



Dreaux: The Corporate Assassin (Boudreaux Mafia #3)

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Category: Urban

Description: By day, Andre “Dre” Boudreaux is the poised and ruthless second-in-command of Boudreaux Enterprises, negotiating multi-million dollar construction deals with a cold, calculated charm. But by night, Dre becomes something else entirely—a shadow in the dark, a silent executioner tasked with eliminating threats to the family empire before they ever come to light.

His latest assignment takes him deep into Milly Grove, a neighborhood buzzing with tension, secrets, and silent wars. What he doesn't expect is her—the prettiest problem he's ever seen. Sharp-tongued, street-smart, and fearless, she complicates everything he's been trained to keep clean and controlled.

Now Dre's balance is tipping. When the enemies close in from all sides, Dre must decide: stay the course, or let his latest distraction become his deadliest mistake.

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“Bartender, another round for the house! Shots are on me tonight!”

I looked around the small hole-in-the-wall bar and watched the patrons cheer and surround Westley. Cigar smoke and burnt cooking oil filled the air as they all celebrated with the man who was set to die tonight. Little did he know, the celebratory shot he was about to take with the room full of guests would soon be his last.

“Hey, handsome! Would you like a free shot of Jack?” The waitress approached me as I sat in the darkened corner. “Wes is in a good mood and is buying them for everyone.”

“I’m good,” is all I said to her as I continued to watch him. “I have a long drive ahead of me tonight, so this Hennessy and Coke will be fine.”

“Well, my name is Leann if you change your mind.” Giving me a sultry smile, she nibbled her bottom lip before nodding and turning on her heels to walk away.

I took a quick moment to appreciate the way her ass spilled from the bottom of her cutoff shorts. The bar gave a Western vibe with hosts dressed in tied-up flannels, denim shorts, and cowgirl boots. There was even a mechanical bull that fit the aesthetic. The tunes that flowed through the speakers had the patrons running to the floor to show off their skills to the latest line dances. It was a nice vibe, and any other time, I would have been more inclined to kick back and enjoy the festivities, but tonight, I wasn’t on that. Tonight, I was on my reaper shit.

Taking a sip of my drink, I let my eyes trail Mr. Westley. They turned to slits as I

watched him throw his head back in laughter as if he didn't have a care in the world. Standing close to five feet, five inches, the little man carried himself as if he were a giant. By day, he was a businessman who owned some of the most popular gambling houses in South Florida. The funny thing is he has a gambling problem himself. He owed the Family more than five million dollars in loan money and fees and has made no efforts to pay us back. Buying the fastest cars and spending money on women wasn't the way to go when you're indebted to the most ruthless nigga in the South. Rosier is not for all of the running around, and he made it clear what his fate would be if he didn't adhere to the terms and conditions of their agreement. It was time for us to collect what was owed to us tonight. Too bad it would be paid with his life.

"Make a move nigga..." I spoke to myself as I watched him flirt with the waitress who had spoken to me moments earlier. "I don't have all night."

Gripping her ass, he pulled her closer to him. She nibbled on her bottom lip and giggled while he whispered sweet nothings in her ear. He couldn't care less about his wife and three kids at home, which makes killing his ass that much easier. Growing tired of watching them grope each other, she finally said something to him before taking his hand in hers. Leading him through the small sea of people, they disappeared to the back of the bar. I waited a few moments before placing my hoodie over my head, standing, and following where they went. The further I got down the hall, the more the music began to fade. Before long, the only thing that could be heard in the hallway was the low moans coming from the utility closet.

"Oh my gosh!" Leann cried over the sound of skin slapping. "Right there, baby!"

Glancing over my shoulder to ensure I was alone, I placed my hands inside a pair of leather gloves before easing the small door open. As I peeped inside, I could easily see them in the far corner of the room, with her bent over while he fucked her roughly from behind.

“Fuck! This pussy is good.” I scrunched my nose as he slammed in and out of her.
“Take this dick, bitch.”

Creeping into the room unnoticed, I looked around to see if there was anything in here I could use without it being too messy. Usually, I wouldn’t do this in a building full of people, but Westley needed to be taught a lesson. He thought he was untouchable because of certain relationships he’d maintained, but I was here to remind him he wasn’t. Tiptoeing to the side of the wall, I remained as quiet as possible as I located some rope wrapped around a small stand. Taking it into my hand, I watched as the two of them continued to fuck like rabbits.

“Throw that ass back and fuck me like you want me to pay that rent of yours.” He gritted his teeth as he held onto her waist. “And you better make it good.”

Changing their stance, I watched as she bent lower to grab her ankles, and he positioned himself to remain still while she did her thing. Once they were in a rhythm and he threw his head back in ecstasy, I knew I had him. Wrapping the rope around each hand, I crept up behind him like the prey that he was. Before he knew what was happening, the rope was around his neck as I pulled with all my might.

“Ugh.” He grunted and clawed at the gloves, but it was no use.

“Oh shit, Wes!” Leann continued to fuck him, oblivious as to what was going on behind her. “Let me do my thing and stay still, Daddy. Just like that.”

Grunting and groaning, he tried his best to fight me off, but it was no use. I towered over his weak frame, and even if he did manage to get away from me in this instance, he still wasn’t leaving this room alive. Pulling the rope tighter and tighter, I knew it was only a matter of time before he was dead as his movements became limp.

“Oh shit, Wes!” Leann cried out shakily. “I’m about to come, baby!”

I peered down at her body, shaking from her orgasm as he went still. Seeing as though the life had left his body, I released the hold I had on him, causing his limp body to fall on top of hers. Taking small steps back into the darkness, I kept my eyes on her as she struggled to remove herself from underneath him.

“Dammit, Westley... I can’t breathe,” she murmured as she tried her best to lift him from on top of her. “Did you hear me? Wes, I said—ah!”

Her piercing screams filled the dark room as I slinked out the same way I came. Closing the door quietly behind me, I looked to make sure the coast was still clear as I made my way back toward the front of the bar. The music was still blasting as the people continued to dance their night away. Nothing seemed amiss, and that was the way I liked it. Canvassing the booths, I found my table was still empty. Going back over, I took my seat, removed my burner cell, and shot off a quick text to Zoo and Mimi.

Me:

Mission Complete

With both of them giving me a thumbs up, I placed my phone back inside my pocket. I wasn’t worried about security cameras with me on film because my cousin, Mimi, was a tech whiz. Deciding to get comfortable, I removed my hoodie and bobbed my head to the sounds of Shaboozy.

“Is there anything I can get you, love?” a different waitress came over and asked. “You’re handsome, but you would look even better with a drink in front of you.”

“You know what?” I chuckled as I locked eyes with her. She was more hospitable and less thirsty than Leann. “Let me get a Hennessy and Coke.” I pulled a hundred-dollar bill from my pocket and handed it to her. “Keep the change.”

Eyes lighting up brighter than the stars in the sky, she smiled and told me she would be right back with my drink. Leaning back in the chair, I threw my arm over the back and continued to vibe for the night. Another day, another nigga bites the dust because he thought he could fuck with my Family. Wes should have known better, and now his ass is dead. Thankfully, I handled this promptly because of my early morning flight to Milly Grove. My job here is done and I can now head home before I leave town, but one last drink wouldn't hurt.

A few minutes went by before Leann was running to the front of the bar, crying and begging for someone to come and help her. The owner rushed to the back before coming back up front and screaming for someone to call 9-1-1. I sipped my drink and watched as chaos unfolded before my eyes. Satisfied with my handiwork, I finished off my drink and stood to leave. People ran around and panicked as I walked coolly to my unmarked car for the evening. Once inside, I turned the ignition and took a few breaths before pulling my cell phone from my pocket. Pressing one on the keypad to dial the programmed number, I leaned back in my seat and listened as the phone rang before it connected.

“Are you okay, baby?” my grandmother’s soothing voice greeted me immediately. “Where are you?”

“Out,” was all I said as the flashing lights appeared to the side of me. I watched as two squad cars pulled up and the officers rushed into the building. “Can you pray for me, Sweets?”

“Sure, baby.” I heard a small rustling and knew she was stepping into her prayer closet. As of late, she’d been spending more and more time there because of me. “Close your eyes and clear your mind, baby.”

Doing as I was told, I closed my eyes and waited for her to continue.

“Heavenly Father, we come to you as humbly as we know how. We ask that you forgive us of our sins and lead us on the path of righteousness. You told us that you will never leave us nor forsake us. You told us that by your stripes, we will be healed. We know that doesn’t mean just healed from internal sickness, but mental as well. We lay our sins at your feet, Father, and ask you to forgive us for not walking in your truth and your light. Cleanse us, Lord, and make us in your image so that it’s pleasing to you. We all have fallen short of your grace and mercy, but you love us anyway. Protect, heal, and strengthen us, Father. Forgive our trespasses as well as the ones who have trespassed against us. Restore us, Lord, because our soul rightfully belongs to you. All these things we ask and pray... in Jesus' name. Amen.”

“Amen,” I murmured as I opened my eyes. People were now filing out of the club as the paramedics were headed inside with the gurney. Putting the car in drive, I pulled out of the lot and entered the dark highway. “Thank you, Sweets.”

“You’re more than welcome, baby.” I could hear the smile in her voice. “Are you headed home?”

“Yes, ma’am.” I nodded as if she could see me. “I’m less than an hour away from the city.”

“Call me when you get there. I will be waiting up until you do,” she stated sternly, and I couldn’t help but smile. I’d made the mistake of not doing what she’d asked before, and she had no problem pulling up to my house. “I love you, baby.”

“I love you, too, Sweets.”

Disconnecting the call, I rode the lonely road in silence. Even though I’ve been doing this for a while, that doesn’t mean the heaviness isn’t there with each life I take. As I made my way back home, I played the same song I did after every kill: “Deliver Me” by Le’Andria Johnson. I know it’s going to take more than prayer and a gospel song

to save my soul with all of the foul shit I've done, but that will never stop me from at least getting a consultation with the Big G on my judgment day. I hope my remorse can at least get me into the cooler parts of hell.

"It's been almost a month since we've broken ground in Milly Grove, so does someone want to tell me why I'm looking at an aerial view of a bulldozer and pile of dirt?" I glanced from the monitor to the scared faces around the conference room. Leaning against the edge of the table, I eyed the six men in attendance one by one. "Someone has about three seconds to answer my question before I fire every single one of you."

Some days, I feel like being an assassin is easier than holding a leadership role in corporate America. Niggas act as if they're incompetent in doing their jobs at times, and if they knew how badly that shit made my trigger finger itch, they would do what's required of them the first time it's asked.

"Mr. Boudreaux... the crews are tired." My head of commercial development was the first to speak up. "I've been trying not to overwork my best guys because of some of the members slacking. I want to fire them, but that's less hands I'll have."

"I see." I stuck my hands into the pockets of my slacks and walked the room. "Why wasn't this communicated with me?" I stopped pacing and eyed John. "We could have rectified the situation, and I could have been in contact with Mayor Mills about this. We have a very exclusive and extensive contract with his city. I don't want him to think we're incapable of doing the job. So... how are we going to fix this before I communicate with him?"

While I hold my team to a high standard, I'm not heartless. I know that even a dog gets tired, and if my guys needed a break, they could get that. They've been working

nonstop for the past year with the rebuilding of Milly Grove, and I know they needed rest. I've offered them breaks and vacations on more than one occasion, and they haven't taken me up on my offers. I guess their bodies were finally feeling the regret of the declined rest, and now their work ethic had declined. I was more than willing to give the men whatever they needed. I'm more so pissed about the lack of communication.

He glanced at the other men and gulped before nodding his head in agreement. Before I could continue my brainstorming, John chimed back in. "I was thinking we could hold a job fair of sorts. We could hire about ten more guys, so the ones we have won't be stretched thin."

"How long will that take?" I crossed my arms as I walked over to the windows overlooking the city. It was a gloomy day, and I was more than ready to take my ass home. "The hiring and training included?"

"Three weeks," he said instantly, causing me to turn and face him. "I've already started the process. All I need is your permission to continue."

"I hope with hiring new members, you're going to fire the ones who don't want to do their jobs. I'm not paying anyone who doesn't want to work." I was adamant about that. One thing I didn't like was laziness. "I trust you, John. You're in charge of construction for a reason. Bring me the details when they're final, and we can discuss it. Also, let the guys know the site is shut down until you have the replacements."

"But... Mr. Boudreaux, those men need to work." His eyes widened as he spoke frantically. "They love their jobs... they just needed a break?—"

"Relax, man." I chuckled as I returned to my seat, right as there was a knock on the door. We all looked as Rosier entered the room quietly. Giving me a curt nod, I returned it before giving my attention back to my men. "I know those guys are good

because I've seen them in action. I want them to come back focused and well-rested. The amount of time it's going to take you to find new members to add to the crew, I want them to take that time off—paid. I also want to get with you on an acceptable vacation and pay package for the fellas. Let's give them a raise and incentive on a job well done." I stood from my seat and offered him my hand to shake. He hurriedly stood and accepted. "You're doing a fine job, and so are the guys. Let the site supervisors be hands-on in the hiring process as well. When all this is squared away, let them know they'll have time off too. They deserve it just like their team."

I'm a firm believer that when you're good to your team, they're good to you. I made sure the guys didn't need anything else before I let them know to keep me updated, and they were dismissed. Loosening my tie, I watched as the men shook hands with Zoo and filed out of the room. Once gone, he closed the door before walking over to dap me.

"What's up, bro," he greeted before taking a seat across from me. "You look like you need a vacation your damn self."

"Who would help you run this shit if I take one?" I eyed him with my brows raised. "Jules? You want that, Rosier?"

Chuckling at the thought, he threw his hands up in surrender. "You might be right, my boy." He nodded before he turned back serious. "What's up, though? I haven't heard from you since the other night. I assume there weren't any issues?"

After killing Westley a few nights ago, we've been keeping tabs on the news and his family. We were never worried about anything leading back to us because I'm well-versed in what I do. Witnessing the fallout of our actions, though, was mandatory. Like the fools before him, Wes didn't think there would be any consequences to how he moved. The waitress, Leann, was questioned because she was the last one to see him alive, but she was let go. His poor wife found out he died while in some pussy

and damn near lost her mind. She refused to spend any money on his burial, so he became property of the state. It's not like she had much money to do it anyway. He'd fucked up all of their assets, so she had to sell what she could and move her kids out of state, causing them all to go live with family. The bank was auctioning his businesses and was in the process of selling them to Boudreaux Enterprises. One way or another, we always got what belonged to us.

"Everything is what it's supposed to be." I left it at that because we only speak about mafia business in certain locations. "How's the family? I need to get by there and see Auntie soon. I know she's going to be talking cash shit."

With our fathers being brothers, my cousins and I were damn near raised as siblings by our mothers. Even with the underlying beef between my dad and his, our relationship with each other never changed. Rosier and Jules were my brothers, and nothing would ever come between us.

"The family is good, man." He beamed with happiness as he spoke. "Gabby and Baby Rosaria are great, while RJ is getting bigger by the day. I've been trying to put another baby in Gabby, but she ain't going for it." He looked off and shook his head before turning back to me. "Speaking of family, when are you going to settle down? You know there's nothing wrong with having someone to go home to after a day of chaos? You need a little peace in your life."

"Let me find out you've been talking to Sweets." I smirked as I stood to leave the room. It was almost four in the afternoon, and I wanted to respond to a few more emails before I left for the day. "You know she'll marry me off at the first chance she gets."

Sweets was my maternal grandmother and the apple of my eye. I gave her the nickname when I was a baby because she was the one who gave me all the candy and cake I wanted. I loved her more than life and would do anything for her. She's privy

to some of my actions because I know that when things get heavy, she's there to speak life into me. One of the main things she is vocal about when it comes to my life is her wanting to be around long enough to see me married with kids. I fear that won't happen, though. Not because I don't want it but because of my profession.

"Sweets is one of the smartest women I know. She's not going to tell you anything wrong." We walked down the hall toward the elevators and my office. "I want you to think about it, Dre. Don't let none of this shit consume you to where you end up alone forever. I know you have your roster of ladies, but there's nothing wrong with finding your one." He patted my shoulder before turning to press the button to call the elevator. "I'm going out of town with Gabby for the weekend but call me if you need me. Ma will have the kids, so pull up on them. She's most definitely going to get in your ass when you go over there." Rosier chuckled as he stepped onto the elevator, holding his arm out to keep it from closing. "How much longer are you going to be here today?"

"About an hour..." I looked down at my watch. "Y'all be careful. If anything pops off, I'll enlist your dumbass brother."

After seeing him off, I trekked back to my office to finish up for the day. Business-wise, I was on my shit without a fault in sight. My personal life needed a little work, but I was good with how things were for now. I needed a level head in this line of business, and a relationship is nothing but a distraction. Distractions can get you killed, and dying isn't on my agenda.

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Gripping my clutch, I stepped into the lounge, looking around, hoping to find a seat by the bar. It's been a long week, and all I wanted was to catch a good vibe and enjoy my evening. Taking note of the patrons, I felt slightly overdressed in my knee-length black dress and heels, but it was too late to worry about that now. I bobbed my head to the tunes of the old school R a scene is the last thing I need. Without saying anything else, he resumed his drinking, and I wasted no time getting to the bar. Breathing a sigh of relief, I eased into the empty seat.

"Hey, pretty lady," the bartender greeted me as he walked over, throwing his towel over his shoulder. "What can I get for you this evening?"

"Hi..." I returned his smile as I placed my clutch on the counter. "Can I have the dirtiest martini you have to offer? Extra olives, please. Also, I'd like to have a hookah."

"My type of girl." He grinned as he went to work. "Sit tight, sweetie, and give me a second."

Giving him a nod, I reached for the food menu and looked it over. I've barely eaten today, and if I didn't want to puke into a toilet later, it would've been wise to put some food on my stomach. As I browsed the menu, the most intoxicating cologne invaded my nostrils. The woody scent caused the hairs on my arm to stand. Feeling a shadow form over me, I slowly dragged my eyes from the menu and met the dark ones of the man I'd seen moments ago.

"Hey, my name is Nate." He smirked and displayed his left dimple. "I just wanted to apologize for my boy, Kurt, back there. A woman like you should never be accosted

that way.”

“It’s fine.” I pulled my bottom lip between my teeth as the bartender placed my drink before me. Taking a quick sip, I moaned at the taste. “Damn, this is good.” I nodded in appreciation. “Thank you, sir. How much do I owe you?”

“Let me pay for that,” Nate insisted as he pulled a wad of money from his pocket. “It’s the least I can do...”

“Dee.” I gave him my name with a smile, appreciating the gesture. Placing the hookah tip at my lips, I wrapped them around it to inhale and watched his eyes darken. “Thank you, Nate.”

As I watched him pay for my drink, I sipped the delicious concoction and took in the delicious man. His caramel skin glowed under the fluorescent lights like a freshly made donut with no icing. His low temp fade haircut looked good on him, blending into his face that was clean and bare. Facial hair usually aged men, but his bone structure was enough to show he was a grown-ass man without a goatee or beard. Meeting his honey-brown bedroom eyes, I knew this man had women eating out the palm of his hand and was used to getting them to fall for him easily.

“So, Dee, tell me...” Leaning closer to me, he placed his lips directly to my ear. “Are you from here? I know just about every pretty face that enters into my city, and I don’t recall ever seeing yours.”

Slowly, I raised my hand to the collar of his shirt and began to dust off any imaginary lint. I’ve never been this bold when it came to men I didn’t know, but it was something about Nate that drew me in. Shifting his eyes to where my hand was located on his shirt, he settled them there for a few moments before dragging them back over to me.

“I’m new to Los Angeles.” I lifted my hand a little more and stroked the base of his neck with my coffin nails. “I don’t know who the city belongs to. Being that it’s yours, maybe you could show me around sometime.”

He licked his bottom lip while desire filled his eyes. Beginning his scan at the top of my head, I watched as his eyes lingered on my breasts that were spilling from the top of my dress before they continued to assess my body. I knew I was a looker with my chocolate skin and curvy body, but it still felt nice to get this type of reaction. Looking him over, the slow movement in his designer slacks let me know he loved what he saw.

“Put your number in my phone, and I’ll make sure I do that.” He eyed me for a few beats before adding, “I’m not going to step on your niggas toes, am I?”

“I’m single, love.” I winked as I turned to face him. “I hope I’m not messing up anything for you and your girl. As handsome as you are, I know you have a few tucked away somewhere.”

“Nah, I’m good, baby.” He chuckled, but I knew it was a lie. “I got all the time in the world for my new interest.”

“Sooner than later, I hope.” I raised my brow as I accepted his phone. Going to his contacts, I saved my number, but not before calling my phone so I could have his. “Don’t keep me waiting. I’d hate to have to find someone more willing to show me around. Maybe your friend over there.”

He chuckled as something dark flashed over his hooded eyes. “Don’t get that nigga killed, baby. With as fine as you are, I’m sure the body will be well worth it.”

My eyes widened, and my heart sped up at his admission. A man who barely knew my name was willing to kill for me. While that should be a red flag, I was more

intrigued than ever.

“So, Nate...” I cleared my throat and popped an olive into my mouth. “Have you lived in the area long?” His brows furrowed slightly at the question, and I raised my hand in mock surrender. “I’m just making conversation, boo.”

“Where are you from?” He took a sip of his whiskey as he eyed me intently. “That southern accent is strong as hell on you.”

“Texas.” I smiled brightly, causing him to simper. “I’m a southern girl through and through. Before you ask, yes, I love mud riding and sipping moonshine like the next girl. Being on the West Coast is so different than back home. There’s no hospitality here.”

Nodding, he pulled his vibrating phone from his pocket. He eyed it before giving his attention back to me. “I got all the hospitality you need, mama, but check it.” He threw back the remainder of his drink before giving his attention back to me. “You should let me take you out soon. I want to get to know you, Dee. Maybe even let me cook you dinner at my spot.”

I nibbled my bottom lip. “I’d like that. I love a man that knows his way around the kitchen. The way to my heart is definitely through my stomach.”

Groaning, he inched in closer to me. I’m not sure if it was the liquor or his scent that had me woozy all of a sudden. Gripping my waist, he pulled me closer to him.

