needed me to.

I coughed a few times and got up to fix some Theraflu.

Since I had been the king of Miami, I never had to do this kind of shit for myself because somebody on my payroll was always around to make sure I didn’t have to, but taking care of myself right now gave me a sense of normalcy and fuckin’ peace.

She chuckled, soft and sexy, but I could tell she was trying to keep it together.

If I could I wanted to be there to do whatever she needed me to do even if it was just to rub her back.

I didn’t want to miss shit. I didn’t care if it was just sitting on her bed, just being there.

At the same time, I couldn’t risk passing on whatever the fuck I had right now...

not with how fragile she seemed right now and definitely not with that baby she was carrying.

“I miss you,” she said softly.

“Yeah, I know,” I replied. “I miss you too.” I told her being honest. Had I not missed her, I wouldn’t even tell her. One thing Carmen knew about me was I wasn’t in the business of lying to no female, I didn’t care who it was.

When we hung up, and I just sat there with my fingers over my mouth staring towards the balcony.

I ain’t never been scared of shit, not bullets, not somebody betraying me, and damn sho’ not death but Carmen, that baby, and this life?

That shit scared the fuck out of me. A knock at the door broke my thoughts.

It wasn’t that easy getting up here, so I knew it had to be one of my people.

I checked the security camera and saw Tone.

He stepped inside looking like his usual self and well rested.

Tone had on a big ass chain with a medallion hanging from it, his golds was glistening, and a chunky Cuban bracelet was on his wrist. Nigga looked like a linebacker in designer, but I could tell the past few days off was what he needed even if Shona was over there working his ass. He dapped me up like always.

“You look like shit,” he said, flashing his teeth.

“And you look like a retired trap nigga turned soon-to-be daddy,” I shot back. “The fuck you doin’ here? I thought you was on early maternity leave.”

We both laughed, and it was the kind that came from exhaustion more than joy, but it was real. He pulled out a bottle of D’usse from my cabinet like it was his house, poured up two shots and handed me one. “What’s up, bro?”

I hesitated thinking about if I wanted to tell him about Carmen, but this was Tone, my fuckin' brother, my right-hand man, and somebody who I knew would take a bullet for me. When he found out about Shona, he talked to me like a man, now it was my turn. "Carmen pregnant."

Tone blinked a few times and just stared at me.

He knew how strongly I felt about not wanting no kids, which was the same reason he never wanted none.

"Damn." He sighed and ran both his hands over the top of his head.

He immediately poured another two shots, and we dogged them just as quick as the first.

"Yeah." I told him, appreciating the burn as the liquor went down.

"You tell anybody else?"

"Hell nah. You the first. I want to give Carmen that space to announce her own pregnancy when she's ready. I don't feel like it's my place... I gotta give her that."

He sat down across from me, with both elbows on the table, looking like he was carrying the weight of the world too.

"Ain't gon' lie, bro. This shit we livin'?"

It ain't made for peace. Every time I look at Shona's belly, I wonder if I'm gon' be around to see that baby turn one.

This is why I made you promise that if anything happens to me, please be the step-up

daddy to my kid man, which I know you would, but still... shit is terrifying than a muhfucka.”

That hit me in the chest ‘cause Tone was never soft, but he was always real and everything he said was the truth. “I feel the same,” I admitted. “It’s like, damn, how do I protect what I love when the world tryin’ to kill me every fuckin’ day?”

Tone nodded. “You don’t... you just be the type of man they’ll always remember, and you go harder for them than you ever did for the streets.”

That shit sat with me heavy as his words echoed through my mind. He poured up again and this time we clinked glasses and downed the shots. The liquor may have burned, but not harder than the fuckin’ truth. “I hear you man, I hear you.”

Tone scratched his head like he was thinking about saying something else or maybe trying to see how to word it. “Yo, maybe we should’ve got neutered and shit, then we wouldn’t be in trouble with our dicks now.”

I gave Tone a hard look and shook my head. My head was pounding too heavy to laugh at this nigga right now. “You mean a vasectomy? We ain’t no fuckin’ dogs.”

“Says who?” He shot back with the jokes and shit.

I simply shook my head. It was good having Tone around.

I felt like I was about to die before he walked in, taking my mind off the flu.

A few seconds later and my phone was buzzing once again.

This time it was one of my people posted outside Victoria’s new condo, just confirming her security was set and the cameras were active with eyes on every angle

and no blind spots.

I texted back a simple reply: Good. Keep her close.

After that, Tone left and I slumped back on the couch, with my head still heavy.

My empire was in motion. My family was expanding, and my city still belonged to me.

However, deep down, I knew everything was changing, and I wasn't ready for some of them, but I'd be damn if I didn't protect what was mine, no matter how much I wasn't ready.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:28 pm

It had been just a few days since I began working at the spa downtown, but it felt like a lifetime since I last moved this freely because I never truly had.

The Royal Spa was nestled in a high-rise in the center of Miami's most elite district.