“If me putting something in your stomach is what you want, I can make that happen, baby.” He kissed my exposed collarbone and brought his eyes back to me. “Just let me know how far you want this to go.”

“Well, I’ll be waiting for your call,” I replied in a husk tone and pushed back slightly.

I finished off my drink and prepared to leave. “As tempted as I am to test your theory tonight, I have to go. Plus, I deserve one dinner date before we discuss dessert.” We shared a laugh before I placed my clutch under my arm. “I have a busy day at the office in the morning, but I needed a drink to take the edge off. ”

“Shit, I know of other ways we can do that.” He grinned as I accepted his helping hand and eased from my stool. “I’ll be calling you tomorrow. Make sure you answer for a nigga.”

“Definitely.” I gave him a small smile before standing on my tiptoes to kiss his cheek. “Goodnight, Nate.”

Turning on my heels, I glanced over my shoulder and eyed him before leaving. His sight was glued to my ass, so I decided to give him something to think about for later. With the sway of my hips, I sauntered through the bar with all eyes on me. On the way out, I met the glare of his friend, and I smiled politely. As tiring as my day has been, my night ended better. Reaching the door, I peered again to wink at Nate. I had a feeling he would make my stay in California well worth it.

* * *

“You know, when you gave me the address to your place, I started not to come.” I smiled as Nate opened the door to his home. Dressed in nothing but a wife beater and sweats, he still looked like the sexiest sin. Stepping inside, I took note of how beautiful the place was. “You just never know someone’s true intentions until they’re revealed.”

Since meeting in the lounge, we’ve been texting and calling each other for a few days. When he asked me to come chill with him at his home, I was taken aback. We went back and forth about it before I finally gave in and said to hell with it. A few of my friends have my location if anything goes wrong, and I do well protecting myself

in most situations.

He chuckled as he closed the door behind us. “You’re in good hands with Nate, baby. You looking good today, Dee.” He eyed my tank and leggings. He said we were chilling, so I made sure my attire fit the occasion. “Come on in and get comfortable.”

Placing his hand on my waist, I let him lead us through the foyer into his living room. I looked around for signs of another woman, but his well-put-together home didn’t show any. The black and grey furniture was clean, and the house smelled like mahogany teakwood. There weren’t any pictures on the wall, but for the most part, the place looked homely.

“This is definitely a bachelor pad,” I said, snickering as we both fell onto his sectional. “Did you just move in? It’s so bare in here.”

“I don’t require much, baby.” He winked as he grabbed the remote to his television. “This is just one of my places, so there’s no need to go all out.”

“Ahh, I see.” I placed my bag beside me and turned to face him. “Is that why you invited me to your home so freely? This isn’t your main one, so how many do you have?”

Winking, he reached to the side of him and handed me a stack of menus. One thing I’ve learned about Nate in this short amount of time is that if he didn’t want to answer something, he wouldn’t. Deciding to let it go, I looked over the menus and settled on Chinese. It’s been a while since I had honey chicken and lo mien, so that’s what I decided to roll with.

“So, how was work?” he asked after ordering for us. We were watching some type of action movie that I couldn’t care less about. “They didn’t get on your nerves too bad, did they?”

“You have no idea.” I chuckled as I pulled my vibrating phone from my pocket. Glancing at the message, I frowned slightly before placing it back inside my purse. “How was your day? Did you get some business taken care of?”

During one of our late-night conversations as we tried to get to know each other, he let me in on a very small piece of his life. He was a businessman who had hands in various types of real estate and sales. I tried to get him to elaborate, but he changed the subject, as always.

“Yeah, I got a lot of shit done.” He nodded and peered over at me before pulling me closer. “Had to show some niggas that I’m not the muhfucka to play with.” He pulled his lip between his teeth. “You fine as fuck. You know that?”

Tracing his finger along my jawline, he gripped my neck and pulled me closer to him. My heart began beating in my chest with hopes of him kissing me. I couldn’t help but moan when he used his tongue to trace my lips. The chemistry between us couldn’t be denied.

“I’m not going to lie to you... I want to fuck you so damn bad.” He pulled me to where I was straddling his lap. “I know we’re both grown, but I’m trying not to move too fast with you.”

“Y-You’re right, we’re both adults.” I was embarrassed by how I moaned once he grabbed a handful of my ass. “Maybe... I want you to fuck me.”

Chuckling lowly, I could feel how hard his dick was beneath me. Pulling him closer, I began to grind in his lap as I kissed him deeply. His hands found the inside of my thighs as he squeezed my ass.

“Is that pussy already wet for me?” he asked as he nipped my bottom lip with his teeth. “Can I see?”

Without waiting for me to answer, he tossed me beside him and spread me across his couch. Pulling my tights down my thick thighs, he groaned once my red thong came into view.

“You like what you see?” I panted once he pulled it to the side and stared at my bald pussy. I knew I was making a mess on his sofa but at this point, I didn’t care.

Spreading my lower lips with his fingers, he leaned forward and pulled my clit into his mouth. The way he was nibbling and slurping, I knew I wasn’t going to last long.

“Shit, Nate!” I cried out, feeling a whirlwind of emotional and physical feelings.

“You like that shit?” he asked as he peered at me from between my legs. Easing his finger in and out of me, I couldn’t do anything but grunt and groan. His own tone matched mine as he said, “Fuck, this pussy is tight. When was the last time you had some dick?”

“Does it matter?” I moaned as I rode his digits. “How about you replace your fingers with your dick and ask me again in an hour.”

Stroking me faster, he placed his tongue right where I needed it to be again, and I knew it wouldn’t be long before I climaxed. When my legs began to tremble, I knew it was over for me.

“I feel that shit coming, Dee,” his voice rasped as he sucked me harder. “Let me have it.”

“Shittttt!” I cried as I lifted from the couch. “I’m about to come!”

Never slowing his strokes, he continued to eat me as I released. Gripping the pillows on his sofa, I wouldn’t be surprised if I’d put a hole in them. My legs shook

uncontrollably until I locked them around his head in hopes of him stopping.

“Damn, girl.” He chuckled as he pried my legs apart. “You gone let me go or what?”

Standing, he fumbled with his sweats, and I just knew I was about to get the best dick of my life. Before he could free himself, the doorbell rang, causing us both to groan.

“Go ahead and get cleaned up.” He picked my thong and leggings up from the floor. “We’ll eat and then pick up where we left off. You’re going to need your strength for what I’m going to do to you next.” He winked as I eased from the couch. “Down the hall to the left.”

Slapping my ass, I yelped and watched him as he disappeared around the corner to get our food. I followed his directions and went to clean myself up so we could eat and reconvene. Once I entered the bathroom, I was pleased to know it was clean. Looking myself over in the mirror, I couldn’t help but chuckle at my reflection.

“Girl, you look a mess.” I tried my best to fix the messy bun on my head but decided against it—the messier, the better. “If you’re on your last leg from just head, there’s no way you can handle the dick.”

Gathering myself as quickly as I could, I left out of the bathroom in search of Nate. As I roamed the halls, curiosity got the best of me when I began to pass the bedrooms. The flat-level, three-bedroom home was nice, and as I opened the first bedroom door, I shook my head at how empty it was. There was nothing in the room but a simply made king-sized bed. I knew it was his bedroom, but I didn’t have time to snoop like I wanted. The second room was just as empty, and I decided there was no point in looking into the third—that is, until I heard voices inside.

“Man... I don’t know what the fuck is going on, but we need to go see about them niggas. There’s no way we can let them think they got away with stealing from us.”

Stepping closer to the door, I tried my best to be as quiet as possible. Slightly ajar, I could peek through the crack and see Nate pace the floor while another man stood with his back to the door. The look on Nate's face caused me to gulp. Something or someone had pissed him off.

"I'm going to see about them niggas... believe that." He stopped and nodded. "I'm going to kill—" Turning his attention to the crack in the door, my eyes went wide before I slowly retreated and took off down the hall.

Making my way back to his living room, I plopped down on the sofa and pretended to watch television just as he entered the room.

"Hey... I was waiting for you before I went looking for you and the food. That activity we did has me famished..." I looked from the TV to him. I tried to steady my breathing to disguise my anxiety about being caught, listening to them converse. Dragging my eyes to his friend, Kurt, from the other night, I gave him a small wave. "I didn't know we were having company."

"I was just leaving." His boy frowned and went to step past him before Nate placed his hand on his chest to stop him. He turned and asked Nate with a confused expression, "What's up, bro?"

"We need to finish talking," is all he said with his eyes still on me. "You don't mind giving me a raincheck, right?"

"N-Not at all," I stammered, looking back and forth between them before grabbing my bag. "I guess I'll see you later."

Kurt smirked as Nate led me toward the door. "See you later, beautiful. Be safe out there."

Nate said nothing as he escorted me out the door and to my car. It was awkward, and I wanted to ask him about it, but I didn't want to pry. My curiosity got the best of me, though.

"Is everything okay?" I finally spoke once he held the door open for me. "I can wait until you guys finish talking so we can continue our night."

"Nah... business calls, love. That will always come before pussy." He nodded for me to get into the car. "Let me know when you make it home."

Stuffing his hands into his pockets, we stared at each other until I closed the door and started the ignition. Stepping back, he watched me as I placed the car in reverse and backed out of his driveway. As I pulled away from his home, I watched him in my rearview mirror until he was no longer in sight. Chills ran through my body from the odd encounter. What started as a great evening ended with uncertainty, and I didn't know what to make of it.

What the fuck have I gotten myself into.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

Sitting on the edge of the bed, I dropped my head and rolled my shoulders. The sun was set to rise in about an hour, and I needed to be on my way. Last night, I decided to take Sandra up on her dinner date offer. She and I have been dealing with each other for a few years now. Nothing with us has ever been serious, and I doubt that it will ever be. She wasn't the only woman I entertained, but she's been around the longest. She's familiar, and in my line of work, I can't take chances with new people if it's not necessary. She didn't know anything about my illegal dealings, nor did she inquire, and that was all that mattered to me.

"Hm... why are you up so early?" I glanced back at the sound of her sultry voice. She sat up slowly, and I couldn't help but lick my lips at the silk sheets that fell from her chest. "I know you're not about to leave."

"I am." I stood from the bed and stretched. With my jobs, both legal and illegal, it was rare that I ever had time off for myself. Today was Sunday, and while I wanted nothing more than to sleep the day away, my heart was telling me that I needed to be in church. "I need to get going so I can make Sunday Service." I bent over and picked up my joggers from the floor. "Sweets would kill me if she knew I had the day off and didn't make it into the Lord's house."

As I continued to get dressed, I couldn't help but chuckle as I thought about how damaged I was. Those closest to me often joke about how I should burst into flames as soon as I step on church grounds. How can I be a hired killer and still find time to praise and worship my creator? I have no clue. What I do know is I'm a child of God, and although I'm not perfect and will have to answer for the sins of this life, he loves me anyway.

“Well, if you wait for me, I can go with you.” Sandra entered her bathroom, and I could feel my dick twitch. She was so pretty to me with her coffee skin tone, expressive brown eyes, and an ass that sat up higher than two bunk beds. “I would love to see your grandmother again.”

Over the years, there have been times I had functions to attend, and I would have Sandra accompany me. She works for one of the vendors we use at Boudreaux Enterprises and made it known every time she came into the office that she wanted me. I’ve never been one to mix business with pleasure, but since she didn’t work with me directly, I saw no harm. She’s met my grandmother a time or two, but she’s never been known as anything other than a friend.

“Maybe some other time.” I locked eyes with her in the mirror as I washed my face. “You know how Sweets is... she will start thinking we’re a couple and?—”

“Is that a bad thing?” She stepped closer to me and allowed her naked breasts to rest on my torso. “We’ve been doing this same song and dance for a few years now, and I would like to put a label on things. I love you, Dre, and I want to be with you. Why is it so hard for you to be with me?”

Looking into her sad eyes, I felt bad for how things have gone. I know she loves me, and I have love for her too. The love I have is on the friend tip, though. It just so happens that she’s a friend I’m fucking.

I lifted her chin and brought her eyes to mine. “You know I can’t do that, baby. I have love for you, and I want to see you happy. I tell you all the time that the man you’re meant to be with isn’t me. You said you understood...”

“I do.” Tears welled in her eyes, and I sighed heavily. “I know we can be good together, Andre, and you know it too.”

“I gotta go, baby.” I kissed her forehead, gave her a quick hug, and let her go. Side-stepping her, I made my way back into her bedroom and grabbed my keys from the dresser. “Come lock up, and I will talk to you later.”

Hearing her sniffles behind me didn’t make me want to reconsider my words. I never wanted to hurt Sandra, and I felt like shit for doing it, but she knows what this is with us. I’ve given her outs on several occasions, and she’s always made her way back into my bed. She even knows about the other women and has stated that as long as she gets her time, she’s not worried. I thought we knew what this was, but now it may be time to cut ties. Andre Boudreaux isn’t a man who does relationships. The expensive suits, tattoos, and deep pockets are what draw the ladies in. The charm and sense of humor I possess are nothing compared to the darkness and demons within me. Still, I wouldn’t change a thing about my life.

Sandra lived in the heart of the city, so it was going to take me well over an hour to get back to the compound. Looking at the dashboard, I decided to make a quick stop at Waffle House for breakfast.

“Shit... looks like I came just in time,” I muttered to myself.

Looking up from his phone, I locked eyes with Jules. The place was fairly empty since it was so early in the morning. The club crowd was gone, and soon, patrons who were attending early morning services would be filing in.

“What’s up, bro?” I reached across the table and gave him a fist bump as he cut into his waffle. “What are you doing out this time of morning?” Giving me a slow smirk, I chuckled at his subtle answer. “You know what? Nevermind. How about you come to church with me this morning? Seems to me... I’m not the only one that needs a little bit of prayer.”

“Is that right?” Jules replied as the waitress came over and took my order. “Make sure

you add my stuff to his ticket, beautiful. This nigga is loaded.”

Shaking my head at his antics, I ordered my All-Star breakfast and made idle chit-chat before my food was presented to me. Blessing it quickly, I dived straight in.

“So, which one of those fast-ass hussies were you booded up with last night?” he asked, causing me to choke on my juice. “I might as well beat Sweets to the punch because you know she is going to ask.”

“I was with Sandra, and I think it was the last time.” I shook my head as I chewed my bacon. “She told me she knew what this was with us, but every time I look up, she crying and talking about how much she loves a nigga. I don’t want to hurt her any more than I already have, so I’m going to just cut her off.”

“Why are you so opposed to settling down, Andre?” He wiped his mouth and eyed me intently. “You’re crazy as hell, and you’re good nigga. Do you not want a family? A warm body to go home to every night?”

Continuing to eat, I mulled over what he said in my mind. Yeah, it would be nice to have a family and someone to love, but that’s not in the cards for me. My life consists of Boudreaux Enterprises and the Family. There’s no room for anything else.

“My father loved the ground my mother walked on before he died. The love they had for each other was borderline insanity.” I scoffed as I thought about all the times they tried to kill each other over money and infidelity. “I saw what work, women, and money did to him. I don’t want that for me.” I wiped my mouth and eyed my watch. I still had another forty-minute drive before I even got to the family compound. “I’m good on all that, bro.” I stood from my seat and pulled a couple of hundreds from my pockets. “I gotta head out. Kiss Bunny for me.”

“I’ll turn you into a snail right now, nigga.” He mugged me, and the smile I was

sporting dropped. “Talking about kissing my damn girl for you like I won't ruin your fuckin' day. Have you ever wondered what it was like to be a beetle, bitch?”

“Aight, I'm gonna head out.”

I threw up the deuces and got my ass out of there quicker than I came. I know that my sin is no greater or lesser than the next man, but Boko is by far the craziest and scariest nigga I've ever met. I thank God daily that he's my boy because I would hate to have to deal with that witch shit. Looking at my watch once more, I knew I would be pushing it by heading home first to shower and change while trying to make it to church on time. However, a piece of the word is better than none at all. Late or not, the house of God would be seeing me.

* * *

“Too many times, we focus on things that can go wrong. We sit back and wonder how we're going to make it out of our storm. I'm here to tell you today... that I serve a God that can calm the most raging sea! No matter how much it seems you are drowning, My Father can step in, scoop you up in his arms, and dry you off with the flick of his wrist!” Pastor Jones shouted from the top of the pulpit.

“I'm here to tell you today to not let your fears consume you! Don't let the 'what ifs' cripple you! God sees all and knows all and will make it alright!” He stepped from the podium and made his way toward the congregation. “God wanted me to tell you that no matter what's bothering you, come to Him. Are those kids stressing you out? Give it to God! That man can't stop cheating and wants out of the marriage? Give it to God! That woman is no longer in love with you and found comfort in another? Give it to God!”

Like I knew I would be, I was late getting to church. The reverend sounded as if he was on the tail end of his sermon, and I hate I missed it. The members of the

congregation were shouting and on their feet. Stepping inside, I glanced around and found Sweets on the front pew. It wasn't hard to miss her because she always wore the biggest hat, knowing the people behind her couldn't see.

"Take your time, Pastor!" my grandmother waved and shouted. She stood to her feet right as I slid in beside her. Smiling at me, she turned her attention back to the reverend. "Let him use you!"

"Is your job stressing you out? You feel like your actions, duties, and obligations are putting you in a space that has you at war mentally and spiritually?" he continued as he looked directly at me. Walking over, he placed his hand on my shoulder. "Give it to God! Romans Verse 23 says... we all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory! Do you think just because your neighbor's sin is greater in your eyes that your chances are better than theirs at getting into Heaven? Whether it's adultery or murder, we all have been tainted one way or another by the ugliness of this world."

I nodded my head as I gazed up at his piercing glare.

"I serve a God that sits high and looks low. He died so that we may have a chance at life. You will not get into Heaven judging the next man because of what he does. Jesus loves us as God loved Him." He gave my shoulder a tight squeeze before he continued his quest and wrapped up his sermon. "I'm here today to tell you... it's time to get your houses in order. Don't let another day pass you by and you don't know my Father for yourself. I can't get you into Heaven. That praying grandmother can't get you into Heaven. He is the way, the truth, and the life. All of the praises and glory go to Him!"

By now, the entire congregation was on their feet. Even I clapped and felt chills all over from the power of his words. I'm not a perfect man—I've sinned and taken many lives, but I love the Lord. I know what He has done for me and my life. I know when this life is over, I have to atone for the pain I've inflicted in this life. No matter

how much of a demon I might be, I still have my faith.

“The doors of the church are open!” he panted as he wiped the sweat from his brow.
“Choir, do your thing.”

It took no time for the benediction to wrap up, and church was over. My grandmother embraced me in her arms, as only she could, and told me how glad she was that I attended. One introduction to a few members turned into an entire meet and greet. While I was over it and ready to go, I would never tell Wanita that.

“You look good today, Sweets.” I grinned as she looped her arm in mine as I led her out to the churchyard. “You should let me take you out to dinner today.”

“And risk running into one of your little girlfriends...” She huffed as she squinted up at me. The sun was shining bright, and it was pretty warm outside today. “I’m feeling good from the pastor’s sermon, and I don’t want to have to put my religion down and whoop some tail.” We shared a laugh as I walked her over to her new Cadillac sedan that I’d purchased this past Christmas. “Besides... I’m cooking today, and I would love for my grandson to come by.”

I wanted to decline because I knew there was a chance my mother would be there. She and I haven’t had much of a relationship these past three years. We didn’t see eye to eye on the subject of my father, and it wasn’t up to me to convince her of the truth. That was her husband, and if she wanted to be loyal to him, even in death, based on the vows she took, that was on her. As for me, my loyalty died when I found out how much of a bastard he was.

“He won’t be able to go anywhere but the emergency room if he doesn’t unhand my wife.”

Chuckling, I glanced over my shoulder and locked eyes with Pastor Jones. My

grandfather was a man of God, but many, including me, knew not to try him. He hasn't always been in the church, and he was aware of some of my dealings. Between him and my grandmother, I need the closest connection with God I can get.

"Hey, Pop." I extended my hand for him to shake, but he pulled me into a hug instead. "It's good to see you."

"You too, son." He patted my back and looked me over once we detached. "It was good to see you in church this morning. I was going to call you tonight for prayer."

"Sorry, I was late," I said as I held the door open for my grandmother. "It's hot out here, and I don't want this sweet lady to melt." I smirked as he frowned. "I'm going to follow you guys home."

After helping her inside the car, I watched him get into the Cadillac truck that matched hers. One thing I'm going to do until one of us leaves this world is spoil them both. Most of the members were gone, while a few lingered and gathered in the lot. Watching my grandparents pull away from the church, I did the same and followed them the short distance to their home. Not even fifteen minutes later, they were pulling into their modest four-bedroom home. I've wanted to buy them a new house several times, but they always declined. There was nothing wrong with what they had; I just wanted them to have the best.

"So, how's business with Boudreaux Enterprises?" my grandmother asked as she took her seat beside me at the table. Today, we were having a pot roast and collards, and I was full as hell already. I know for sure I'm going to take a nap before I go home. "Your cousins called me the other day and checked on us. I love them so much. That Jules is an angel."

"A what?" I yelled a little louder than I expected. "We can't be talking about the same Jules, Sweets."

Earl and Wanita Jones are my mother's parents, so they weren't aware of Boudreaux Mafia or the Family. They knew I was the Vice President of Boudreaux Enterprises and that my line of business sometimes causes me to incorporate fatal punishments. They know I've taken lives, but they never ask questions about it. They don't approve of my work beyond the office or my lifestyle, but they never judge me for my sins.

Sweets smiled as she sipped her tea. "He's a sweet young man, and he's respectful. I told him and his brother to bring those kids over here and let me see them—those wives of theirs too. If Jules can settle down and get engaged, I know there's hope for you yet."

I knew it wouldn't be long before she started with me getting a woman. Looking over to my grandfather for help, all he did was shrug as he continued to eat. Thankfully, there was a knock on the door that pulled their attention from me.

"Mama, whose car is that in the yard?" I stiffened at the voice and the steps that came closer. "It's nice and—oh... it's him."

"Hey to you too, Mama." I nodded and looked over toward the entrance of the kitchen. The look of disgust on her face broke my heart. At the end of the day, it hurt knowing my mother hated me. "You look nice today."

Dressed in a simple royal blue maxi dress and sandals, Mattie Boudreaux was beautiful. With her chocolate skin and high cheekbones, she looked like the younger version of my grandmother. She was a plus-sized woman who always carried herself with confidence. She and I had the absolute best relationship when I was a kid, but when I got older, things changed.

Taking over as an enforcer in Boudreaux Mafia, my father wasn't happy about it. While he was the right hand to Rosier's dad, he felt that we were the ones who truly ran things. I never felt that way, and eventually, he stopped speaking to me about the

secret animosity. I guess that left room for him to confide in my mother about things she had no business knowing. She always felt she was better than Ma Ros and wanted the spotlight that came with being with the head Boudreaux in charge.

“Come on in and grab a seat, dear.” My father stood and hugged his daughter. “It’s been a while since we’ve sat and ate dinner as a family.”

“Who said we’re going to start back today?” She continued to frown at me as she set her purse on the counter. “How dare you come here and act as if it’s not because of you and that family of yours that my husband is dead?”

“Mattie... please don’t start this again, honey.” My grandmother sighed as she went over to the stove and began to fix my mother’s plate. “Claude died in a car accident that he caused when he decided to drive drunk. You need to accept the fact that?—”

“I’m not accepting a damn thing!” she shouted as she shot daggers my way. “Claude was next in line to take over as head of the Family, and Dre knows that! They killed him because they knew he would be better suited for mafia life and undo everything Samuel did as Boss! My husband should have been the one with the money and power.” She stepped to me, and I kept my face neutral. “How can you still work for them knowing what they did to him? Do you know all of the things those people have done? That damn mafia?—”

“Ma, you don’t know what you’re talking about, and it’s best you be quiet when speaking on matters you know nothing about either,” I stated as calmly as I could, causing her to pause. “Mafias haven’t been a thing for years. Even if it was, speaking on matters like that can get you and the ones you loved most killed.”

“Are you threatening me?” She gritted her jaw together as she clenched her fists. “Is that why they killed your father?”

“Dad died in a drunken crash.” I stood and eyed her, stuffing my hands in my slacks. “Was it the guilt of his brother being killed that consumed him? Maybe. Or... maybe the guilt of preying on kids and adolescents was too much on him.” I could hear my grandmother cover her mouth and gasp. “I loved Dad too but let us not pretend he was a good man.”

Whap!

Slapping me with all of her might, she eyed me with so much hate. Slowly turning my head and dragging my eyes back to her, I took a gradual step in her direction. I could hear a chair behind me scrub against the floor as it was pushed back from the table, but I never took my eyes off her.

“You better watch your fuckin’ mouth, boy!” she shouted as tears flooded her eyes. “You helped them kill my husband, and now you want to sit here and lie on his name! You’d better hope I never find out what happened to him because I’m going to make you all pay! I’m going to see to it that each and every one of you go down for this! You better hope I don’t kill you myself!”

“Is that right?” I chuckled menacingly. I took another step toward her and this time, she did the right thing by retreating. “You think you have it all figured out? I’ll humor you, Mama. Let’s say this said mafia exists. Do you think they take threats lightly? If they hypothetically killed someone in their organization for betraying them, what do you think they would do to someone like you? Someone who means nothing to them? Not only that, but this isn’t the old days. They have killers who don’t give a damn about harming women and children. They won’t wait until you sleep and creep into your home like a thief in the night.” I smirked at the tears that flowed down her face. “You think they care about your tears? No... they will kill you in broad daylight and lick those tears as they slice your neck from ear to ear.”

“Okay, Andre... that’s enough.” My grandfather grabbed my wrist and pulled me

back from my mother. I hadn't realized that I was now directly in front of her. "She gets it, son."

"Do you, Mama?" I pulled from him and angled my head as I eyed her. "Do you understand that your idle threats can cause you a world of pain simply because you want to speak on things and threaten people that wouldn't give a damn if you were related to them? Are you sure that's the game you want to play? You really want to summon the Grim Reaper?"

She sobbed quietly, and I took the time to examine my mother. Mattie was someone I couldn't recognize. I never wanted to threaten her or, even worse, kill her, but she needed to let sleeping dogs lie. In my father's case, a dead one.

My grandmother walked over and touched my cheek. "That's enough, baby. She gets it."

"Get what?" I blinked a few times and peered down at the eyes of my worried granny. I smiled at her sweetly. "Everything I mentioned was hypothetical."

Bending, I kissed her cheek before turning to my grandfather. He said nothing as he pulled me into a hug and kissed my temple. "I love you, son."

Saying nothing, I gave my mother one last once over and accepted the hatred she displayed for me. No longer wanting to be in her presence, I gathered my things and left. Unbuttoning my dress shirt, I felt as if I was suffocating. I panted heavily as I sank into the driver's seat of my whip and gripped the steering wheel. Taking a life is easy for me, but never have I been this close to taking my mother's. Once my breathing was paced, I started my car and called up the only person I needed to talk to. After a few rings, the call connected.

"What's up, man? How was church?"

“Zoo...” I ignored his question, looking through my windshield so I could pull away.
“We have a problem. However you want to handle it, I accept it.”

This was the last call I wanted to make, but the choice wasn't mine. At the end of the day, it was my sworn duty as the Boss's right hand to report all matters that could be detrimental to the organization. The noise in his background faded, and I knew I had his full attention, so I continued, “There's a potential threat I need to tell you about.”

“Who?” he asked. I could hear the curiosity in his voice. “Let me know who's getting this work.”

“My mother.”

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

“Hi, Mommy! I miss you! When are you coming home?”

Smiling into the camera, I looked into the sad eyes of my six-year-old daughter, Briley. She was the apple of my eye and the reason why I got up for work most days. I could not wait to have her back in my arms.

“Soon, baby.” My smile faltered when she poked out her bottom lip. “Hey, my girl... don’t do that.” I could feel my sadness rise as I pleaded with her. “You’re going to make mommy cry, and I thought we were both big girls here.”

“I am a big girl.” She sat up straighter at the table, causing my mother and I to chuckle. “I just miss you, is all. Nana June is the only one that plays dress up with me because Papa Joe said he’s not putting on a dress.” She frowned for a minute and appeared to go into deep thought as she tapped her chin. “But he wears a gown every day?—”

“It’s a robe, little girl,” my dad cut her off. I could hear the disdain in his voice as he entered the kitchen and the conversation. I assumed he didn’t have any judicial duties today because he was dressed down in a Champion sweatsuit. “I was going to ask you if you wanted to take your bike to the park today, but since you want to gossip about me to your mother?—”

“Nooo!” she squealed and giggled as she wiggled out of the chair. “I love you, Mommy! Me and Papa Joe are going outside!”

Watching her grab my father’s hand and drag him from the kitchen, I called out to her and told her I would call her before bed. I was so thankful for my parents because

being a single mom in a demanding career field wasn't easy. Often, I wonder if the job is worth missing the quality time with my child, and I'm starting to consider that it's not.

"Those two are going to drive me up a wall." My mother giggled as her face came into the camera. "You look tired, baby. Is it anything you want to talk about?"

June Atkins has been more than just my mother in the almost thirty years of my life. She's also my best friend and truest fan. She's supported me through every endeavor, and although one would think that is the normal reaction of a mother, I've seen girls and women who have not been so blessed in the "mom" department.

Settling back against the headboard, I sighed heavily as I propped my phone to the side of me. I could feel tears blur my vision before I even opened my mouth. "Am I a bad mother? Her father is barely present in her life, and I'm always working. Yes, she has the love of you and Dad, but she needs that from her parents too. I think when I come home, I'm going to stay for a while. Briley deserves stability, and I think it's time for me to have the same."

Having a job that moves you from state to state at any given time isn't ideal when you're the sole guardian of your child. When I was growing up, my parents always made time for me, and I never knew what it felt like to not see them every day. That daily interaction fostered the strong relationship we have today. I never doubted my parents' love for me, and I couldn't help but to compare my childhood to the one I was creating for Briley.

My father was a federal judge, and no matter how stressful his job was, he made sure that our house never felt the effects. He was not only an amazing father but also an amazing husband. Watching him love my mother over the years has made me want the same kind of love from a man. Unfortunately, I had already messed that up between my career and poor decisions with me. I wanted the same experience for my

child, so I felt I was failing Briley.

“I tell you all the time that you’re a wonderful mother, and I mean that.” My mother gazed at me lovingly as she sipped her morning tea. “As a parent, you have to make sacrifices when it comes to home life and your career. Being a single mother isn’t easy, and you have a village behind you that will support you every step of the way. Yes, I know you want to be home more with your child, but the sacrifices you’re making now ensure that she has a brighter tomorrow. Never feel like you’re a bad mother because you’re not even in that ballpark, love.” She gave me a stern look, and I nodded knowingly. “Now... if you want to come back home and settle down with a nice man, I’m here for it. When was the last time you’ve been in the company of a man that wasn’t for work? I know you’re backed up.”

“Maaaa!” I screeched, causing her to laugh. If I had a lighter complexion, I know my face would be beet red from embarrassment. “A man is the last thing on my mind. You see how Briley’s father did me.”

When I met Bryce, he was so charming and charismatic. Although he was a few years older than me, he was so handsome. During a business conference seven years ago, I was fresh out of college and on the road all the time doing internships. At first, I thought bumping into him that night in the hotel lobby was the best night of my life. He’d helped me with my bags and even offered to have dinner with me at the hotel’s restaurant. I didn’t see any harm, even though he was a stranger, because he was so kind. I accepted the dinner reservation, and we laughed the night away and ended it together. That weekend, we sexed each other as if we had been lovers for years. After exchanging numbers, we vowed to stay in touch and even meet somewhere when time allowed. It wasn’t until two months later that I found out I was pregnant.

When I called him and told him he was going to be a father, he hung up on me. I tried calling him back, but my number was already blocked. I was devastated, to say the least, and didn’t know what to do. I was twenty-three, barely in my career field, and

had no life experience or time for a baby. It was a couple of weeks later, at a charity ball I attended with my parents, that I found out the reason he didn't want any parts of my child or me. He was married with a family of his own. The night that I thought was my best suddenly turned into my worst, and I'd yet to forgive myself for being so naive and reckless.

"Bryce is a bitch, Denim!" my mother spat, jarring me from my thoughts. "That man is a sad excuse for a husband and father, and I wish I knew some people that would break a few bones of his for me!"

"Mama! You're married to a judge!" My eyes went wild at her revelation, causing her to shrug. "You can't say stuff like that."

"Girl, that's your father... not mine." She rolled her eyes and continued to sip her drink. "Your daddy or Bryce's ass doesn't scare me." She paused for a moment before asking, "Bryce came by to visit the other day. He brought Briley a toy, and she barely acknowledged him. He blamed you..."

"Me?" I scoffed as I grabbed my phone and rose from the bed. I was off today and didn't want to spend it inside, so I was about to shower and run some errands. "He's the one that acts as if his child doesn't exist... as if I'm the reason he will be deemed a cheater once the public knows about his outside baby. I don't care what he says, Mama. That's on him—not me."

When Bryce finally came to terms with the fact that we were having a child together, he wanted me to keep quiet because of his marriage and his being a public figure. He never introduced himself to me as a married man because, if he had, I would have never had dinner with him when we met, let alone sleep with him. What makes matters worse is even though he denied Bri in the beginning, he still tried to sleep with me during and after my pregnancy. He was still trying to this day. I was so ashamed that I had found myself attached to a married man, and I felt as if I had

failed my daughter by bringing her into this world in this situation.

“Girl, you know I told him to get the hell out of my face.” Her screen went gray, which let me know she had an incoming call. “This is your aunt calling for the second time this morning. Let me call you back, baby.”

Agreeing to speak later, I continued walking through my room and gathering my things for my shower. I was frustrated with what Mom told me because how dare he blame me for his shortcomings as a father. The more I thought about it, the more heated I became. Finding his contact in my phone, I put it on speaker and placed it against the tiled wall behind the sink. It didn’t take long for the rings to echo throughout the room. Right before the voicemail could come on, he picked up.

“Denim...” He huffed as if I was annoying him. “I’m busy right now and?—”

“I don’t care about any of that!” I cut him off and glared into the phone as if he could see me. “Please share the reason for you telling my mother I’m the reason my child doesn’t fool with you. What efforts have you made in the last years to show my baby that you give a fuck about her?”

Usually, I’m calm and sensible, but when it comes to my daughter, all that goes out of the window. Excusing himself to whoever he was with, I could hear his background become radio silent. Crossing my arms, I tapped my bare feet on the tiled floor and waited for him to respond.

“First of all... watch your tone when you speak to me. I’m not one of those thugs that you’re used to.”

“Stop acting like a bitch, and I won’t speak to you like one.”

“See, this is why I need to spend more time with my child. I refuse to have her

subjected to your hostile behavior and think it's okay. The more you keep her away from me, the more she feels like her little combatant attitude is okay. I want you to start sending her with me. My wife and I were talking, and we feel it's best if she stays with us."

Slowly, I dropped my arms to my sides and tried to control my breathing. "Repeat that shit one more time for me..."

"You heard me." I could hear the smugness in his voice, and I'm glad this was a phone conversation. If in person, I probably would have put my hands on him. "You're never home and have your parents raising our daughter. She barely knows me because you won't let me see her?—"

"No!" I cut him off. "She doesn't know you because the only way you want to see her is if you can have sex with me, and I'm not going for that! Had I known you were married, I would have never let you touch me."

He chuckled menacingly. "Did you ask? If I recall, you were drunk and all over me, baby. I gave you what you cried to have: premium dick. Now, as I was saying... Rebecca and I have talked. I want Bri living here full-time. You can come to visit her whenever you want and spend every other holiday with her. It won't be any different than the arrangement you have with your parents."

I wanted to curse him and let him know how he had me fucked up, but he was right. That is the exact arrangement I have with my parents, and it makes me sick. I'm away more than I'm home and hearing him say it lets me know that now more than ever, I needed to get my shit together. There was no way I was allowing Bryce to have full custody of my child.

"Bryce, fuck you and your wife." I gritted my teeth as I leaned on top of the counter and spoke into my phone. "That lady has made it clear to me on more than one

occasion that my child is a bastard... that she's filth and will never be welcomed into her marriage or her home. You expect me to just let you have her ?”

“Be that as it may...” He ignored my statements as if they held no weight, “Bri is mine just as much as she is yours, and if you don't want to be amicable about the situation, we can take a different route.” He paused before adding, “When are you coming back from California? I can fly out and see you while you're there. Maybe we could?—”

Beep. Beep.

Disconnecting the call before he could finish, I closed my eyes and took several deep breaths. So badly did I want to fly back home and show my ass, but I know I can't do that. Causing a scene wouldn't help me or my baby. Bryce can talk as much shit as he wants, but he knows I will die before I hand her over to him.

Once my breathing was under control, I continued my routine and started my shower. Before getting in, I said a small prayer that my job assignment ended soon so I could return home to my daughter. God knows I love my job, but it's not worth me potentially losing my child, especially to her bitch of a father.

* * *

“Ms. Atkins, the report you wanted is on your desk like you asked.” Jasper looked up from his laptop once I entered the office. “Also, someone by the name of Nate has been calling nonstop for you this morning. What's that about?”

Giving him a small finger wave as I balanced my coffee and briefcase, I entered my office without answering his question. My assistant could be a nosy little something, but I tried my best to keep the lines of personal and business uncrossed. I wasn't sure why Nate was blowing me up like he had been. He and I have barely spoken since

that awkward night at his house. Placing my things on my desk, I got myself situated and powered up my desktop as I checked my phone for any missed calls or messages.

“Today is a good day to have a good day... Let’s do this.” I breathed through the office jitters as my emails loaded while reaffirming myself. I was good at this job, but that didn’t mean I was eager to clock in every day. Working as a clerical administrator for one of the top agencies in the world is one of the most trying jobs I’ve ever had in my life. The countless phone calls and emails drove me crazy, but I always do what I need to do.

“Dee speaking,” I answered my ringing desk phone. “How can I help you?”

“Good morning, Denim. I hope you’re working on that special assignment. If you weren’t going to be able to wrap it up promptly, you should have just said that, and I could have assigned someone else to the file. You assured me you could get this done.”

I rolled my eyes at the nasal voice of my superior, who was now breathing into my ear as if he’d just run a marathon. “And I meant what I said, sir. You gave me a timeframe to have it done, and if I’m not mistaken, I’m still in that window.” I was trying so hard to keep the attitude from seeping through my voice.

“I know what I gave you. This case is big and?—”

The clearing of someone’s throat caused me to snap my head up from my computer screen. Before me was Nate, looking like the fine man he knew he was. Dressed in a cream button-down and burgundy slacks, he looked like he’d stepped straight out of a magazine. His lineup was so clean you’d think the barbershop was in the lobby. Regardless of the weird space we were in, he was still fine as hell.

“Denim!” Hearing my name shouted in my ear caused me to jump, but I didn’t take

my eyes off Nate as he placed his hands in his slacks and looked around my office. “Did you hear what I said?”

“Not at all,” I answered honestly, my eyes still on him. “I have a guest, so I have to go. I’ll be in touch.”

“I hope I’m not interrupting,” Nate said, his back to me as I disconnected the call. He walked over to the window and peered at the people below. “I’ve been calling you all morning.”

“As you know, I don’t arrive at work until after nine.” I swiveled my desk chair around to face him. “What are you doing here? It’s been days since we’ve spoken.”

Slowly, he turned to face me, and my breathing hitched slightly. Nate was a very attractive man, and his energy was, at times, suffocating, and not in a good way. His face remained neutral as he made slow strides toward me. Standing directly in front of me, he lifted my chin and brought my eyes to meet his. He stared at me momentarily before he dropped his lips on top of mine. Tonguing me down, with dominance, I couldn’t help but reciprocate his actions.

“I’ve missed you...” he spoke between pecks as he gripped my cheeks. “Why haven’t I seen you in three days?”

Although he and I were still getting to know each other, I felt he was too aggressive with me at times. I’ve been enjoying the company and adult conversations, but his smothering me early on was a red flag that I wasn’t ignoring. He’s been very vocal about us having sex, but we haven’t gotten close to crossing that line since the house situation. A big part of me was screaming not to have sex with Nate, but every time I thought about our first encounter, I couldn’t help but drool over us going all the way.

“I’ve been giving you space to miss me...” I said with a smirk, hoping that would

suffice. “The night I came over was a little weird, but I guess we can move past it. Maybe you could come to my place, and I can cook for you this time.” I tried to push back and put space between us, but he wasn’t allowing it. “What’s wrong?” Eyeing me intently, he angled his head and just stared. His hands lowered from my cheek to the top of my breasts, and goosebumps formed along the way. “Nate...”

Instead of answering, he continued his quest and unbuttoned the top of my blouse, allowing my black, laced bra to be on display. Glancing toward the door, I was thankful it was shut and locked. With my eyes trained on him, I waited for him to make his next move.

“You know you’re sexy as hell?” He licked his bottom lip as he freed my right breast from its cup and pinched my nipple. “We could be having a lot of fun together, but you want to duck and dodge me.”

“Nate...” I moaned as his free hand made its way under my skirt. I knew he could feel the heat radiating from my middle because I was turned on something serious. “What are you doing?”

He shrugged as his hand continued to creep up my skirt. “Had you answered my calls, I wouldn’t have to come to your job to do this. Now, I’m going to have to do here what I wanted to do inside the privacy of my home.”

Before I could object, he was sliding my panties to the side and easing his middle finger into my pussy. My walls instantly clenched at the intrusion. Gripping his wrist, I threw my head back and bit my bottom lip to keep from screaming out.

“Please,” I begged as he moved in and out of me slowly. “W-We can’t do this here.”

He smirked as he continued his assault, inserting another finger, causing me to buck. “Too late, love. The quicker you come, the quicker I can go. You gone sit here and

tell me what I can't do, or are you gonna give me what I came for and send me on my way?"

"Ugh!" I cried out as he dropped his head onto my chest and damn near swallowed my entire right breast. I palmed the back of his head and rocked against his fingers as he continued to invade me. I've never been one to do this in a work setting, but he caught me off guard. I wasn't putting up much resistance because part of me wanted this—a part that was larger than I cared to admit.

"That pussy so fuckin' tight," he mumbled into my breast as he latched on like a newborn. "I knew this pussy was going to be something serious from the moment I saw you." His hand moved faster and faster, and so did my hips. "Go ahead and give it to me, Dee. Give me that nut, girl."

Holding onto his wrist for dear life, I locked my legs and began to tremble as his fingers fucked me to ecstasy. Throwing my head back, I shut my eyes tightly and bit into my fist to keep from crying out. Even though Jasper and I were the only ones in this office, I still didn't want him to hear my screams of pleasure.

"Shit!" I panted as I came down from my release, still trembling at the hands of him. "Fuck, Nate."

He chuckled as he kissed my chest. "Not yet, but soon. Good thing you have a bathroom in here... you made a mess." Pulling his fingers out of me, I watched as he placed them on his tongue and licked my juices clean as his eyes stayed on mine. "Just as sweet as I remember. Check it... I have to go out of town for a few days, but when I come back, I expect to see you." Smirking, he bent down and placed a kiss on my forehead. "I'll call you later."

Dazed, I watched as he walked across my office and left the room. He didn't even look back to see if I was okay. I sat there and thought about what happened before I

came to my senses. Jumping from my seat, I hurriedly went into the bathroom to get myself together as best as I could. As I washed up, I eyed the flustered woman in the mirror and cursed at being so weak. One moment of pleasure could have jeopardized so much, and it wouldn't have been worth it. After reprimanding myself, I left the ensuite bathroom and cursed once I locked eyes with a smirking Jasper in my office.

“You still don't wanna tell me the tea on Mr. Nate?” He crossed his arms and eyed me. “You might not want to say anything, but the way he had you moaning, I bet your coochie does.”

Ignoring Jasper, I cursed myself once more and went back to work. What happened with Nate was a mistake I wasn't too sure wouldn't happen again. He said he's going out of town for a few days, which gave me time to get things in order and ready for his return. He told me he was going to see me when he got back, almost as if I didn't have a choice. Little did he know, I had a surprise already waiting for him. He seemed to be all in about me, and I was hoping he was ready for the next phase in our little relationship as much as I am.