Everything just sparkled down to the marble floors, the chrome-accented doors, even the glass bowls filled with sliced cucumbers and floating orchids that could be smelled in the air.

The elevator ride up alone was enough to remind me that this life was unfamiliar to me... a new territory.

I sat at the front desk behind a curved marble counter wearing a white blouse with soft sleeves and a beige skirt that hugged my curves.

I had a tiny name tag pinned to my top read that read, 'Valerie' and it still didn't feel like me at all.

Sometimes when the girls called my name, I wouldn't even turn around to answer because it wasn't familiar to me and the alias hadn't stuck to my spirit yet, but I was truly learning because I wanted this.

"Perfect," she beamed before disappearing into one of the back suites.

This job wasn't hard at all, it was just..

. different. I wasn't being watched every second and I wasn't being used as a pawn.

For the first time in my life, I wasn't expected to spy, seduce, or survive.

I was able to just be me... or Valerie. I felt like I was being some version of myself that had never existed before.

The other women who worked here were beautiful and poised, but they welcomed me without judgment, and I appreciated that.

Their Miami accents made me smile because it was so much carefree spirits.

They talked about brunch spots, their latest nail sets, or the drama from whatever reality show aired the night before.

It was strange but peaceful being in a room full of women who had no idea what it felt like to hold a gun.

The spa itself was a dream come true for any woman.

It had soft lighting, eucalyptus diffusers, and playlists of flutes and water sounds feeling like the total opposite of the world I came from.

A world where I had to fake strength while being pulled apart inside.

My new condo wasn't far from the spa either and I was loving it, it was sleek and modern with white walls; a glass balcony, a stainless-steel kitchen, and a rainfall shower I could stay under for hours.

I had a bed with fluffy grey covers, silk curtains, and a wine rack.

I had my own space for the first time in my life with no uncle hovering over my shoulder and no blood on the concrete of every corner I hit, and yet.

.. even with the new identity, new job, and new apartment, there was a part of me that still felt like I didn't belong sometimes.

It was like I'd walked into someone else's life and borrowed their clothes and name.

I had called Dom earlier that morning to thank him once again.

He didn't say much like usual, but I heard the truth in his silence sometimes.

He still didn't trust me yet and I hadn't done enough to earn that, but he gave me this shot anyway and I wasn't going to waste it.

When I walked out of the spa that evening, the sun was beginning to set painting the sky golden hues along the skyline, and I felt proud that I made it through another day.

I was proud that I had work, and a name, and a chance to build something even if I wasn't sure what.

My phone vibrated, one of the ones Dom gave me, and I was still getting used to it, but I appreciated the gesture.

It always vibrated as a reminder that he was protecting me or somebody was watching me.

In a way, I did feel like I needed it, and it felt like safety, even if it came in the form of shadows and not him.

As I entered my condo and kicked off my heels, I poured myself a glass of Stella and opened the windows.

The breeze carried in the sounds of traffic, music, and some laughter from my neighbors on a nearby balcony.

Yep, I belonged to the world now... not just the cartel and not just Dom.

I was slowly finding myself, and just maybe. .. I'd earn a real name again one day.

After I got settled, I floated across my polished tile floor in a pair of fuzzy white slippers, then tapped my phone to start a playlist. I wanted to hear something Latin, warmth and familiar so I played Juan Luis Guerra song, 'Bachata Rosa' and the first few notes instantly made my curvy hips start to sway.

Any loneliness I felt vanished just like that in this moment.

Deciding to cook, I headed into the open-concept kitchen.

There was already a stocked fridge when I moved in thanks to the Royals and I'd always known how to make something out of anything.

Tonight, I craved 'arroz con coco' and 'pollo guisado', slow-cooked chicken in a tomato-based stew with bell peppers, garlic, and seasoning that reminded me of the chefs back home who cooked for me.

It was the kind of meal that made even the coldest home feel like someone loved you.

As the pot simmered, the aroma filled the condo and finally made the place smell like a Cuban restaurant.

I danced a little as I stirred the pot, catching my reflection in the balcony doors.

I may have looked free, but I was still bruised on the inside.

Later, I showered and wrapped my hair in a towel, then sat at the edge of the bed in a robe while searching for a Dominican hair salon near Brickell on my phone.

I needed a blowout and a fresh press, maybe even some highlighted streaks or maybe just dye my entire head.

I needed something to make me feel like the woman I knew was inside me.

I found a spot just a few blocks from the spa.

It was bright, classy, and had all five-star reviews.

I bookmarked it and made a note to stop by during my lunch break tomorrow.

I woke up early, made a cup of espresso, and dressed in my neutral-toned work clothes with beige slacks, a soft white blouse, and my nude heels.

My hair was pulled into a sleek bun for now, but I was determined to look my best by the afternoon.

When I arrived at the spa, the other girls greeted me as they always did.

A few of them commented on how calm and composed I always seemed, and how I kept myself like I belonged somewhere.