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“Luca, what’s up, my boy,” I greeted him as I stepped into Zoo’s home office. Today, he wanted to meet with a few of us to touch base on what’s been going on. A meeting with the other families will be held soon, but this one was for our members of the Family. “I feel like I haven’t seen you in months.”

“He’s too busy being besties with my wife...” Jules chimed in, mushing him as he entered the room. “I need to see Zoo about sending this nigga to China or some shit.”

“This guy has been married two weeks and has already forgotten Bridgette’s name.” Luca crossed his arms and smirked as he eyed my cousin. “You better leave me alone before I ring her up and let her know how you treating a nigga. You know she doesn’t play about me.”

Leaning back in my chair, I listened to the two of them go back and forth. When Jules called me last week and told me he and Bridgette went to Vegas and eloped, I felt excluded. I thought he’d invited everyone except me, but once I found out it was just them, I let it ride. B had been through a lot, but I knew Jules was her safe space. If she was more comfortable with a private ceremony for two, I wasn’t mad at it. I was happy for them both.

“Luca... did you know the highest internal temperature a human can withstand and live is around one hundred and twenty degrees?” Jules asked as he walked over toward me and grabbed a fry from my plate. “Imagine what it will feel like to reach one hundred and fifty—maybe higher.” He turned to face Luca and grinned. “I will roast you like a rotisserie chicken, nigga.”

“Boko, sit your ass down and stop threatening that man.” Rosier chuckled when he

entered the room with Nicky and Trench following. “You always wanna put voodoo on somebody.”

“It’s a cleaner kill.” He waved his brother off and took a seat in one of the recliners. “Not everyone wants to get messy like your black ninja of a cousin over here.” He threw his head in my direction before adding, “I’d rather turn a nigga to dust and roll him in my blunt. I smoke my opps, literally and figuratively.”

“Say, Zoo... can you hurry up and get me from around this wannabe YN?” I stood with my food and walked over to the other side of the room. “Talking about smoking opps and shit.” I frowned at him before adding, “You know I don’t like when he gets to talking that shit.”

“Next full moon, I’m turning you into Thackery Binx, Andre.” Jules mugged me.

We all looked around before the room erupted in laughter. Shaking my head, I walked back to my seat, bumping his fist along the way. Although I was serious about hating his indulgence in black magic, I know he knows his limits with me. Witnessing him turn his ex into a bird is the wildest thing I’ve ever seen to date, but I don’t judge him for what he does. From what he told me, he still has her propped up in the corner of his bedroom so she can watch him fuck his girl until the day she dies. I laugh at his foolishness to keep the eerie feelings about it at bay. As my grandfather said, no sin is greater than another.

“All right, y’all. Let’s get started.” Zoo took his seat behind his desk. “I didn’t feel the need to gather with our entire crew because, if changes need to be made with any of the soldiers, Luca and Trench can handle it. Speaking of...” He nodded toward them as they stood against the wall. “Everything good in the streets? I haven’t heard any noise lately.”

“And you won’t.” Luca pushed off the wall and kept his eyes on Zoo. “Those guys

know what's required of them and know not to fuck up. You don't hear of any problems because we eliminate them as soon as they arise."

"Exactly," Trench said while nodding his head. "They know by now that when one eats, they all do. When one fucks up, they're all punished. We got it under control."

"Good shit." Zoo bobbed as he turned his attention to his brother. "Jules, what's the word?"

"Ehh... another day, another nigga that can't fuck with me." We all laughed at his foolishness. "Nah, but Westley's gambling houses are officially owned by Boudreaux Enterprises. All the legal operations are on the up and up. I spoke with Uno and his lawyer, and he wants to talk to you and Dre about bringing more commerce to Milly Grove."

"Yeah, he told me." Zoo dragged his eyes over to me. "So, Dre... I was thinking you could go and set up out there for a little while. You can always handle Boudreaux Enterprises virtually until you come back. Whatever you can't be here for physically, I'll handle. I know you try to eliminate the need for me to leave my office, but I can still pull my weight. You good with staying there for a few months to see if there's more potential business for us in Milly Grove?"

"Is the company paying for my stay?" I asked jokingly as I looked between him and Jules. "I mean... this is a business trip, and it's only right you guys front the bill."

"This nigga," Jules mumbled. "I will get with Uno about getting you a place to stay."

"I'll be sure to send my demands." I chuckled when he gave me the middle finger. "But yeah, bro. I'm good with it. I'm assuming you don't have any upcoming assignments for me since you're suggesting this work trip?"

Not only was I a hired assassin for the Boudreaux Mafia, but I serviced our business partners as well. It didn't matter if it was someone who owed them money, had shown disrespect, or merely was the competition that needed to be eliminated. Granted, I wasn't thrilled about killing women and kids, but I wasn't opposed to it. That was another reason I wasn't in any rush to find love or settle down. I wouldn't want my family to become a target while I hunted someone else's.

For as long as I can remember, I have been able to kill easily. Whether it was hunting animals or niggas, my father made sure I was able to adapt to any environment. As time passed, I realized he was only encouraging it, hoping he would be head of the family one day. I never knew how far he would go to make that happen until it was time for him to die.

"Everything is quiet on our end, and no one has mentioned needing anything right now. I will be sure to let you know if that changes." He eyed me intently before adding, "Has anything changed from our last conversation?"

Leaning back in my seat, I took a few gulps of my fruit punch and cleaned my hands of the wing sauce. I knew once I told Zoo about what was going on with my mother, the guys would also be made aware of her words. Eventually, the conversation was going to come up, so now was as good a time as any to speak on it.

Shaking my head at Zoo, I sat up and addressed the entire room, "As you know, we take loyalty seriously within this organization. With what happened to my father, I know firsthand what happens when you go against the family." Looking around at the guys, I ensured to keep my tone and voice steady because I didn't want my words misconstrued since all eyes were on me. "I loved my father as any son would, but my position and loyalty to this organization wouldn't allow me to turn a blind eye to the shit he'd done. I know I received a few side-eyes within the family because people thought I would retaliate or feel ill will toward Zoo. It will never be anything other than love for him—as well as all of you. We're family until we're not."

“Has something happened?” Luca asked as he looked from me to Zoo. “Is there another threat we need to know about?”

I stood from my seat and walked over to Zoo’s minibar. The stress of my mother was frustrating. “My mother and I’s relationship has suffered tremendously since my father passed. I’ll never say what a person will or won’t do, but my mother has made it clear that she isn’t fucking with me or this family. She’s made accusations about the Family, and she wants to bring it down. Of course, there’s no mafia, right? I’m not sure what her husband has told her, but I don’t take threats of any kind lightly. I brought it to Zoo’s attention to see what he wants to do going forward. Now, I am informing you all so no hidden agenda is speculated.”

I know people may think I’m less of a man for choosing a life of crime over my parents—over my flesh and blood. Truth was, it wasn’t as simple as people thought. I made a vow to serve this organization with my life. My father did the same, and he knew the consequences of going against his brother. Do I want my mother to face the same punishment as him? Not at all. But once you threaten to expose information you may or may not have correctly, you have to be ready to face the repercussions.

“Do you think Auntie Mattie will make good on her threats?” Jules asked from the other side of the room. The stiffness in his posture let me know he was on alert. “You know that even the simplest threat to us has to be taken seriously. I know that’s your mother, but?”

“Don’t you think I know that? The first thing I did was call Zoo when I left her at my grandparent’s home. I wanted to put a bullet in my mother’s head for the shit she was saying, but instead, I called him. It’s my job to eliminate any and every threat to this organization, and right now, that threat is the person who gave birth to me. If it comes down to it, I’ll be the one that has to push her shit back, right? Doesn’t matter if she’s my mother or not, so you don’t have to remind me of shit.” I snapped at him, shocking myself. I didn’t mean to lose my cool, but I was annoyed and conflicted.

I'm a killer. Taking my emotions out of the equation has never been hard, but I was hurting to know my own mother would be on the other end of the bullet. Whether I was shooting or Zoo found another person to do it, this woman had birthed me. Shit had not been good since my father's death, but that was not always the case. I still have some memories of having a mother-son relationship with Mattie Boudreaux. Now, I was having to think about her dying by my hands.

"So here's what I'm going to do..." Rosier leaned up in his chair and folded his hands on his desk. "I'm going to have Auntie trailed twenty-four seven. I will also have Mimi tap into her home security system, as well as her electronics. I already have eyes and ears at the station, so I'll be the first to know if our names are mentioned. Know that I'm doing this as a courtesy to you, Andre. Anyone else would have been dead before our phone call disconnected."

"Thank you for the generosity," I said sarcastically. I was ready for this meeting to be over so I can get the fuck out of here. "There's never been a time when I couldn't do my job, and I didn't think this would be much different. But cool. Do whatever you deem necessary, but no more car accidents—may be too obvious." Zoo and I engaged in a brief stare-off before I continued, "What are the plans for Milly Grove? I need to go home and get things situated."

Squinting his eyes as he glared at me, I held his stare. I respected Rosier—not just only as my boss, but my brother too. Still, this nigga didn't intimidate me. My commitment to our last name held the same weight as his. I knew his choices regarding protecting Boudreaux weren't hard to make, and neither were mine. I've shown him and our associates more than once that I'm all in with this shit, regardless of who I have to kill. If he still felt uncertain because of the people closest to me having to be punished, then maybe he needed to reevaluate my role.

"Okay." He sat back and nodded. "Let's talk more about the plans for you once you're in Milly Grove."

Not acknowledging his response, I walked from the minibar to the floor-to-ceiling windows. I wanted to walk out, but I knew Zoo would not stand for the disrespect, and I didn't want to be disrespectful. It was important we all remained professional to keep Boudreaux running as the reputable company it was. As I leaned against the window, I listened to him and Jules talk about some ideas Uno wanted to execute before I tuned them out. The more I thought about this being a mini vacation instead of just business, the more I welcomed the thought of getting out of Southern Florida for a minute.

I knew that my mother was going to die soon. I knew because the look in her eyes at my grandparents' house the other night was the same look I held—determination. She was determined to place guilt on this family for my father's death. I was determined to protect this family until my last breath. Zoo may not be forcing me to choose or even be the one to send the final blow to my mother's body, but we all knew that was what I was built to do. I was a killer, so I killed. However, accepting this next kill would be the ultimate test of loyalty, and once it was done, my role in this business would most likely be up for discussion.

* * *

I was leaving for the Grove tomorrow morning, so tonight, I decided to take Sandra out for dinner. She had been blowing my phone up since I left her crib a few weeks ago. I have been intentionally playing her to the left because I knew she was spiraling. Hurting her feelings was something I never wanted to do, but all of a sudden, she seemed confused about what this was with us.

"I'm happy you decided to come back around. I knew you missed me as much as I missed you." She looped her arms in my and scooted closer to me. I decided to get a driver for the evening because I didn't feel like driving after the week I'd had. I also wanted to indulge by having a drink or two. I didn't plan to get drunk because I would be out in public, but I wanted to relax more than usual tonight.

Dragging my eyes from the window, I peered down at her excited ones. Sandra looked good as hell tonight in a red cocktail dress with matching heels. Her makeup looked nice on her, but I told her often she didn't need it—that much wasn't a lie. She was a knockout, and I was sure she could find a suitor in any man she picked, but she was adamant about me.

I wanted to burst her bubble and tell her I only called her in hopes of getting some pussy before I went out of town, but I was going to let her make it. Instead, I just gave her a small smile and went back to peering out the window. I was choosing peace so that the relaxation I was seeking wouldn't be hard to find. Some dinner, drinks, and pussy was the only equation I was accepting tonight.

As we drove toward downtown, I appreciated the beauty of the city. South Florida had a lot of rugged areas, but it also had a lot of love to give. I'd never lived anywhere other than my city, but since I didn't know how long my stay in Milly Grove would be, I had to be receptive to change.

“What's on your mind, baby?” she asked as she used her index finger to bring my eyes back to hers. “You've been quiet since you picked me up. Is it work?”

“Something like that...” I kept it simple. I would never put Sandra in my professional life. “It's a little hectic right now—nothing I can't handle.”

Since the meeting with the internal team last week, I've been withdrawn. If it wasn't directly about Boudreaux Enterprises, I was reclusive. I wasn't mad at my brothers, but I was offended. For the last two years, the insinuation that I couldn't do my part when it came to my parents and their threats was insulting. Will I be sad if I lose my mother? Of course. Not just sad for me but for my grandparents as well. My mother is their only child, and although she had turned cold to me, she loved them just as they loved her. I wanted to talk to them and prepare them for what may transpire, but I didn't have the heart to do it, especially since they were still innocent in their

knowledge of what Rosier, Jules, and I did behind Boudreaux Enterprises. I would eventually have to make some sense of what was to come because they didn't deserve to be kept in the dark about their daughter dying.

“Well, tonight... I want all of your time and focus to be on me.” She leaned closer and placed a soft kiss along my jawline. Her hand rubbing on my thigh was making my dick twitch. “What can I do to get your mind off things?”

Nibbling my bottom lip, my eyes roamed her sexy-ass body. Her breasts were threatening to spill from her dress, and my mouth watered at the sight. Bringing my eyes back up, I zoned in on her juicy-ass lips, and there was only one thing that could make me happy at the moment.

“You can start by giving me a kiss.” She puckered her lips and leaned toward mine, but I stopped her. “Not on my lips, though.”

A look of confusion flashed across her face before she smirked and caught the hint. Unfastening her seatbelt, she reached for the button of my slacks as I pressed the button to raise the partition. Feeling her fumble around to remove my dick from my boxers had me hard as bricks.

“I love this dick so much,” she murmured before she gave it one long lick. “How dare you keep him from me?”

“You gone talk or suck this nigga, San?” I pulled her hair from her face to see her better once she got down to business. “I ain't for the small talk.”

She said nothing else as she dipped her head lower and began to suck on my balls. Alternating from the left to the right, I threw my head against the seat and relished her giving my dick slow strokes.

“Hmm,” she hummed as she licked from the base to the head. “Just as delicious as it was the last time I had it. Tell me, Dre... have you been giving my dick away?”

“Whether I’ve been fucking or not shouldn’t matter,” I groaned and peered down at her as she licked the precum from the tip of my swollen dick. “If I answer that, your feelings are going to be hurt, baby. You want to catch an attitude, and I want to catch this nut. Suck this dick, girl. It’s yours when I’m with you. Don’t worry about who it belongs to when I’m not.”

Staring at me for a moment, I could see the pain in her eyes. This is what she does every time we’re together, and I hate the shit. Why ruin the mood with questions that are going to have you sliding down the wall in the shower?

“Fine, but I bet they can’t do you better than me.” Taking my entire dick in her warm mouth, I couldn’t stop my toes from popping in my Gucci loafers if I tried.

One thing I will never deny is her ability to make me come. The way she sucks dick is the reason I’ve kept her around all these years. Cupping my nuts in her hand, she bobbed her head up and down rapidly as she slobbered all over my little homie.

“Shit, girl.” I groaned as I wrapped my hand around her hair tighter and thrust into her mouth. “That’s what the fuck I’m talking about.”

Swirling her tongue around the head every time she came up, I could already feel my nut rising. Faster and faster, I moved my hips in sync with her suctioning. I was a well-endowed nigga, so I knew she was going to be hoarse by the time I was done with her. Glancing over at her ass in the air, I gave her a hard slap, causing her moans to send more vibrations to my dick.

“Fuck, Dre,” she cooed as she pulled her mouth away from me. “I need you inside of me.”

“Nah, you’re going to suck this nut out of me, and if you do it good enough, I’ll give you the dick later.” I rubbed her ass a little before tracing the outline of her lower lips through her panties. “You’re wet as fuck, though.”

Getting back to the task at hand, she continued slurping me as I pulled her panties to the side and eased my middle finger inside of her pussy. Immediately, she clenched her walls around me. I stroked her a few times before pulling out and strumming her clit.

“Uggh!” she moaned as I pinched her clit before stroking it faster. “I’m going to come!”

“Suck this dick, San.” I palmed the back of her head as I continued to rub her. “We’re almost at the spot, baby, so catch this nut.”

Nothing could be heard in the backseat but moans and groans as we both were on the brink of our release. It didn’t take long for my nut to rise and shoot inside her mouth.

“Hmm!” she cried out and shook with a mouth full of dick and semen.

“Fuck!” I growled as she milked me of everything I had. “Gahdamn, girl.”

While we got our breathing together, the car came to a stop. Looking out the window, I realized we were at the steakhouse. Tapping her ass once more, I lifted her from my dick. Thankfully, she didn’t make that much of a mess on my slacks, but I knew her panties were ruined.

“You might as well take those off.” I smirked as she straightened her dress. “That wet spot is going to show through that dress.”

She smirked as she cleaned herself up. “I know... I want you to see what you do to

me.”

Chuckling, we took a few more minutes before stepping out of the car and into the restaurant. With her arm looped in mine, we approached the hostess stand and were immediately seated, thanks to reservations.

“I’m so glad you called me to come out tonight,” she said for what seemed like the thousandth time. We were both now back at the table from washing our hands. “It’s been too long since the last time we saw each other.”

“Let’s just enjoy the night.” I sipped my water and looked over the menu. “I don’t want you reading too much into this, Sandra. I brought you out for a chill evening because I’m going out of town, and I wanted the company before I left.”

“Oh, you wanted to wine and dine me before taking me back to your condo.” The attitude in her voice caused me to look up at her, and sure enough, there was a frown on her face. “Am I just pussy to you, Dre?”

Thankfully, we were tucked into the corner, and our voices couldn’t easily be heard over the soft sounds of jazz playing. Placing my water on the table along with my menu, I looked her right in her eyes in hopes she would understand what I was saying. She wanted to have this conversation, so we were.

“How many times over three-plus years have I told you that this will be nothing more than a dick and pussy exchange?” This time, the sadness in her eyes didn’t move me. “You will never be my wife. Hell... you will never be my girlfriend. There’s nothing wrong with you, Sandra. You’d make the perfect helpmate. You just won’t be that for me.”

“Why?” she asked as her bottom lip trembled. “Why can’t I be that for you?”

“Because I don’t want you to be,” I answered honestly. “I like to fuck. Not just you, but other women too. I’m not willing to cut anyone off and make you my one and only, baby. It’s been years, and my stance has been the same since day one. I told you what it was going to be. I hate you caught feelings for me. Tonight wasn’t a date to say, ‘I miss you, and I want more.’ Tonight was a night to say, ‘thank you for pussy over the years. It’s been a blast, but I’m moving on because your time is up.’”

Tears streamed down her face as my words settled in. I didn’t want to hurt Sandra, but I felt like these were the words she needed to hear to move on from the thoughts of us ever being more than what we were. If I had to be rude in my delivery to make that happen, then so be it. I was tired of repeating myself.

“How can you do this to me?” She placed her head in her hands and cried. “I thought I could make you love me.”

“Um, hi,” the waiter greeted us. He looked back and forth between us two, unsure of whether to get our orders or not. “I can come back if you need me to...”

“We’re good,” I assured him as I placed the menu down. Sandra said nothing as she continued to cry softly. “Let me get a bottle of your most expensive wine and two of your porterhouse specials—both medium well.”

Handing him back the menu, it didn’t take him long to come back with the wine. After pouring our first glass, he informed us our food would be up shortly before he went on his way. By now, Sandra had stopped crying.

“Are you okay now?” I asked as I assessed her. “Do you need to go to the bathroom and clean yourself up?”

“I’m fine,” she mumbled and dabbed her eyes. “Let’s just eat dinner so you can take me home and use me.”

Chuckling, I decided not to answer her. She was trying to bait me, and I wasn't going to let her. She did all that crying and was still willing to let me fuck her. After this dinner, she was getting dropped off at her spot. I hope she got a good and memorable taste of this dick in the car because I was never sticking it in any hole of hers again.

Looking around the restaurant, I saw that the crowd was just as I thought it would be. Fancy suits and laughter filled the air as the sounds of the live band played for our enjoyment. This particular spot was known for its prestigious guest list of patrons, so I wasn't surprised at all by the man approaching my table.

“Andre Boudreaux!” He beamed with his hand extended. “Nice to see you again.”

I stood and accepted his hand to shake. “Good evening, Lieutenant Governor Holmes. It's a pleasure to see you as well.”

“How are you doing this fine evening?”

I was scheduled to possibly kill my mother soon, and my pussy for the night had just been canceled. I smiled because telling him any of that was out of the question. “Things have been fine my way. How's the family?”

Lieutenant Governor Holmes and I have been acquainted with each other for years. He and I met through philanthropy projects hosted by Boudreaux Enterprises. He's been valuable in getting us set up in various places for the many projects we've worked on. He was a decent man with a beautiful wife and children—a respectable family man.

“Everyone is wonderful.” He grinned as he pulled out his phone and showed me a recent photo of his two sons. “The boys are growing daily and are almost as big as I am.”

“I see...” I smiled as I handed back his phone. Hearing Sandra snuffle, I brought my eyes back to her. “Excuse my rudeness. This is my date for the evening, Sandra.” I motioned toward her, and she gave a faint smile and wave. “San, this is Governor Holmes.”

“Nice to meet you, beautiful.” He smiled as he reached over to shake her hand. His eyes did a quick scan of her body, and I could see the lust in them. “You look lovely this evening.”

“Nice to meet you, too.” She pulled her hand back. “I’m not feeling well, so I know I look horrible, but I appreciate the compliment.”

After chatting briefly, he excused himself but not before making promises to reach out about a silent auction event he was hosting. I informed him I would let Rosier know to be on the lookout for the invite. Shortly after he left, our food was placed on the table. Sandra was quiet throughout the dinner and made the evening awkward. However, I wasn’t leaving until I finished my meal and drink.

“So... as I said, I have to go out of town for business.” I sipped my wine and eyed her over the rim of the glass. “I’m not sure how long I’m going to be gone.”

“That sounds nice,” she stated, unenthused, as she played with her mashed potatoes. “Maybe you’ll find someone worth your time to add to your rotation since I’m not enough.”

As quickly as the thought of not leaving until my steak was devoured came, it went. Looking around, I found the waitress and waved him over. With a look of skepticism, he came right over. “Is everything okay?”

“Perfection.” I gave him an assuring nod as I removed my car from my wallet. “Can you run the tab, please? The food is great—no worries there.”

“Is there anything I can do to make your experience better?” He looked down at the half-eaten food. “I can get the chef or manager?—”

“No, a to-go plate will be great.” I nodded toward Sandra, who looked like she was going to break down at any moment. “My date is ready to leave.”

Nodding, he scurried off to do as I asked. I wasn’t going to sit up here and listen to the damn crying over some dick. At the end of the day, that’s what this was about.

“So, that’s it?” she asked as I escorted her back to our awaiting car. “You’re just going to drop me off and end things as if I meant nothing to you?”

“I’m not one for the back and forth, love.” I helped her into the car and told the driver to take us to her home to drop her off. “Fasten your seatbelt. We’ll be at your house soon.”

Crying silently to the side of me, I tuned her out as I pulled out my phone. There were a few missed calls and texts from a couple of ladies who wanted to see me tonight. As much as I wanted to take them up on their offers, I would leave well enough alone. I needed to get home and make sure everything was ready for my flight tomorrow.

So much for ending my last night here in some pussy.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

As the sounds of Anita Baker flowed through my home speakers, I stood over the stove and mixed my infamous Alfredo sauce. Nate was coming over tonight for dinner, and I was more than ready to see him. It'd been two weeks since he made me come inside my office at work, and my body hummed in excitement. I know things are moving pretty swiftly with us, but that's okay. We're both consenting adults, and I knew what I wanted from Mr. Nate.

After the confrontation with Bryce earlier today, I started to cancel my plans for the night. The more I sat and thought about it, the more I changed my mind. That's exactly what he wanted me to do. Allowing him to have power over my life wasn't happening. It was time I had a little fun for once, and if that just so happens to come with a side of dick, so be it.

"Perfection!" I tasted my sauce as I cut the stove down to low. It was a little after seven, and Nate was set to arrive any moment now. Taking the breadsticks from the oven, I looked around and made sure everything was in place. The wine was chilling on ice, the pasta and steaks were done, and the lights were low to set the mood. I may have been doing a lot for a man that wasn't mine, but the reward would be well worth it. Trekking to my downstairs bathroom, I eyed myself in the mirror to ensure there wasn't a hair out of place. Looking at my reflection in the mirror, I couldn't help but smile.

"I mean... I would want to fuck me." I giggled before I turned serious. "Don't mess this night up, Denim."

Under my see-through sheer robe was a cherry red two-piece set with a garter belt that I hope Nate appreciates. My toned chocolate skin shimmered under the lights

thanks to my body butter, which left my skin soft and delectable. Thanks to Briley, my breasts were firm, my hips were wide, and my ass was fat. All five-foot-seven inches of me was beautiful. I wasn't a cocky or conceited woman by any means. I just knew I was a baddie.

Pushing my curls from my face, I jumped slightly as my doorbell sounded. I took a deep breath before I strolled up the hallway to the front door. Slowly, I unlatched it, and when Nate came into view, I couldn't help but smirk. No matter the circumstances, the man was fine. Dressed in a Givenchy t-shirt, distressed Amiri jeans, and some colorful Nike Dunks I'd never seen, I appreciated his look. It showed me that he cared enough to not show up in some loungewear even though this date was inside my house. His one dimple came into view as he held his arms open for me to walk into his embrace. Without a second thought, I did just that. With a deep sniff of his cologne, I was intoxicated before a drop of wine could touch my lips.

"You look good as fuck, baby," he groaned into my ear as he squeezed my ass tightly in his hands. "Lemme find out you been missing a nigga."

"Come in. Let's eat first, and then maybe... I can show you how much that statement is true." I bit into my bottom lip as I grabbed his hand and locked the door behind us. "You didn't bring me a gift from your trip?"

"Relax, ma." He chuckled as he looked around my place. It was his first time here. Nate informed me he was a creature of habit and didn't like walking into unknown spaces. Usually, when we met up, it was at a restaurant or his condo downtown. "I'm the only gift you need. I told you that I'll buy you bread, but I'll never break it. This ain't that type of party."

My steps faltered as I listened to his snide comment. I know Nate isn't my man, and he's shown me several red flags, letting me know why he never would be. I was only here for a good time, anyway—not a long one. Not bothering to address his comment,

I led him into the dining room and pulled his seat out for him. Raising his brow at me, he sat and eyed me like a hawk. Regardless of how rude he was being, I was going to continue to cater to him tonight.

“I hope you like dinner,” I said as I placed his meal before him. “You’re so secretive and selective when it comes to certain things, so I decided to make a meal I’ve seen you order before.”

Nodding, he said thanks and began eating before I could even sit down. He was being weird tonight, and it was starting to throw the mood off. I decided to join in and eat instead of worrying about his silence and awkward behavior. I let it go on for a few minutes before I said fuck it and broke the ice.

“So... how was your trip?” I asked as I dug into the pasta. I must admit, it was probably the best I’ve made. “Did everything go your way?”

“There’s hardly a time it doesn’t.” He sipped his wine and eyed me over the rim of the glass. “Niggas know not to fuck with me.”

“Is that right?” I rolled my eyes as I cut into my steak. “What exactly is it that you do? I mean... it’s been a month, and I still feel like we just met. I know nothing about your family, your job, you... nothing.”

In a sense, you would think that the same thing I went through with Bryce is what I’m going through with Nate, but it’s different. I know what this is with Nate. He may have made me come twice, but I’m more in control of this situation. I know how far I’m willing to go. Bryce manipulated me from hello. Nate has been upfront about his business being his and his alone. He did let me know I wasn’t the only woman he was dealing with, and I never would be. I respected his honesty and the choice to continue whatever this was, but he was going to have to give me more if he planned to do this “dating” part.

“What have I told you about asking me questions about my business, Dee?” He placed his fork down and eyeballed me. “I told you from the jump. I’m a businessman, and I get money. What else do you want to know?”

“I was just making conversation,” I mumbled as I continued eating the food on my plate. “I won’t ask again.”

For a moment, we sat there quietly and allowed the awkwardness to fill the air. Hearing him push his chair from the other side of the table, I looked up and locked eyes with him. Beckoning me to come to him, I took a sip of my wine before doing as he commanded. Once I was in front of him, I hovered over him as his eyes roamed my body. Goosebumps formed as the lust and hunger became evident on his face.

“You look good as fuck, girl.” He licked his bottom lip and pulled the tie from my robe, causing it to slip open. “You wore this shit for me?” Nodding was all I could do as he pushed the fabric from my shoulders and watched it pool to the floor at my feet. “Damn, that pussy is fat.”

Running his finger over the slit of my panties, I shivered as the wetness leaked more than it was prior. Turning me around slowly, he slapped my ass, and I moaned at the impact. His hands roamed my ass and hips before they reached my top. Pushing the straps from my shoulders, he spun me back around as my breasts came into display.

“Nate...” I panted as he pinched my nipples. “Ugh!”

“I’ve had a long two weeks.” He kept his eyes on me as one hand continued the nipple play, and the other caressed my body slowly. “I lost two of my best men to gunfire, so excuse me if I don’t want to talk about it.” Standing, he spun me back around and pushed me toward the table until I was lying on top of it. “Then, I come in here thinking we’re going to spend time together, and you wanna interrogate a nigga.”

“Nate, what are you doing?” He kicked my legs apart as I heard him rattle the belt of his slacks. “I don’t?—”

“You better be glad I don’t think you’re wearing a wire on some fed shit.” He hissed as he groped me. “Being in a man in the business that I’m in, you have to be careful sticking your nose in shit that doesn’t pertain to you.”

“What are you?—”

“You don’t think I know somebody sent you to watch me?” He grabbed ahold of my messy bun and snatched my head back so his mouth was directly by my ear. “You think a bitch as bad as you can pop up in my town and not make waves? I don’t buy that ‘you came into town just to work’ shit.”

“Nate, let me go...” I spoke in a panic as I struggled against him. I was ready for him to leave. “What the hell is wrong with you?”

Ignoring me, he continued to grope and kiss all over me. My heart dropped when I heard his pants fall to the floor. I knew I had to do something to get this man off of me.

“Don’t worry about what’s wrong with me, baby. Just know... you have until the time I bust this nut to tell me what the fuck I wanna know before I paint the walls with your brains.” My eyes bulged at his threat. “I’ve been killing niggas all my life. What’s another body? It doesn’t matter how bad you are.”

Slapping my pussy with his dick, he had no time to penetrate before I elbowed him as hard as I could in his side. Groaning, he stumbled backward from impact, giving me room to slide from under him. Hurriedly, I ran back over to my side of the table. I watched with wide eyes as he caught his bearings and growled my way.

“I’m going to kill you bitch!”

Fumbling under the table, I found what I was looking for right as he was about to lunge my way. “If I were you, I wouldn’t take another step. Don’t come any closer to me.” I walked sideways to the end of the table we were on, my eyes never leaving his.

“What are you going to do with that besides piss me off?” He smirked and continued to walk my way. “If I were you, I’d put that down before I kill you instead of fucking you. Matter of fact?—”

Pow!

“Freeze!”

“What the fuck!” he groaned from the floor as he held his fresh thigh wound. His eyes widened from the uniformed officers swarming into my home. “Bitch! You set me up!”

“As you said... I was sent here to watch you, Nate.”

Picking my robe up from the floor, I watched as a team of federal agents filed into the rented house to apprehend one of the most dangerous men the state of California has seen. From drugs to trafficking to murder, he was as ruthless as they come. It was a shame that a pretty face and a fat ass was the reason his downfall had finally started.

“I ran background checks on you!” He bucked and shouted as they led him out the door. “Who the fuck are you?”

“You will always see only what I want you to see...” I smirked at him right as my superior agent came into the house. He eyed me and my attire before turning his

sights to Nate. “You don’t think a federal agent like me knows how to minimize what comes up in databases about me?”

Seething, he watched me with so much hate. “You don’t have shit on me. I’ll be out by morning.”

Smiling, I removed the hairpins and allowed my curls to flow over my shoulders. I shook them loose before removing the pin that held the hidden camera. Upon seeing it, he had to be restrained. “There’s more where this came from, Mr. Nate. You should see the ones I planted in your condo.”

“You’re dead!” he screamed and spit as he was carried outside. “I’m killing you and your family, bitch! Let me go! Let me fuckin’ go!”

His screams and shouts faded as he was escorted from the home, and I breathed the sigh of relief I had been holding for the last few weeks. This was by far my most stressful assignment to date.

“Looks like you were dressed for the occasion, Special Agent Atkins.” Senior Special Agent Roberts looked toward me with disdain. “Was this necessary?”

“I got the job done, didn’t I?” I raised my brow as I pulled the robe tighter against me. “You told me to do what needed to be done to wrap this case up. I did my job and was within my limits. Now, if you’ll excuse me... I’d like to shower so I can prepare to go home to my kid.”

Senior Special Agent Roberts has never liked me, and the feeling was mutual. I was sure he thought my father was the reason I was able to be in this position with the FBI. Being the youngest black female agent with the bureau was a dream I made a reality two years ago, and I will never let anyone discredit me. There were times when the agency used me as bait, and I accepted that role. We all knew a man’s

biggest weakness was a beautiful woman with a nice body. I wasn't above allowing my pretty privilege to assist me when it came to certain cases.

For months, we'd been working on a case against Nate Williams, and nothing had come of it. He was careful and calculated with the things he did in his operation. Once I agreed to pursue him outside the office, I knew my life was on the line. It was why I chose to use my looks and body to get closer to him, and if I hadn't, we may never have been able to bring him down. Granted, sleeping with suspects isn't the way to go, and it was never my intention to let it get this far. That day in my office was a surprise I was unprepared for, and I felt sick about it afterward. At the end of the day, this is my job. My reaction to his looks and body wasn't an act because the man was fine, but that's what made things work in my favor. I could make men feel things because I was able to use my own inhibitions to coax them. I will never let anyone make me feel less than because of the methods I choose to get the job done. Men have done things since the beginning of time that could be deemed unethical or immoral. I was simply using my own advantages as they had for years.

"Atkins, we're about to head out. Do you want to come back with us?"

"No," I spoke over my shoulder when I reached the top of the stairs. "I'm packing my things to leave first thing tomorrow morning. It's time for me to get back to the Grove."

* * *

"Mommy! I've missed you!"

Dropping my bag on the floor, I crouched down and opened my arms wide in anticipation of my baby. I've missed Briley so much. It's been three long months, and I don't think I can go that long without seeing my baby ever again.

“Oh, how I’ve missed you, too, my Briley Boo!” I lifted her from the ground as I hugged her tightly. “You’ve grown so much!”

I love my baby down, but she was a replica of her father. From her expressive light brown eyes to her kinky hair and dark hues, she was his twin. As much as I hated that he was her dad, I appreciated him for giving me the most perfect gift.

“I know!” She grinned as she played with the cross hanging around my neck. I gave her one to match it when she was three, and she still wears it to this day. “Papa Joe said I hurt his back every time he picks me up.”

“Where’s the lie?” my dad stated from behind me as he entered the house with the rest of my bags. “You’re not a baby anymore, Bri.”

“Oh hush, Joe,” my mother fussed as she entered the living room, wiping her hands on her apron. “She will always be our baby right along with her mother.” She smiled at me and pulled me into a hug. “Welcome back home, Denim.”

My stay in California was extended by a week, and I was not happy about it. Once Nate was arrested, he made it seem as if I coerced him through sex. His lawyer and the DA had to go before the judge to argue if such enticement was acceptable. With all of the evidence we had against him, my pussy should have been the least of his worries. I was slightly embarrassed when his lawyer mentioned what happened the day he came into my office. It was deemed inadmissible in court, so I didn’t have to worry about his lawyer attempting to use the details of Nate’s and my encounters during the trial.

After I was cleared of any wrongdoing, I was dismissed. Before leaving the courtroom, I locked eyes with Nate. If looks could kill, I would have been dead on sight. The snarl on his face was one I will never forget, but I wasn’t worried about him. I’m trained to kill with my bare hands. Not to mention, he will never see the

light of day again.

“It smells good in here, Mom. I came home just in time.” I continued to hold my daughter in my arms as I entered the kitchen. It felt too good to let her down.

“I know you didn’t want to make a fuss about being back and having a family dinner, but I thought it would be nice to cook and eat here.” She glanced over her shoulder as she cut up her vegetables. “Just us... Rome is going to stop by later too.”

My mother knows that anytime our family gets together, drinks fly. I love them, but they were the definition of dysfunction. My female cousins hate me because they feel that I think I’m better than them. How am I any better when we all are single mothers? The only difference is I get up and go to work rather than have government assistance. Jerome, or Rome, is my favorite cousin who just happens to be a gay man. He is the best thing to happen to me outside my daughter and parents. I was more than excited to see him.

“Of course, Rome is fine, Mama. Thank you.” I placed my daughter on the floor as I walked over and stood by her. “Do you need me to help you with anything?”

“No, but thank you.” I glanced to the side of the me and watched as my daughter shot off. I called out to her, but she was long gone. “Girl, she is gone to aggravate her grandfather.” She threw her head toward the freezer, causing me to open it and smile. “Grab that bottle and talk to me. Tell me about your latest case.”

Now that the assignment is over, I could let my mother in on some of the details. Pouring myself a glass, I took a sip and relished in the crispiness. My parents always had the good stuff, and I loved that for me.

“Ma, it was stressful.” I chuckled humorlessly. “That man was so fine, though. I almost messed up the mission.”

Pulling up a stool to the counter, I ran down the events that took place during my last assignment. Pretending to be a clerical administrator at one of our dummy businesses was one of the most boring parts because I really had to do clerical work for the bureau. It made me appreciate being a field agent even more. My mother listened intently as I gave her all the details I could.

“I’m going to need you to get a man if it was that easy for you to fold like a lawn chair.” I gasped at her statement as she continued, “I’m serious, Denim. I don’t like that for you, baby. How long has it been since you had a man in any type of capacity?”

Opening and closing my mouth, I thought her question over. I was embarrassed to admit it’s been years since I’ve had companionship. Between my work and dealing with Bri’s father’s bullshit, I haven’t had the time nor the patience to deal with a man.

“I’m a sad case, Mama.” I huffed as I poured myself another glass of wine. “How could I be this pathetic?”

“No, ma’am! We’re not doing that.” Mama placed the knife on the cutting board and wiped her hand on her apron. “You’re not going to throw yourself a pity party, and I’m damn sure not attending.” She turned and faced me as she placed her hands on her hips. “You’re young, smart, and a damn good mother. There’s no reason why you can’t get out there and date. If you want to throw that twat to a man or two in the process, go ahead.”

“Maaaa!” I squealed and giggled. “Don’t ever say that again.”

Shrugging her shoulders, she went back to cooking. Before long, my father and daughter moseyed into the kitchen, complaining for an afternoon snack. I made a few chicken sliders and enjoyed spending time with them. I missed this quality time and was so happy to be back home to compensate for lost time.

Ding Dong!

“I got it!” I shouted as I reached the bottom of the stairs. I’d just put my baby down for a nap, and I was thinking of taking one myself. Pulling the front door open, I squealed and jumped into my cousin’s arms.

“Rome!” I wrapped my arms around his neck and hugged him tightly. “I’ve missed you, cousin.”

Jerome and I have been thick as thieves our entire lives and were raised as siblings. At an early age, he knew he was different, and some of our family members didn’t fool with him. Being a gay black man wasn’t the easiest thing in the world to be, but as long as he had me, he would always have someone in his corner.

“Baby Dee!” He tittered as he squeezed me in his arms. “I’ve missed you, sis.”

Placing me back on the ground, I grabbed his hand and shut the door behind us. I dragged him into the den and pushed him onto the sofa with me sitting beside him. I was so giddy with excitement that I couldn’t contain it.

“I’m so glad you came over here today.” I turned to face him as I sat Indian style. “Mama told me she didn’t invite the rest of the family for dinner, and I’m thankful she didn’t. You know we would have torn this place up.”

Looking my cousin over, I couldn’t help but smile at him. Rome has never been one to care what others think about him, and it shows each and every time you’re graced by his presence. His feminine energy exuded from him, and you couldn’t help but gravitate toward him. He was always dressed in the most stylish clothes, his face was forever beaten to the gods, and the hairs on his head and face were never out of place. He was so tall that he could have easily played basketball, but a different set had his attention more. He was a bad bitch trapped in a man’s body but never wanted us to

address him as a woman. He was simply Jerome. Gay, straight, or anything in between, he was my everything.

“Girl, I would have turned Unc’s house every which way but loose.” He rolled his eyes and smirked. “Every time I’m around your people, he has the law on standby.”

“That’s crazy. considering my daughter is a federal agent, and I’m a judge.” My father startled us as he walked into the room. He walked over to Rome and hugged him tightly. “How you doing, nephew?”

“I’m good now that my best girl is back in town!” He pulled me into another hug. “I’m going to let you get situated, but I’m not going for you being an old lady and sitting in the house all day. It’s time for you to go outside and shake what your mama gave you!”

Pulling me from the couch, he began twerking to whatever music was playing in his head. Before long, I was dancing with him. My father watched us and laughed before my mama came in to see what all the fuss was about. It didn’t take long before she turned the music on and joined in.

I was in heaven right now, laughing and turning up with my mother and cousin. By the time we’d finished, I was winded. Back seated on the couch, I listened to my father and mother talk about what’s been going on in the family, and my mind replayed what Jerome said about me going out and having a little fun. The more I thought about it, the more he was right. There was nothing wrong with me living a little. The time is now, and I’ll be damned if I continue to get in my own way.

* * *

“Special Agent Atkins. I wasn’t expecting to see you so soon.”

Looking up from my computer desk, I locked eyes with my supervisor. His beady eyes roamed my office as he stepped inside. I watched him as he placed his hands behind his back and took in all of my accolades plastered along the walls. The only thing I didn't have hanging were photos of my family, especially my daughter. I never brought her into my work in any capacity. The more I watched him roam and assess my space, the more frustrated I became.

“Agent Roberts, is there something I can help you with?” I pushed my chair back slightly and stood from my desk. “I didn't know there was a time frame that I needed to stay away. Am I under investigation or something?”

“What? No...” He frowned as he took a seat in one of the office chairs before my desk. He unbuttoned a few buttons on his suit jacket and got comfortable. “Have a seat, and let's chat for a bit, agent.”

Sighing, I sat as he commanded. He and I didn't have the best relationship, but I try to keep the lines of respect open. For a moment, we just sat there and eyed each other before he simpered lowly.

“You've always been straight to the point.” He shook his head and focused on the glass window in my office that viewed the office floor. Here, there were only a few agents stationed, and we all got along well. The majority stayed to themselves and did the job that was required of them, only engaged when necessary. It was a plus for me that my assigned location just happened to be a few hours from my hometown because I preferred not to engage at all.

“Well, I feel like if there is something that needs to be said, there's no need to beat around the bush.” I adjusted my suit jacket and continued, “With that being said, I feel like there's some underlying issues you have with me. Care to share?”

I looked on as his jaw ticked and knew immediately that I was right. Leaning forward

in the chair, he observed me sternly and tried his best to intimidate me. I wasn't easily rattled, though; he should've known that by now.

"While the higher-ups applaud you for the work you did bringing down Mr. Williams, I find it deplorable. The way you were dressed when we raided the dummy home?—"

"I was assigned to do a job, and I did that job, sir." I returned his glare and cut him off. "I've been cleared, and nothing I did was unethical. If you have a personal issue, that's just what it is... personal. The goal was to collect more evidence against him and place him under arrest in federal custody. Is that not where he is?"

It's been two weeks since I've been home and a week since I've been back in the office. Upon arrival, the first thing I did was check the status of Nate's case. He's being held on federal gun and drug charges with no bond. I'm not sure why the murder charges are pending, but from what I can see, he won't be coming home anytime soon.

"Be that it may, I still feel like you could have gone about it a different way. I do not believe we will ever agree on this matter. However, we can both agree that a level of professionalism is required as an agent in this bureau, Agent Atkins. If you plan to continue to rise in the ranks, it would be wise to take different routes to secure convictions." He leaned back in his seat and eyed me before he continued, "Now, as you know... it's common for audits to be done on agents' computers to ensure the safety of the agency. We check to make sure no files have been downloaded and uploaded that carry potential threats and viruses."