.. royal. I only smiled in return because they had no idea.

Everything to them was what they saw in front of them.

They had no idea what an underworld was or that it even existed.

They couldn't walk a mile in my shoes or live the life that I had.

By noon, I slipped out during lunch and made my way to the salon I'd found the night before and the driver never gave me any issues. The smell of heat protectant,

hairspray, and coconut oil greeted me as soon as I hit-the-door.

“Buenos días,” the receptionist said. “Do you have an appointment?”

“I was hoping to do a blowout during my break,” I answered looking at my watch. “I only have about an hour.”

“Sure, we can take you now. It’ll be \$95 with the conditioning treatment.”

I politely smiled and reached for my wallet realizing that I only had forty dollars in cash.

My expression on the outside didn’t change but, on the inside, I was humiliated and even more pissed that El Blanca emptied my accounts.

I paused for a second and then I stepped outside for a moment and called the one person I knew could fix it and he answered immediately with a cough. Is he sick? I wondered.

“Dom,” I said, keeping my tone low.

“You straight?” he asked.

“I’m at the salon near my job. I... um... I need to get my hair done but I don’t have enough money. I don’t have a bank account either.”

There was a long pause, but I could hear him breathing on the other end. “Where you at?” he finally asked. I gave him the name of the salon. “Aight. I’ll make a call, don’t move.” He hung up without another word.

Not even two minutes later, the receptionist called me back inside. “Miss Valerie? You’re all set. We just received a call and everything’s covered.”

I was taken back. “Seriously?”

She smiled while waving me inside. “Yes. You must know somebody important.”

I nodded my head as a small smile crept upon my lips. “Something like that.” I said.

As I sat in the chair and felt the stylist begin parting and brushing my hair, I stared at my reflection knowing damn well this new life wasn’t perfect and I’d have some hard days, but it was mine now and somehow, even though I wasn’t sure I deserved it yet, I was going to make it work.

The Dominican blowout had my hair laid to perfection.

It was so soft and silky as my hair cascaded down right above my ass.

I was feeling like a regular woman in the city.

I stepped out of the salon with a little bounce in my heels this time, as I slid my sunglasses on and adjusted my bag before walking toward the black SUV waiting a few feet away.

One of Dom’s shadows stood by the rear door, opening it for me like clockwork.

I climbed in and the soft roar of the engine and the cool air conditioning took over as we rolled back into downtown.

I looked out the tinted window, watching the city that was so full of life.

The palm trees were swaying in the heat, couples were laughing as they crossed the street, and tourists were pulling out phones to snap pictures of any and everything.

Miami was so damn beautiful to me and the place to be, but something started to feel

off all of a sudden and I got chills.

My eyes unconsciously scanned the sidewalk until they landed on him.

Sitting at an outdoor café, holding a folded newspaper, wearing aviator shades and sipping a café con leche like he belonged there.

It was fucking Hector! El Blanca's right-hand man.

He was cold-blooded and loyal to the bone.

He was one of the most dangerous and he never left El Blanca's side unless he was sent to kill something and as far as I knew, he was still supposed to be in Cuba .

My blood immediately ran ice cold as I sat up straighter with my heart pounding in my chest. He didn't see me and there was no way he could have behind these tinted windows.

We were at the red light, and I couldn't stop staring at him.

My palms were suddenly sweating and my stomach twisted into knots.

"El está aquí..." I whispered to myself, panicking telling myself 'he is here'. "It just can't be..." I reached for my phone so fast it nearly slipped out of my fingers. I went to call Dom again and this time with trembling hands. "Come on," I whispered. "Come on, pick up, pick up, pick up..."

After the fourth ring, his deep voice finally answered. "Yeah."

"Dom," I gasped barely able to get the words out. "He's here... Hector. He's sitting outside of Café Verde on 5th and Marble... sipping coffee. He's supposed to be in Cuba, Dom."

Dom paused for a second. “You sure?” he asked, and I noticed how his tone instantly changed. He sounded like a cold-blooded killer.

“I swear it’s him. I’d know that scar on his neck anywhere as well.”

I could hear Dom moving on the other end now at a fast pace.

“Where exactly you at?” he asked. I gave him the cross streets, and he said something under his breath.

“That’s too close to the downtown Royal Enterprises hub.

He ain’t here for coffee... El Blanca’s ‘bout to hit one of our biggest distribution sites.”

My chest began to heave up and down. “Dom... what should I do?”

“Go straight back to the condo. Don’t speak to nobody and lock the door. I’ll handle the rest.”

“Dom...”

“Victoria.” He snapped. “Go home... now. ”

He hung up on me and I gripped the phone in my lap telling the driver to take me home instead of back to the spa.

My heart was still pounding as the SUV made a sharp turn at the next light.

The city didn’t even know the kind of hell that was about to rain down on it...

but I did because if Hector was here... El Blanca was already watching, and they had

officially brought the war to Miami.

To be continued!

Episode 3 of “The Miami King” coming SOON!