"Okay." I gave him a confused look. "We learned that week one in the academy."

"Care to share why you're looking into the Boudreaux family?" He raised his brow at me and awaited my answer. "Is there an upcoming assignment I need to know

about?”

As I returned his stare, I thought over how I needed to answer this question. Over the years, informants and officers have gone missing or died once they started giving us intel on the Boudreaux family and their illegal dealings.

“I have reason to believe Boudreaux Enterprises is a front for illegal operations.” I sat straight up with my chest out as I spoke. “Detective Morales was in touch with me about the head of the operation, Rosier, before he was killed.”

“If I’m not mistaken, he was found dead from an overdose at a beach house in the Bahamas.” He cut in as he frowned. “His family gave us the autopsy report—nothing came from his accusations.”

“You don’t find that suspicious?” I stood from my chair and all but shouted. A few agents craned their necks to peep inside my office to see what the commotion was about. I hurriedly walked over and shut the door. “Then there’s Paul Reeves. He oversaw the ports in Miami and was adamant about the drug cargos that were docking. You don’t find it strange how he?—”

“How he had to flee the States because he was under investigation for stealing merchandise from that same port? How he was looking to illegally benefit from extorting merchants?” He scoffed and shook his head in frustration. “I’ve told you time and time again that you’re wasting resources and beating a dead horse by trying to build a case against them.” He stood from his seat and adjusted his jacket. “I don’t know what your aim is or what you’re trying to prove here, but this stops now. If I have to have this conversation with you again, you and I will have a different conversation that will include you no longer being an agent.”

Without so much as a backward glance, Roberts left out of my office and slammed the door behind him. I stood there and stared at where he’d gone before I sank back

into my chair. Placing my head in my hands, I gripped my hair and took several deep breaths. Glancing up at my computer screen, I scanned over the photos of the three Boudreaux men: Rosier, Jules, and Andre.

The two brothers and cousin trio were very educated, successful, and philanthropic on paper. I could never sit here and try to take away their achievements and generosity to various businesses, organizations, and people. However, I wouldn't sit here and pretend that I'm not looking into the face of three handsome drug dealers and murderers. I may be taking a risk, but what's the point of vowing to protect and serve when I'm hindered from doing my job? Giving away millions and building up the poor doesn't excuse you from being a menace to society.

Downloading all of the documents to a thumb drive, I placed them in my briefcase, along with photos of the men, my findings on their businesses, and their personal information. Regardless of what Roberts said, I knew there was a case here. I just had to be more discreet about building it.

"Going somewhere?" I looked up as my coworker, Agent Micheals leaned against my threshold. "I was coming to see if you wanted to grab a bite to eat for lunch."

"Thanks, but I'm going to head out." I gave him a small smile as I placed my bag strap over my shoulder. The look of disappointment couldn't be missed, but I wasn't worried about that. I still chose to be polite. "Maybe next time..."

"Next time, huh?" He chuckled as he straightened up and followed me into the hallway as I locked my door behind me. "It's always next time with me. I just want to take you for food and conversation, Atkins. Is that too much to ask?"

Turning to face him, he hovered over me slightly. Micheals wasn't a bad-looking guy. He had a muscular build and a shaved head. His beard was always nice and moisturized, and above it sat a goofy smile. While his face wasn't what I would

typically call attractive, his mannerisms added a charming layer to his overall appeal. He was one of the nicer agents here, and we spoke often. Being rude and standoffish was the last thing I wanted to be because he didn't deserve that.

“Agent Micheals?—”

“Call me James?—”

“James...” I corrected and adjusted the bag on my shoulders. “I apologize if it seems as if I'm brushing you off. I just have a lot going on these days. I'm headed upstairs to take a leave. How about we link for lunch or something in the next week or so?”

Satisfied with my answer, he nodded and made small talk as he walked me to the elevator. Seconds later, I was stepping off and headed into Human Resources.

“Special Agent Atkins! To what do I owe the pleasure?” Amanda asked as I took a seat. “I never see you up here.”

“You know I'm big on figuring things out myself.” We shared a laugh because, over the years, she's grown to know my personality. If I needed help, she was my go-to, but that was hardly ever the case. I was a problem-solver. “If possible, I wanted to apply for a mental health leave. Completing these back-to-back assignments, I need to gather myself and regroup.”

“Absolutely!” She turned serious and began to type away at her keyboard. “Is there anything I can do for you? Do you need counseling recommendations?”

One thing I love about the bureau is that they take mental and physical health seriously. In this line of work, you could easily lose yourself with the dangerous assignments and their long-lasting effects. Too often, agents have lost their jobs, families, and even lives due to not being able to handle the stress that comes with

being a federal agent.

“No, I don’t need anything but a vacation and a little peace.”

“I understand.” She nodded as she continued to type. “I’m going to get this submitted and signed off on straightaway. I’ll be sure to call you and send an email once it’s completed.”

“Thank you, Amanda.” I extended a hand to her, which she took. “I appreciate you.”

Now that that’s out of the way, it was time for me to get things in order with my personal life. Not only that, but I also wanted to dive deeper into the Boudreaux Enterprises and the family that held the same name. I heard what Roberts said, but what I look into and do on my personal time is my business. There was something more to that family than what meets the eye, and I was going to be the one to find out what.

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“I appreciate you coming to town and helping me restore the integrity and quality of my city. I can’t thank you enough for this.”

Handing Uno his requested bottle of water, I nodded as I took my spot on the loveseat across from him. He’d hooked me up with the penthouse suite at the Grove Plaza Hotel we’d built for the city about two years ago, and it had the perfect view of the city. Milly Grove is beautiful and has plenty to offer its residents and visitors. I’m happy to be a part of it continuing to reach its full potential.

“No thanks needed, man.” I waved him off as I got comfortable. “The Heights is better than ever from what you and your brothers tell me. Not to mention... the youth and senior centers are doing well. I hired a new crew to complete the shopping center near Highland Meadows, and it should be done in about three weeks. My question is, what’s next? You were telling Rosier you have more ideas for us to partner on.”

Once John and I finalized the hiring of the new construction workers, the build was seamless. The guys came back from vacation refreshed and excited to be getting raises, as well as happy about having team members who actually wanted to be there. I personally went to the site to make sure everyone was happy. In the same way we ensured everything was well with the Family business, I adhere to those same principles with Boudreaux Enterprises.

He smiled and nodded. “Yeah, y’all are doing your thing for us here in Milly Grove. I was thinking once we get that shopping center finished, we could canvas the area together. I have some things swirling that could be good additions, but I also want to hear what you think about some other potential businesses being that y’all the experts and shit. I don’t want to just keep building shit that ain’t going to make sense. I also

want to revisit the conversation about the casino. I feel like it's time we bring that to fruition." He kept his eyes locked on mine as he spoke. "I know there were issues and concerns when the previous mayor made his counterproposal, but this is a new era."

"I agree..." I leaned forward in my seat, placing my knees on my elbows. "Off the record, are you looking for additional cuts from the revenue it makes to sow elsewhere?"

When we wanted to work with the previous mayor, his Uncle Carlos, he demanded additional money that we refused to pay. I've known Uno for some time now, and I knew he wasn't that type of person. Still, I needed to know about any potential personal gains so we knew what we were dealing with on the back end. Most people who want a cut at the beginning of a deal usually end up wanting more and more. I was hoping greed wouldn't be Uno's downfall.

"I don't want shit but to see the city thrive." He frowned at me before adding, "A percentage of the casino's revenue will go toward the city's building fund. I don't want any personal profits, if that's what you mean by elsewhere."

With a smirk, I nodded and reached over to dap him up. Uno was a stand-up nigga, and to decline millions, if not more, was commendable. "I respect that." I waited as he pulled his vibrating phone from his pocket and broke out into a smile. "Look at this nigga grinning like a schoolgirl and shit."

He chuckled as he responded to his text and tapped his phone before looking back at me. "Fuck you, nigga. Harley talking that shit I like, though, so we gotta wrap this up. Our baby girl is barely one, and I'm itching to put another one in her ASAP."

"Ain't nothing wrong with that." I stood to walk him to the door. "Love looks good on you, real shit. I never thought I'd see you in love like this." I slapped him on the back and smiled. I liked Harley for him. She was a good person. "Now, if we can get

Wild to settle down...”

“Nigga, please!” He gave me a knowing look once we reached the door. “That boy is a lost cause. He just had to blow a nigga’s top back because the man caught him fuckin’ his wife in their house a few months ago.”

“And the wife?”

“Still touching her toes for that nigga every chance she gets.” He shook his head in disappointment. “You think your grandparents will come to town and pray for that nigga?”

Chuckling, I told him I would work on that before letting him know I would holler at him when he came back into town. Closing the door behind me, I looked around my dwelling for the next few months. I rolled my neck as I wandered to the kitchen, hoping to find something to eat before I called it a night. I still needed to unpack my suitcases and get settled in. Deciding to make myself a club sandwich, I heard my phone vibrating on the counter just as I finished. Looking at the number, I couldn’t help but smile my damn self.

“Well, well... if it isn’t my favorite girl,” I mumbled as I bit into my food. “I miss you.”

“It’s only been two days since you left, son.” My granny giggled as her sweet voice flowed through the receiver. “How are you getting settled in?”

Looking around, I took note of the three-bedroom space and nodded. “I like it, Sweets. I might have to get a spot out here for us. I think you and Pastor will love this place.”

“And your mother?”

Sighing heavily, I continued to eat my sandwich piled with everything I could find in the refrigerator. I haven't seen or heard from my mother since I left her at my grandparents' house. Neither of us has reached out, and the shit lowkey bothered me. I was her only child. She should've been trying to solve the issues between us. At the end of the day, she was my mother, and I do love her.

"I don't know, Sweets. You know how Mama feels about me." I sipped my water before I continued, "I love her, and y'all know that. At the same time, I'm not gonna let her keep talking to me like she's crazy. She demands respect, and so do I. Mother or not, her threatening me is a no-go."

Sweets sighed heavily. "Andre... She's your mother. She has a lot of misplaced anger, baby. Give her a chance to speak her peace."

As I listened to my grandmother plead my mother's case, I fought to avoid being disrespectful. I was conflicted about it all, but I was clear on my mother and her disrespect toward me and my business being unacceptable. Zoo wasn't going to let her threats go unheard or unpunished. The extent of her punishment was on her at this point. The best thing she could do was attempt to make amends with me and undo the damage she'd done with her accusations.

"Regardless of what you're saying, Sweets... I'm a man, and I will be treated like one," I stated as calmly as I could. "Mama thinks she knows everything when, in actuality, she knows nothing." I finished off my food and threw the paper plate in the trash. "How y'all doing, though? Do you need me to send Jules by there to check on y'all?"

Although I wasn't talking to my cousins at the moment, I knew they would never hesitate to check on my people if I needed them to. For them to be older, they got around well, but I still wanted to make sure they were okay in every aspect.

“He checked on me earlier and let me know to call him if I needed anything.” I nodded in appreciation of him for that. I heard the smile in her voice that caused me to do the same. “Your little girlfriend stopped by the church to speak to me on Sunday. You left her in quite a mess, Andre.”

Frowning, I cut the light off in the kitchen as I made my way through the penthouse. The night sky was brightly lit as stars shone through the floor-to-ceiling windows. If I didn’t get a condo out here, I was definitely getting a multi-story house. The view was something serious as the sun faded away earlier, and now the darkness had stormed through making me wonder why nightfall never looked like this in Florida. Focusing back on the call, I sucked my teeth. I knew whatever narrative Sandra told Sweets was a lie before I could even hear the details.

“Sweets, I didn’t do anything to that girl.” I stepped into the room, causing the light to turn on automatically. “She knew nothing was going on with us, and it’s not my fault if she thought she could change my mind.” I placed the phone on speaker and began to undress. A shower and sleep were calling my name. Anything I didn’t do today could be done tomorrow. “I hate that she got her feelings hurt, but that’s not my fault. She knew what our arrangement was when we started said arrangement.”

From the time I dropped her off at her crib until the time I had to block her yesterday, Sandra has been blowing my line up. From text messages professing her love for me to voice notes hoping I died, she hadn’t let up, and it was evident she had lost her damn mind. Blocking her number was the best thing for me—and her if she wanted to live. The alternative was cutting off her fingers one by one for talking crazy to me, of all people.

Sweets was giggling again. “I don’t know what I’m going to do with you. I just want you to be happy, baby. I want you to find a good woman and have me a great-grand before I leave this world. I worry about you, Andre. Who is going to take care of you when I’m gone?”

“You’re going to live forever, baby. Plus... if you go, I go. God knows we’re a package deal.”

Hearing her sweet laugh was enough for me. I hated when she got into her feelings about me being single. This is the life I chose, and I’m happy with it.

“Well, I just wanted to hear your voice, baby.” She yawned, and I knew it wouldn’t be long before she was going to bed as well. “Also, please think about talking to Mattie—for me. I love you, sweetheart, and you be safe out there. Tell my baby, Adrian, I said hello.”

Chuckling, I thought back to how Wild called my grandparents and had my granddad pray for him after witnessing what Jules did to Carlos. Since then, he has called Sweets at least once a week to check on them. After saying our goodnights and me promising to think about communicating with my mother, we ended the call.

I took a seat at the foot of the bed and dropped my head in exhaustion. My mother and I will never be the same, so there was no need to speak to her. I’d entertain a conversation for my grandparents’ sake, but my relationship with my mother was on its last string of hope.

* * *

I’ve been in Milly Grove for about a week, and I was just now settled and ready to see what the city’s day-to-day agenda was. Riding through the busy streets, I was pleased with the hand Boudreaux Enterprises had in restoring the beautiful town. Granted, the city was never busted or rundown, but the landscaping could have improved, and it has. It makes me feel good to know that our company had a lot to do with that.

Uno has been out of the country with his wife and son, so Skip has been my go-to for

any questions I have on the buildings and locations regarding new construction. He wasn't on the council, but he was privy to all his brother wanted to do in the city, so I found no issue with linking up with him.

"What's up, man?" I slapped hands with Skip as I entered his club. I've never seen the nightlife here, so I accepted his invitation to kick it at Club Honey tonight. "This place is a lot different from when I came with Jules."

The club looked nice in the afternoon, but you could tell it came alive at night. The DJ was doing his thing, spinning classic tunes by Young Dro, and there wasn't a person in sight who wasn't bobbing to the lyrics. The bottle girls looked good as hell in their bralette tops, leather shorts, and fishnets. You could tell this was the place to catch a vibe in Milly Grove.

"Any time you're in my spot, everything is on the house. If you ever need anything while you're in the city, let me or Uno know, and we got you covered," Skip said as he led us through the crowd. The way the niggas moved out of the way, and the ladies stopped to stare, I knew he and his brothers had their share of envy and admiration.

"What about Wild?" I asked jokingly as I stepped into the section. I blew a slight whistle because the shit was decked out in black and gold with liquor and champagne bottles everywhere. There was also an entire food spread with wings, sliders, and four different dips with chips. "Man... I know you didn't do all this shit for me."

"Why not?" Skip turned and eyed me as he placed his hand inside his pockets. "This is our private section, and you're my guest. We always take care of our people." He walked over and patted my back as he headed out of the section. "Let me check on some shit real quick, and I'll be back." He peered over the banister and shook his head. "Speaking of Wild... take a look for yourself."

With a chuckle, he shook his head and left me alone in the section. Glancing over the

banister, I couldn't help but snicker at the sight below. Women surrounded Wild as he wrapped his hand around one of their ponytails and danced like Jamaicans. They were all into it until a man approached them. Wild continued to dance and said nothing until the man pushed him. He didn't break a sweat or lose rhythm as he removed his Glock from his waist and hit him in the temple, knocking him out cold. The women gasped and scrambled to get to safety. The girl he was dancing with stood in shock, but Wild whispered something to her ear that caused her to take his hand and nibble her lip as he led her through the crowd and toward the restroom.

"That nigga..." I chuckled and walked over to the bar area to fix myself a drink and something to eat. It's been a little minute since I was out for my own leisure, so I made up my mind to enjoy myself.

A few minutes passed with me eating and sipping on a bottle of Ace as I watched the crowd below. I didn't want to do too much because I had to drive tonight, and no matter how protected Skip attempted to make me feel, I still had to watch my back at all times. I wasn't really worried about a nigga fucking with me regardless of what city I was in, but you could never be too careful.

Right as I was about to leave the section and walk downstairs, I locked eyes with the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen in person. Simply dressed in high-waist jeans that hugged her ass just right, a wrap top, and a pair of heels, she was the baddest thing in here. Her tawny skin glowed under the club lights, but when she smiled, I swear, I could feel the precum ooze from the tip of my dick. I sipped my drink and stared as she threw her head back and shared a laugh with the people around her. I was so focused on her that I barely noticed Wild when he entered the section.

"Boudreaux, what's good?" He smiled as he dapped me up. "How's the city treating you? Skip told me you were coming tonight, but I didn't know you were already here."

“Yeah... probably because you’re out there knocking niggas out and gyrating on hoes.” I chuckled as we clinked our shot glasses together and downed the Hennessy. “Sweets told me she wants to see you when she comes to town.”

He scoffed as he eyed me. “As if I don’t already know. That’s my girl, and she pleads the blood of Jesus over me every night.” Coming closer, he whispered over the music, “You know I had to stay at my mama’s house for two weeks after that shit with that witch you call a cousin? That nigga gives me the heebie jeebies.”

Throwing my head back, I couldn’t help but bellow in laughter. The serious look on his face didn’t make the situation better.

“If nobody else feels you, I do.” I grimaced as I wiped my eyes and calmed down. “Say, man...” I nodded toward shorty at the bar, who was now headed to the dance floor. “Who is that?”

Craning his neck to see who I was talking about, he sipped his drink as he crossed his arms and nodded his head in appreciation. “That’s Denim. She was born and raised here but moved away for a minute. I don’t know if she’s back in town or what. She’s a tough one, though.”

“Why do you say that?” I asked as I continued to watch her and her friends fuck up the dance floor. I don’t know what it is about the City Girls that makes these ladies show their ass, but she was out there having the time of her life. “She must wouldn’t give you no play?”

“Nah, it’s nothing like that.” He simpered and looked on as a flock of ladies approached the section. “A few of the homies can’t say the same, though. She’s just a hard one to step to.” The guard at the entrance asked Wild if they could come into the section, and he looked to me for an answer. “What you think?”

Shrugging my shoulders, I sipped my drink and took one last look at Denim before giving my attention to the five ladies who were filing in. Their body types varied in size, and each one was a different shade of brown, but they all looked good as hell. I wouldn't mind getting to know one or two on a physical level while I was in town.

"Hey, handsome!" One of the thicker girls came over and spoke to me while the others were talking with Wild. The way they were eating him up with their eyes let me know he was going to have a long night ahead. "I'm Tammy."

"What's good?" I nodded as I took my seat on the sofa with her following. She tried to sit on my lap, but I stopped her immediately, patting the spot next to me. "Nah, but you can sit right here, though."

My intentions were never to be rude—only straightforward. I didn't know shit about this girl for her to be sitting on a nigga's lap. Granted, I'm not trying to make friends. If she wanted to fuck, that was cool with me, but let's not make this new encounter something it isn't.

"Brash. I like that." She smirked as she licked her bottom lip. "Are you new to the city? I haven't seen you around before?"

Bobbing my head to the sounds of Tank, I dragged my eyes over toward her. Her breasts and thighs were barely consumed in the scraps she called a dress. She was a pretty girl with light brown eyes and thick pink lips. My dick twitched just thinking about what she could do with her mouth. Bringing my eyes back to hers, I could see the lust she had for me already.

"Just know I'm here for a good time—not a long time." The tunes of R. Kelly's "Seems Like You're Ready" came through the speakers, and the more I looked at her, the more I wanted to see what she was about. "I apologize for being rude moments ago. How about you come over here and show me what you got?"

Sliding the strap of her purse from her shoulders, she stood to her full height before moving in front of me. She wound her hips slowly as her hands roamed her body. The entire time, our eyes never left each other. Turning her back to me, I pulled my pre-rolled blunt from my ear and watched as she bent over. Her ass was playing peek-a-boo, begging to be fucked. Reaching forward, I grabbed her by her wrist, causing her to fall into my lap.

“You feel that shit?” I murmured in her ear as she moaned, grinding against my dick. “You got a nigga hard as fuck, shorty. What you gone do about that?”

“Hmm,” she cooed as she laid her head on my shoulder, draping her arm around my neck. “Let’s get out of here, and I can show you.”

Chuckling, I let her continue to do her dance. I glanced around, and more girls had flooded the section, as well as some of the guys who worked for Skip. He’d given me a rundown when I first came to town and let me know if I needed anything, I could trust these guys. I appreciated it, but the two niggas I trusted the most were back in Florida, so I was good with handling my own.

“You straight?” Skip eyed Tammy with a blank look on his face. “I got caught up in the kitchen.”

“I’m good,” I assured him before I tapped shorty’s thigh and told her to get up for a second. “Let me holla at bro.”

Walking over to the corner of the section, I peered back and saw shorty walk over and whisper to one of her friends that was entertaining Wild. That nigga lived up to his name because he was dry-humping one girl while he made the other two kiss.

“That’s one freaky-ass nigga.” I chuckled as I pulled from my blunt. “Is he always like this?”

“Man, listen... I pray every day for his health.” Skip placed his hand in his pocket while we shared a laugh. “I see shorty is looking to get chosen tonight. I ain’t no hater or no shit like that, but watch your back with these hoes from the East. Grove Heights has some of the shadiest women in the city.”

“My Glock doesn’t discriminate,” I said, giving him a knowing look. “I won’t make no noise while I’m here on business, but there’s not a nigga or bitch alive that can say they played with Dre and lived to talk about it. I saw a hotel up the street that I might take her to. I just want to kick it tonight before it’s down to business tomorrow.”

“You got that.” We slapped hands before I let him know I was about to head out. “Hit me if you need me. If not, I’ll get up with you once Uno lands.”

Glancing over at shorty, I nodded toward the exit, and she wasted no time sliding out of the booth and wide-stepping toward me. Dapping up Wild, I let him know I would get up with him later. As I rounded the corner of the narrow walkway, I bumped into the softest body. I had to grip her waist to keep her from falling.

“I’m so sorry!” The girl Wild referred to as Denim apologized as her purse and phone fell to the floor. “I should’ve been paying attention to where I was going.”

“Yeah, you should have.” I smirked, still holding her in my arms. “You gotta be careful. We wouldn’t want you hurting yourself.”

“Right...” She giggled softly as she pulled away. “I’m Denim... And again, forgive me.”

Smirking, I accepted her awaiting hand. Even her hands were soft, and I couldn’t help but think about how they would feel wrapped around my dick. Peering down into her brown eyes, I felt my dick grow harder than it was when Tammy was dancing in my lap. Speaking of Tammy, the sounds of her huffing and puffing could be heard behind

us, reminding me she had been following me to exit the club.

“Um... can we go?” she said with an apparent attitude. “I thought we were going to chill. Why you talking to her?”

I don’t know what it was about this Denim chick but seeing her up close was fucking with me. When I saw her from afar, it did her no justice. Baby girl had a light, feminine scent to her that was driving me crazy. Her body was oozing with sex appeal even though she was fully covered. The fact that she stood there and didn’t run off from the embarrassment of being close to busting her ass said a lot about her confidence. I was ready to say fuck Tammy, but Denim was trouble—I could tell from simply looking into her eyes.

“Say my name...” I barked at Tammy without taking my eyes off Denim. Just because she was trouble didn’t mean I wasn’t going to admire the work of art. She began to pant softly as my eyes drank her in while my words were rough as sandpaper toward Tammy. “I want to hear you say it.”

“Your name?” I could hear the confusion in her tone. “You never told me what it was.”

“Exactly,” I said matter-of-factly, finally giving her my attention. “You don’t know shit about a nigga except how big my dick is. Pipe that hot shit down when you’re talking to me.” Giving my attention back to Denim, I grinned. “See you later, Denim.”

Side-stepping her, I continued my way toward the steps that led to the main floor. Hearing Denim call out to me, I peered over my shoulder and found her still standing where I’d left her. “You didn’t tell me your name...”

Rubbing my hands together, I pulled my bottom lip between my teeth and gave her

perfect frame one last look. “Dre,” is all I said before I continued toward the exit with Tammy on my heels. Regardless of the attitude she had, I knew she was still going to leave with me. While Denim’s aroma said, “I’m that bitch,” Tammy’s scent was one of desperation.

As I stood outside and waited for the valet, I gave Tammy the details of the hotel and told her to meet me there. She tried to fight me on it, but I gave her a knowing look, and she let it go. Stepping toward my Range as the valet pulled it to the curb, I scanned the lot and locked eyes with Denim. I threw her a wink before sliding onto the buttery seats. Hopefully, I will see Little Miss Denim again. Milly Grove was but so big, so I was sure we’d run into each sooner or later.

* * *

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

Stepping into my appointed room for the evening, I chuckled lowly as I heard Tammy grumble behind me. She made it clear once we walked in that she wasn't at all pleased to be staying in a Motel 6 for the night.

"You drive a truck well over one hundred thousand dollars, and you bring me to the cheapest hotel on the block?" She rolled her eyes before mugging me. "Why can't we go to the Ritz or that nice hotel near Mills Manor?"

"Tammy, are you fucking or not?" I asked as I crossed one arm over my chest. I was bored with this conversation, and if she wasn't going to fuck, I was leaving. "You have two options, love. Give me some pussy, or we can leave. There's no pressure at all if this isn't up to your standards. The choice is yours."

I watched as she looked from me to the bed before she placed her purse on the counter. Like I knew she would, she bent over to kick off her shoes and undress. She could front all she wanted; she knew just like I did that she was going to fuck.

"You know... I was hoping that I would get to spend the night with you when I first saw you walk in tonight." Pulling her dress over her body, I felt my dick jump at the sight of her nakedness. Dressed in nothing but a black thong, baby was pressure. She had a few stretch marks here and there, but it was nothing to a real nigga. "We're going to have a lot of fun together."

Standing at the edge of the bed, I watched through hooded eyes as she crossed the room and came over to stand right before me. Peering down at her, I watched as she dropped to her knees and fondled with my belt buckle. When she wrapped her small hand around my dick, she watched in awe as he grew longer. I couldn't help but

smirk at the excitement as she leaned forward to kiss it; too bad I had to stop her.

“What’s wrong?” She looked up at me in confusion as I placed my hand on her forehead. “Why’d you stop me?”

“I need to slip on a condom first.” I reached down to grab my jeans, but she pushed my hand away. Frowning as I pulled it from my wallet, she went to reach for it, but I wasn’t having it.

“You don’t need that...” She kissed her teeth, rolling her eyes in frustration. “I’m clean... plus, I’m just going to give you head. It’ll feel better without it.”

Ignoring her, I unwrapped the XL Magnum and carefully rolled the sleeve down my dick. No matter how fine a bitch was, there was no way I would ever enter any of her holes raw. Sandra and I have been fucking for years, and I’ve never felt her walls bare, so there was no way I was doing that with someone I’d just met.

“All right, now where were we?” I stood to my full height in front of her. Seeing she had froze, I swiveled my hips and slapped her cheek with my hardened dick. “What you waiting on, baby?”

Licking her lips, she stared for a moment before licking along my shaft before wrapping her hands around it once more. Slowly, she began to stroke me, and I won’t lie, the shit was feeling great. I stood there and stared at her doing her thing because I didn’t want to be vocal and give her false hope of seeing me again after tonight. As soon as I moan, she’ll be asking me if we are going to be in a relationship.

Baby, I’m here to bust a nut, and that’s it.

“Your dick is so big and pretty...” she moaned as she licked the head. I don’t know why she was doing all this because I knew that latex didn’t taste good. “I can’t wait to

feel it inside of me.”

Before I could respond, she suctioned my entire dick into her mouth, and I was instantly pissed. I tried to give her a minute to get used to my length and size so she could do her thing, but the more she bobbed her head, the more aggravated I became.

“Use less teeth, love.” I tried my best to coach her as she looked at me wide-eyed. “Relax your jaws a little...”

I don’t know if it was her first time sucking dick or not, but this girl was about to shred the fuck out of me. Hurting her feelings crossed my mind, but there was no need for that. Instead, I slowly pulled her off of me and helped her stand.

“Did I not do good?” she asked in confusion. “I did what you said.”

“Bend over, baby.” I nodded toward the bed instead of answering. This girl was too fine for her head to be straight trash. “I’m trying to see what this pussy is hitting for.”

Smirking, she bent over and put a perfect arch in her back. Positioning myself, I said a quick prayer in hopes that this hole was better than the last. I grabbed hold of her waist with one hand as I slapped the head of my dick against her sopping wet hole. If nothing else, baby girl was soaked like a motherfucker.

“Oh, shit...” She hissed as she gripped the sheets. “You’re so fuckin’ big, Dre!”

“Mhm,” was all I said as I slid into her. Her mouth might be trash, but her pussy is decent. Giving her time to adjust to my length and girth, I slowly moved in and out of her. Looking down at where we were joined, I smirked at her pussy, already wetting my dick up.

“Fuck me harder, Dre...” she groaned as she began to bounce her ass faster. “I feel

you all in my chest, baby!”

Tucking my bottom lip, I dug my fingers into her skin and began pounding into her. Stroke after stroke, I fucked the shit out of this girl. Her legs were shaking uncontrollably, and I knew she was coming for the second time since I entered her. Over her moans, I could have sworn I heard a noise outside the hotel room. Never slowing my stroke, I peered over my shoulder and saw the shadow of someone’s feet on the other side of the door.

“Oh shit, Dre! Right there!” she cried as she twerked her ass faster. “Don’t stop, baby! Right there!”

Right as she was at the peak of her release, the door of the room was kicked in. Swiftly, I reached to the side of her, retrieved my Glock from the bed, and sent a headshot to the masked man as soon as he stepped foot in the room. Hearing Tammy’s scream, I snatched up my boxers and headed to the door. Before I could cross the threshold, another masked man walked into the room. This one had his hands raised, with Skip holding a Barretta to the back of his head.

“Something told me you would need my help,” Skip spoke menacingly as he pushed the dude into the room and closed the door behind him. Looking around the room, his eyes landed on Tammy’s naked body before they dragged over to the dead body on the floor. “Interesting...”

While he made his assessment of the room, my eyes stayed trained on Tammy as I began to get dressed. Needless to say, the vibe has been ruined. I watched her as she pulled her knees to her chest in the middle of the bed and rocked while she cried.

“Now, Tams... you don’t mind if I call you Tams, do you?” I asked as I pulled my Amiri sweatshirt back over my head. “I’m not a man that believes in coincidences. So, spare me the bullshit because, not only did you ruin my nut, but you may have

caused me a case of blue balls. Now, tell me..." I straightened my shirt and adjusted my jeans as I wiped away any wrinkles. "Why in the fuck did you think it was okay to try and set up a nigga like me?"

Still in shock, snot dripped from her chin as she gazed down at the dead body and cried. Growing impatient, I tapped her forehead with the butt of my gun, and she snapped her wide, scared eyes at me.

"I asked you a question, Tams."

"P-Please!" She moved closer to me and cried, "D-Don't hurt me!"

"Who is this nigga?" I ignored her as I walked over to the body and removed the first gunman's mask. Frowning, I was pissed because the guy was actually a damn stud. Walking over to where Skip was holding his gun to the other guy, I removed his mask and chuckled.

"Do you know how pissed I would have been if I had been set up by three bitches?" I shook my head and peered over my shoulder at Tammy as she tried to get off the bed. "Aht aht!" I raised my gun and aimed it at her. "Sit right the fuck there and tell me what the fuck you thought was going down tonight."

When I met her in the club, I knew I was taking a chance by leaving with her. This may not be my city, but a nigga ain't never been green. Tammy was too eager to get me alone from the time she met me until the time we pulled up in the hotel parking lot. She didn't care about this hotel not being fancy. She was more worried about this not being a secluded area.

"W-We thought you would be an easy lick," she whimpered as she looked at me with pleading eyes. "We weren't going to hurt you. We just wanted some money."

“What kind of shady hoes y’all got in this city?” I chuckled as I turned to Skip. “Is this the motto of the Grove? I might need to reconsider business here.”

He smirked as he shot a text on his phone. “Man, chill out. I don’t want to hear Uno’s mouth about you wanting to pull out. He’s already going to be pissed about three bodies dropping.”

“Three?” the other guy shouted as he stepped toward Tammy. “I told you we were bound to get fucked up running game on the wrong nigga! I told you when I saw him come in with Skip to leave this nigga alone.”

Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.

I spoke the scripture repeatedly in my mind because I knew what was about to happen. There was no way I was going to let them walk out of here alive tonight, and by the way the tears rolled down her face, she knew it too.

“D-Dre, you don’t have to kill us, baby!” Tammy pleaded as she slid from the bed. “I hate that my cousin Amy was killed, but if you think about it... we didn’t do anything wrong. Please let me and my brother go. It’s not like we actually robbed you and—ahh!”

Pop!

The shit she spewed meant nothing to me as I sent a bullet that caused brain matter to scatter all over the walls and her face. Her screams and cries were beginning to get on my nerves, so her ass was next.

“Tevin!” she wailed as she dropped to the floor and cradled his half-blown-off head. “You killed my little brother!”

“Nah, you killed that lil’ nigga the minute you thought you were going to play a nigga like me...” I smirked as I raised my gun to her head, causing her to go still. “No worries, I’ll make sure your mother gets your bodies bright and early in the morning. The least I can do is let her bury y’all together.”

Pop!

I didn’t wait for her to say anything else before I gave her a hole to match her brother’s. Looking around the room, I shook my head at the slight carnage I caused.

“Well... if it’s any consolation, I hate you have to go home with blue balls.” Skip shrugged as he walked over and patted my shoulder. “Cleanup is already outside. Thankfully, you had a silencer on with your trigger-happy ass.”

Shaking my head, I looked toward the door and watched as a few guys filed in and began rolling the bodies in bags and placing them by the door as they began to clean. Removing my burner phone, I dialed up my cousin, Mimi.

“Andre... it’s after midnight,” she groaned. I couldn’t help but smile because I missed my girl. She was the annoying little sister if I ever had one. “Are you okay?”

“Peachy.” I smiled as I stepped out of the room and into the breezeway. The night air was cool and crispy as the stars shone up above. “I’m gonna text you an address, and I need you to do your thing.”

“Say, bruh... I’m going to stay here until they get done. You can go ahead and dip out if you need to,” Skip walked up behind me and said.

“Nah, I’m good,” I assured him. “I’m gonna chill out here until they’re done.”

In my line of business, you can never be too careful when it comes to discarding

bodies and cleaning a crime scene. Most times, I'd leave them so their families or our other enemies could discover them to send a concise message. This time, I wanted and needed all traces of me gone. I didn't touch much, being that I was only here for an hour at most, but you can never be too cautious.

Nodding, Skip went back into the room as I stayed outside. I listened to Mimi fire question after question about who I was talking to as she typed rapidly on her keyboard. It took her all of five minutes before she was done.

"All right, everything is good to go on my end. It will be as if you and Jordan were never there."

"I appreciate it..." She got quiet for a moment, and I knew there was something she wanted to say. "What up, Mimi?"

"Have you spoken to my brothers since you've been out there? I kind of overheard them saying you weren't fucking with them right now."

While it's true that I haven't spoken to Rosier and Jules, I wasn't going to have a conversation with their sister about it. Instead of getting into all that, I thanked her, told her I loved her, and disconnected the call.

"All done," Skip said as I reentered the room. The shit looked good, and you couldn't tell it was even booked for Tammy and I. "I'm about to head back to the club. I don't like leaving Wild unsupervised for too long."

Chuckling, I dapped him up and told him I'd get with him. I glanced around once more before I made my way back to my truck and back toward Mills Manor. So far, I'm zero for two when it came to getting some pussy, and I'm starting to think that maybe my black ass is the problem. Pushing the thoughts of sex to the back of my mind, I went to the phone contacts on my stereo screen and dialed the number of the

only person that mattered at the moment.

“Son...” my grandfather answered the phone groggily. “Is everything okay?”

“Matthew Chapter 18 Versus 21-22,” I stated as I pulled from the lot of the hotel.
“Jesus spoke of limits of forgiveness. I think I’m closer to exceeding the limitations.”

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

It's been three weeks since I took leave from my job, and I was in no hurry to return. From spending time with my daughter to relaxing physically and mentally, I was enjoying my solitude. A few of my fellow agents tried to guilt-trip me about taking time off, but it went in one ear and out the other. Senior Special Agent Roberts sent an email wishing me wellness, and that meant everyone else could kiss my ass. The smile that shined on Bri's face every morning when she woke up to her mommy was going to be well worth the three-month vacation.

"So... what are we doing today, Mommy?" she asked from the back seat of my newly purchased Chevy Trailblazer. I decided to reward myself after all my hard work over the last few months. Next on the agenda was finding my baby and me our forever home. "Are we going out for ice cream?"

"You don't think it's a little too cold for that, Briley Boo?" I glanced at her through the rearview mirror as we cruised through town. "Not to mention... we just went out for cupcakes two days ago. You want your teeth to fall out?"

"I'm only six, Mommy. They will grow back." She waved me off, and I couldn't help but chuckle. Noticing that she went quiet, I brought my eyes back to her and was worried about the sad look that was now on her face.

"What's wrong, baby?"

"Are you sending me to stay with Daddy?" she asked as she peered up at me with dejected eyes. "I heard him tell Nana June that you work too much, and he wants me to come stay with him. I don't want to live with him."

“Is he mean to you when you’re over there?” I glanced back at her when we approached a red light. I reached back and shook her little feet, hoping she gave me a small smile. “You can tell me anything...”

Looking down at her little fingers, she fondled them before she brought her eyes to mine. The light changed colors, but I made sure to watch her through the rearview mirror to gauge her expression.

“No... he’s not mean. He just doesn’t play with me the way you, Nana June, and Papa Joe do.” I exhaled the breath I didn’t know I was holding because had she said he was mistreating her, I was going to jail behind my child. “No one talks to me, but they’re not mean.”

“How about this?” I pulled into the lot of Kiddie Kingdom. Every day, I vowed to do something with her, and today, she wanted to go to an indoor playground. “I will tell him the only way I’ll let you come over a little more is if he promises to have more fun.” I turned and reached back to lift her chin. “More games. More pizza. More?—”

“...candy and ice cream?” She beamed as she unfastened her booster seat. “I love candy and ice cream, Mommy!”

“I know you do, baby.” I chuckled as I got out of the car before going into the backseat and pulling her out. “Your dad is actually going to join us here today. Is that okay?”

Nodding her head rapidly, she held my hand as she spoke a mile a minute about all the games she wanted to play. Stepping inside, I groaned at all of the kids running and playing. The local school district was out of school today for some bullshit holiday, so it was more crowded than when we usually came. After paying for our admission, I helped my baby put on her grip socks for the trampoline. Before she could run off, a shadow formed over us, and once he came fully into view, it took

everything in me not to frown and groan.

“Hey, my pretty baby.” Bryce smiled as he pulled Briley into his arms and kissed her cheek. “You look so pretty today.”

“Hi, Daddy!” She giggled and hugged him back. Regardless of how much time she does or doesn’t spend with him, she loves the fucker. “I’m going to go jump. Watch how high I can go!”

“Stay where I can see you!” I yelled at her back as she took off running. Thankfully, the trampoline she wanted to play on was directly in front of an empty bench. Taking a seat, I watched my baby jump around and squeal as if she was having the time of her life.

“Well, hello to you too, Denim,” Bryce said as he took a seat a little too close for my liking. “You look nice today.”

“Thank you,” I responded dryly. “Your daughter loves Bluey, so she wanted us to dress alike.”

There was a time when I would light up and get so excited at the thought of spending time with Bryce and our daughter. Finding out he didn’t initially want her because he was married turned me off from him, and I never saw him the same way again.

“You could be a little happy about me being here,” he stated lowly as he adjusted the collar of his shirt. No matter where he went, he would always dress as if he was going to or coming from an important meeting. “You should be a little more thankful?—”

I cut him off and turned to him with a raised brow. “Thankful that you’re here spending time with your child? If you came here to argue, you can go on about your day, Bryce. I shouldn’t have even invited you since you think I’m going to let you

petition to take my child from me.” The thought of it alone was pissing me off. “From what she tells me... you don’t even acknowledge her when she is with y’all.”

When it comes to Bryce spending time with Briley, we agreed on every other weekend, every other holiday, and every day after her birthday. That didn’t last long because the wife felt the arrangement was cutting into their daily life. Moving her schedule around so that her husband could see his child obviously wasn’t important. That was another reason I didn’t care for my child going over to their house. His wife didn’t want her there.

“We have fun.” He frowned in confusion as he turned and watched her as she jumped. “We have dinner together, and she also has toys... and a game room.”

I chuckled and angled my head. “Do you play with her? Do you ask her about her day?” Pausing, I waited for a response. When I was met with silence, I turned and looked at him. “Bryce... what’s her favorite color? Food? Cartoon? What did she name her newest stuffed animal? Do you know anything about your daughter?”

He said nothing as he peered at her. I could see his jaw tick as he mulled over the questions because he knew just as well as I did that he didn’t know the answers. “I had no idea that stuff mattered... she’s just a little girl. I didn’t think I needed to know...” He stopped himself before clearing the somber tone with a cough and dropping his head. “She must hate me.”

“No, that’s just me.” I smirked, causing him to chuckle. “Just do better. She wants to give you a chance. As much as I want to keep her away from you, I can’t... and I won’t. You’re her father as much as I’m her mother. She needs both of us.”

We sat in a brief silence and watched our baby go from station to station, playing her little heart out. She met another little girl and started dragging her around the play area, still within our view. Seeing her happy was the only thing that mattered to me.

“I’m sorry for how things have been between us these past few years.” I glanced over at him and found him staring at me intently. “I know I’ve done and said a lot of hurtful things over the seven years, but I do love my child. I love you for having my child, Denim.”

“If I knew you were married, we wouldn’t have had her,” I stated honestly. “I love my child with my whole heart, but I never would have consented to help you commit adultery, Bryce. That’s not me, and quite frankly, I understand why Rebecca doesn’t want Briley around?—”

“Who the hell said that?” He frowned as his posture stiffened. “She loves Briley.”

“Does she?” I stood and followed Bri and her new friend when I saw them skip farther down the row of trampolines. “When was the last time she asked you about having her over? Hell, asked you about her in general. Does she even bother to talk and play with her when she’s there? It’s understandable that you wouldn’t know how to play with her, but your wife is a woman who was once a girl—she knows what little girls like to do.”

Silence.

“That’s what I thought. Excuse me for not jumping every single time you want to have my kid at your house. I’m not entirely comfortable with it because of the animosity. This is chaos you created, and I need you to find a resolution. However, the answer isn’t to remove my daughter from my care. I know I work a lot, and I’m working on fixing that. Just don’t try to take her.” I looked at him with pleading eyes and prayed he understood. I wasn’t one to beg anyone for shit, but I didn’t mind when it came to Briley. “I will work on a better co-parenting relationship, but we can’t uproot her and cause unnecessary turmoil because of our situation.”

“Will you allow me to spend more time with her if I got a place in the city and

figured out the answers to those questions before transitioning her to my house more often?”

Bryce is a smooth talker, and right now, he could very well be blowing smoke up my ass. If spending one-on-one time with our daughter would help him form a better father-daughter relationship, then I wouldn't stand in the way.

“If you're really willing to try, I won't stand in the way of that.”

“You promise?” He looked at me with that panty-dropping smile of his, and I couldn't help but roll my eyes. “Let's hug on it then.”

“You tried it, nigga!” I pushed him away from me as Bri came barreling our way. I whispered, “You want to make things better? It starts now.”

I stepped back and watched as Briley ran to her father, and he caught her in his arms. He held her as she talked animatedly about the fun time she was having. Hanging on to every word, he carried her over to the ball pit and threw her inside. I smiled as she squealed with joy and begged him to join her. He did with no hesitation.

“Come on, Mommy!” she screamed with delight. “Come have fun with us!”

“Yeah, Mommy ... come on!” Bryce laughed as he picked her up and threw her again.

Looking back and forth between them, I couldn't help but think this was what I wanted for her. Briley deserved moments to cherish with her parents since she couldn't be raised under one roof with us both.

“Oh, what the hell...” I conceded as I kicked off my shoes. “One time won't hurt.”

* * *

“Sis, I am so happy to have you back in town. I can’t stand spending time with your other cousins.”

Laughing at Jerome, I turned to look at the various hot sauce bottles on the shelf in front of us. We decided to have a movie night at his house tonight, and I couldn’t wait. I decided to stand by my word and allow Bryce to keep Briley for the weekend. It’s been a week since our little family playdate, and he didn’t waste time finding an apartment in the city to spend more time with her. I made sure to let him know anytime I called, I needed him to answer. Bri picked up each time I called and let me know she was having the time of her life.

“They don’t deserve to be in the presence of greatness anyway,” I said as I pushed the shopping cart. He wanted to have a taco night, so we were getting all of the essentials. “I don’t get how they can be our family but hate our guts. I will never understand.”

As we walked through the store, we were so engulfed in our conversation about our trifling family members that we weren’t paying any attention to the person in front of us until the cart collided with the back of his ankles.

“Gahdamn, shorty!” He winced as he spun around and faced us with his hand on his hip. “I should shoot—oh. What’s up, Denim?”

A response was caught in my throat as I came face-to-face with Andre Boudreaux. Well, maybe not face-to-face because he was a lot taller than I remembered from the night at the club. I’ve met a lot of sexy men in my day, but nothing compared to Andre. His tattoos played peek-a-boo under his clothing, and the darkness of his eyes told me that he had some shit going on within him. Looking at him dressed in his Ralph Lauren hoodie and the iconic grey sweats, you would never think he was a

corporate man. You'd never think he was a killer either; the nigga looked normal as hell.

“Denim, you’re not going to introduce me to this fine-ass man.” Jerome shoulder-bumped me and broke the stare-off Andre and I were having. “Shit... I’ll introduce myself.” He pushed me out of the way and held his hand out to Dre. “Hey, Mr. Sexy Man! I’m Jerome, but you can call me anything you want as long as you calling me something.”

Dragging his eyes to Rome, I gulped lightly because many men couldn’t handle being hit on by a gay man.

Instead of causing a scene, Dre smirked and shook his hand. “This dick is for pussy only, my dude.” Both of our eyes widened at his response as he continued, “Maybe your girl can try it out and gossip with you later.” He licked his lips as his eyes roamed my body. “Yeah, I’ll definitely give her fine ass a story to tell. The way I would toss her muthafuckin’ ass with her pussy?—”

“Oh my gosh, Dre!” I stepped between them and chuckled nervously. “How are you doing? You look different without the bop on your arm. Matter of fact, where is Tammy? I don’t want her coming around the corner thinking I’m making moves on her newest boo.”

From the moment I spotted Andre in the club, I knew who he was. As long as I’ve been building a case against him and his cousins, I could easily put a face to all the Boudreaux Mafia members. Little did he know, I knew more about him than he could imagine. I also knew Tammy and her brother’s bodies were dumped on her mother’s porch the morning after she left the club with him. Tammy and her brother were both grimy, so there is no telling what they did to meet their demise, but that still didn’t warrant them to be murdered.

He chuckled. “That was just something to get my dick wet. Between me and you, I didn’t even get my nut off.”

“Where is she?” I asked, trying to bait him. “I haven’t seen her in a while.”

Eyeing me closely, he smirked as if he knew my game. I’m sure he’s looked into me or will after this encounter. Just like with Nate, he would only find what I wanted him to see. The bureau database ensured my career as an agent was invisible.

“That’s not my hoe, baby.” He shrugged as he turned around to leave. “Keeping track of disposable shit ain’t really my thing. Nice to see you again.” He winked before he turned his attention to my cousin. “Be easy, Jerome.”

“Say my name... say my name!”

Dre chuckled and walked off without so much as a backward glance as Jerome sang Destiny’s Child. His confidence and cockiness was sickening, but I admit, he had me intrigued.

“Girl! You’re crazy as hell if you don’t go and get that man’s number!” Rome fussed as we walked over to the meat section in search of ground turkey. “He offered you, what I’m sure is some prime dick, and you didn’t hop on it. What is wrong with you?”

“He didn’t ask for my number...” I shrugged my shoulders and browsed the selection. The meat was so damn high—it was ridiculous. “That man just wants to have sex, and?—”

“And so do you!” He placed his hands on my shoulders and spun me around. “Look, sis... I get it. You don’t want the miles of a ’98 Honda on your cooch, but who gives a damn! Single people do single shit. Nobody said you had to fall in love with the

man. Get you a good orgasm or two and go on with your life. Ain't nothing wrong with getting your back cracked every now and then."

Thinking about what he said, I agreed that he was right. The thing was—I didn't want this situation to be similar to Nate's. I didn't want to use my body to get what I needed from these men, but who was I to deny myself in this situation? On record, Andre wasn't on our radar, so technically, I wasn't doing anything wrong if I pursued him. Catching his eye again as he walked to the front of the store, I decided to throw caution to the wind. There was nothing wrong with me having a little fun. If I just so happened to stumble upon valuable information in the process, so be it.

"Andre..." I jogged up behind him and tapped his shoulder before he could check out. "I was wondering if I could get your number. Maybe we could go out sometime?"

With hooded eyes, he stepped toward me, hovering over my frame. This man's aura was intimidating, and for a moment, I second-guessed myself. The feeling was short-lived once he smiled and reached for my phone.

"Just so you know... I'm not a drive-in type of guy." He held my phone to my face to unlock it. "If you want to get in these draws, you gotta wine and dine me. You gone have to spend a check, love."

"Is that right?" I giggled as he handed me his phone. Inputting my number, I looked up at him. "If I spend a check the first night, are you going to let me fuck?"

The older lady passing us gasped in shock, and I was immediately embarrassed. Covering my face with my hands, I could hear Dre's infectious laugh.

"No need to be ashamed, baby." He chuckled as he removed my hand from my face. "I promise to make the night well worth it. Just know that I'm not looking for

anything major.” He lifted my chin and brought my eyes to his. “Dinner and dick is all I have to offer you, baby. Nothing more. You cool with that?”

“Y-Yes,” I stammered. How can something so vulgar be so sexy? “That’s all I want too.”

“Good.” He tapped my chin before returning to his shopping cart. “I’ll text you and let you know where I want to go. I expect to be picked up, so I’ll send you the address too. I want money for a haircut and?—”

“I know that’s right, Mr. Sexy Man!” Rome’s ignorant ass yelled, causing more attention our way. “Princess treatment only.”

Shaking my head at them both, I grabbed Rome’s arm and led him to the next available cashier. “Must you show out everywhere you go?”

“Girl, please.” He waved me off as he placed our items on the conveyor belt. “I’m the best thing in your life outside of my Briley Boo. Your life wouldn’t be shit without me.” He glanced over his shoulder as Andre left out of the store. “I can’t wait for you to ride that pony and tell me all about it. I just know he’s about to have you walking funny.”

As he continued loading our items for bagging, my eyes followed Andre all the way until he reached the parking lot. I felt like a creep watching him as he placed his groceries inside the brand-new Range Rover. I don’t know why he was in town or how long, but I hoped it was long enough to get the information I needed to take him and his cousins down.

This time, I was going to play my cards right and get the dick before the charges were pressed. Nate was tempting, but I was sure about going all the way with Andre Boudreaux. I knew I was playing with fire by attempting to seduce him with my

pussy, but I had to try my luck. I also knew the stakes of me getting burned were higher with this man than they were with the previous. If what I knew about Dre was true, I could very well lose the dangerous game I was playing. My job, ethics, and morals were not the only things I was risking—I was risking my life. I could only hope that at the end of this arrangement, he would be in cuffs, and I would be once again the victor.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

“So, I thought this would be a great location to start breaking ground for the casino,” Uno stated as we walked through the vacant space. “This lot is not too far away from the city's outskirts and has a steady flow of traffic. What do you think?”

Today, we were finally getting down to business with the next project, and I was excited about it. The city was cool and all, but I wanted to do what I came here to do and take my ass home. Before I had to kill Tammy and her people, I considered this time in Milly Grove an organized vacation. Now, I was ready to be near Pastor and Sweets—I was less likely to do what I did best when they were close.

Placing my hands in my slacks in hopes of warming them up, I continued to canvas the area. “This lot is massive, so I agree this would be a great location. I can already see the casino, parking lots or decks, and maybe even some onsite hotels if you wanted.” I stretched my hands across the space for emphasis. “What’s even better is the location...” I turned to face him as he gave me his undivided attention. “I’m glad you didn’t want to put this too close to Mills Manor. That area is nice and screams money, so it would work aesthetically, but the majority of your staff will come from the Heights and Highland Meadows. You want to think about the commute so your potential employees do not struggle to get to work every day. Yeah... you may have people from out of town that will want to come here to work, but you have to consider home first.”

“I agree. All right, then... I will get the city’s lawyer to get with Jules and figure out the numbers so we can start on this right away,” Uno replied as we finished inspecting the open space with nothing but dirt. I could see the excitement in his eyes as he spoke about the casino. I was happy that our goal to bring a casino to Milly Grove was becoming a reality. Back when Uno’s uncle was mayor, we knew the

casino wouldn't happen under his leadership. His uncle's greed is why I want to make sure Uno was in this deal for the betterment of Milly Grove first and the profitable business for the city's economy immediately after.

Looking up from his phone, he asked, "How long do you think it will take for it to be built?"

Taking a beat to make sure I didn't give him an unrealistic timeline, I shrugged. "I'm not going to lie to you; it's a lengthy process. You're looking at twelve to twenty-four months," I answered honestly. "I may try to recruit a special team to assist with it, and that may speed up the actual construction. Once we get a layout of how you want it to look, I will know for sure. The good thing is we're working directly with the city, so we don't have to go through too many hoops to get building permits. Just know that Boudreaux Enterprises gone make this shit as efficient as possible."

Nodding, we concluded the visit to the site and headed back toward City Hall. It was midweek, and traffic was in full effect. Thankfully, my commute from the penthouse to City Hall wasn't more than thirty minutes. It was a nice day out, but I was a Florida boy, so I hated any weather under sixty-two degrees. It was freezing like a bitch in Milly Grove, and the shit was driving me insane.

"My nigga... I'm going to need you to go buy a fuckin' coat with all that shaking and shivering." Uno chuckled as he adjusted the heat for me. "Other than the weather, how is my city treating you?" He peeked from the road to me. "Skip told me about that little situation with Tammy. My bad about that."

"Nigga, you don't control these hoes, so why are you apologizing?" I chuckled as we passed a sign that said Sunset Valley. "What's out that way?"

Dragging his eyes back to me, I noted the menacing look that came across his face. "Let's just say that's the spookier parts of town. I've heard stories of all types of shit,

from an old witch in the woods to even vampires living out there.” He chuckled and shook his head. “I don’t believe in that type of shit, though. What I do know... is not many people live or visit the area willingly. If they do, they rarely make it out. If you ever want to go, let me know and?—”

“Now, why in the fuck would I want to go out there when you just told me niggas are dying from the trip?” I shifted in my seat and mugged him. “Do I look like I play that shit? That may be up my cousin’s alley, but I will pass.”

People close to me often ask how I could take a life but was spooked by the thoughts of the supernatural. I don’t like the unexplainable. I can easily adjust to seeing someone killed in front of me, but I draw the line at seeing their bones reconstructed and them turning into animals. That shit isn’t normal.

The traffic was thinning out, and we were getting closer to town. We both had meetings to attend that would take up the rest of our day and had no other plans to see each other this week after this, so I took the opportunity to ask the question that had been lingering since my last grocery store visit. “Aye, let me ask you something... What do you know about a chick named Denim? Wild mentioned a few things, but I assume he tried to fuck her or something.”

Since running into her at the club and again at the store, she’d been on my mind heavily. Denim was bad as hell, and I wouldn’t mind getting to know her on a skin-to-skin level. When I told her the only thing I was willing to offer her was dinner and dick, I meant that. Her agreeing with me had me even more enthralled.

“Denim?” he asked in a confused tone until the name clicked in his mind. “Oh, her. Nah... he ain’t tried her, surprisingly. He hit a few of her family members, but that’s about it. Her people don’t make any noise, so it’s out of sight, out of mind with them. Why? What y’all got going on?”

“She asked me out on a date.” I smirked as he snapped his head over at me. “We've been texting and may be going out this weekend. I just wanted to know if I was going to have to kill shorty or not. Coming to your town and dropping every woman that pisses me off isn't on my agenda, so I'm trying to stop a homicide before it comes to it.”

“You and Skip are so much alike;—it's insane,” he mumbled as he pulled into the parking lot of City Hall. “Man, listen. Don't be out here causing trouble in my muthafuckin' city. You already had two bodies dumped off to a mother in the middle of the night.”

I shrugged because what did he want me to do? Let them rob me? I wasn't the type of nigga to cause trouble unless I was paid to do so. If niggas died by my hands, it was because of some shit they did—I didn't kill people for free.

“But on a serious tip... go out with her. I've never heard any shady shit about her or her family, and I know you have a way of getting her checked out, so I don't even know why you asked me.”

I rubbed my chin, chuckling at the thought that ran across my mind. “Yeah... I was thinking about hitting up Mimi. I'm not looking for anything serious. Just looking for a little fun while I'm here.”

“Hit up Adrian then.” He tittered when I raised my brow at him. “You're right... I just told you I wanted you to chill. Fuckin' around with his ass, y'all been done dropped three more bodies by the end of the week.”

Once inside the massive building that housed most of the city's officials, we both walked to our respective offices with murmured goodbyes. I appreciated Uno for setting up an office for my stay here since I still had things I needed to do for my own company. Getting myself situated, I powered on my laptop, and an incoming email

confirming a meeting with Jules and Milly Grove's city lawyer popped up immediately. I accepted the invite, happy to see these niggas were wasting no time expanding our partnership with them. I still hadn't spoken to my brothers since leaving. I wasn't pissed anymore about our last meeting, but I didn't have anything to discuss outside of business. If those niggas needed something, they would make enough noise to get a response out of me.

"This is Andre," I answered my cell as I typed an email to Rosier about today's meeting. I was pleased with the formal and informal discussions with Uno and his personnel, and I knew Rosier would be too.

"Andre, please..."

I frowned and pulled the phone away from my ear to view the Caller ID. The number was restricted. "Who the fuck is this?"

"I'm sorry for whatever it was I did. I miss you, baby!"

"Sandra?" I asked in confusion. "Girl, why are you calling my phone?" I finished typing the email and sent it before getting comfortable in my chair. "I told you what it was with us when I cut you off. Why do you keep blowing up my line? And why are you stalking my grandmother with the bullshit?"

Sandra is a good woman; I'll never take that from her. She was attractive and attentive, and her sex drive was appropriate for any man who needed daily satisfaction. But her delusion of us being together was insane, and she needed to let the shit go. Never once did I tell her there was hope in us being together—it would never happen. Therefore, she is the source of her own misery, and there was nothing I could do to help her unless she wanted to die.

"I need her to talk some sense into you, Andre." She sniffled as she spoke into the

phone. “We’re about to have a baby, and?—”

Click.

One thing I’m not going to do is entertain this bitch and her lies. I’ve never run inside her raw nor used any condom I didn’t provide. Unless she was able to get pregnant from swallowing my nut, she wasn’t carrying any child of mine. As I gathered my things to leave the office, I heard my phone vibrate again. Snatching it up, I was irritated.

“Listen here, wench! I’m tired of playing with you?—”

“Damn, Daddy! I just wanted to know how your day’s been.”

Pausing, I realized it was none other than Denim, and a grin spread across my face. I haven’t heard from her today, but I guess I’ve been on her mind like she was on mine.

“Better now...” I chuckled as I locked up the office. Passing by Uno’s, I threw my head up at him, and he did the same. “How you doing today?”

She giggled sweetly. “I’ll be doing a little better once I see you again. When is our date?”

If I was going to entertain this girl, I needed to check in with Noemi. She was fine as hell, but I didn’t miss her eagerness to be in my space.

“I have some business to tend to this week, so how about this weekend? Are you free?”

“Hell yeah, she is!” I heard her cousin, Jerome, yell in the background. I laughed as I

heard slight rustling and hushed whispers before he spoke again. “You better tell him yes then before I steal that nigga from you.”

“Aye, chill, Rome.” I hit the automatic start button for the Range to start the engine. I had preset the heat to turn on so when I eased inside, I would be greeted with some warmth. Georgia was colder than the fine-ass woman on my line. “What I keep telling you, man?”

I’m not one of those guys who are easily offended by the presence of a gay man. I’m a good judge of character, and I knew Jerome didn’t mean any harm with the shit he said. Nothing about me screams gay or down-low, and he knew it. If he ever lost his mind and decided to try me, though, it was lights out for his ass.

“I apologize about my cousin.” I knew she was rolling her eyes at the statement. “What were you saying? Saturday at seven?”

I chuckled as I slid into the truck, happy to find the heat blasting. “Yeah, that’s cool, baby. I’m leaving work, so I’m going to hit you later when I get to the crib.”

Disconnecting the call, I pondered on Denim while I merged into traffic. Deciding not to overthink it, I figured it was best to make the call I was avoiding.

“What can I do for you today, my dearest cousin?” Mimi’s loving voice flowed through the speakers. “And how soon do you need it?”

“Damn, boo... you act like I only call you when I want something?” I was slightly offended by the thought. “That’s how we’re doing it?”

She laughed. “I’m kidding, Andre.” The music in her background was turned down before she spoke again. “Seriously, what’s up?”

When I told her my plans regarding Denim, she agreed to have what I needed once she was done with her date, which caused me to frown.

“Date with who?” I all but shouted as I pulled up to a red light. “The guys know about this?”

“I’m grown, Dre. Can I not have a man?” She sighed.

“Of course, stinkabutt... when you’re thirty!”

“I’m twenty-five!” she screeched. “That’s five more years.”

“Time flies when you’re doing right by the Lord.” I chuckled because that was something Sweets would say. “Who is the nigga?”

“I’ll reach out to you when I have what you need. I love you.”

With that, the line went silent. Noemi was a good girl with a good head on her shoulders. I knew she wanted companionship, but seeing her as an adult and not the bratty kid following me around as she did years ago was hard.

For the next two days, I was going to stay at the penthouse and get the bulk of my work done before the weekend. If things panned out, Denim would get more than my attention. I hoped she was ready because I had so much pressure to release; I was thinking about double gloving my dick before letting it go swimming. I planned to make her back up all the shit she’d been talking during our flirty texting and phone calls. Denim was beyond gorgeous, and I knew she was going to look even better after I helped her bust a few nuts.

* * *

Looking over myself in the mirror, I'd admit I was one handsome-ass nigga. After reviewing the file from Mimi on Denim, I decided to commence with our date for the evening. With a fresh lineup and braids, thanks to Wild and one of his girls, I looked clean as fuck. My outfit for the evening was simple—all-black Givenchy from head to toe had never failed me. I looked and smelled like money, and I knew the diamonds on my neck, wrist, and ears were hitting just the way I liked them.

Buzz.

Hearing the intercom inform me of a visitor downstairs, I pulled up the app on my phone and spotted Denim. For a moment, I just took her in. The girl was stunning, and I smirked at her, unintentionally matching my fly. I wanted to admire her a little longer but knew the weather outside was biting. After buzzing her in, I grabbed my phone and wallet and left the bedroom. By the time I made it to the front of the penthouse, the elevator was dinging. Once she stepped out, it seemed as if the air thickened.

Once our eyes connected, we held each other's stare, daring the other to break contact. I had to give it to her; she's confident, but she'd met her match with a Boudreaux. Shifting her eyes, she took small steps toward me.

"You look... handsome," she said in a whisper before finally bringing her eyes back to me. "At least I know I'll have a looker on my arms for the evening."

"On your arm, huh?" I chuckled as I pulled her into a hug. She stiffened before melting into me. "You look good your damn self. That ass is fatter in this dress than it is in jeans."

Swatting at my shoulder, she gave me a smile that put the stars in the sky to shame. "Are you ready? Reservations are in forty-five minutes."

Extending my arm, she looped hers in mine and allowed me to lead her out of the penthouse. The elevator ride down was quiet as we both were in our heads. Once it dinged, I led her toward my truck.

“What are you doing?” she asked in confusion as I held the passenger door open for her. “I thought I was driving tonight.”

“Something about Jerome calling me a passenger princess doesn’t sit right with me, so I got it.” We shared a laugh as I helped her in. “I got it from here, baby.”

I know she was expecting to make all the plans for tonight, but I wasn’t going to do any of that shit. Whether I wanted something other than pussy or not, I will never expect a woman to wine and dine me. I was going to drop dick off regardless of the effort she put into the evening. As long as she consented, she was getting fucked down tonight.

“So... how are you liking the city?” she asked as we rode through downtown. The smell of her perfume was driving me crazy. It was sweet yet bold, and it blended well with her organic smell. “Do you think you could live out here?”

“I love the city, surprisingly,” I answered her as I nodded to the melodic tunes of Silk. “I don’t know about moving out here, but I would definitely get a spot for when I came to town. As you know, I’m only here for work, but I can see this being a nice spot for when I want to get away from Southern Florida.”

Keeping my job from her wasn’t a secret. I told her I was in town working with the mayor on renovations, and she was inquisitive about the growth in Milly Grove. When women find out I’m Andre Boudreaux, all they see is dollar signs. With Denim, she was more interested in me as a person, and I fucked with that.

“So... how’s your vacation going? Are you ready to go back to work?”

“Hell no!” She chuckled as I pulled up to the valet at Prime and Platter. “I’m in no hurry to sort through people’s taxes and property documents. Clerical administration is boring. The only reason I haven’t pursued another profession is because it pays so well, and nobody bothers me.”

I exited the truck without responding and rounded the front to help her out. The way her long-sleeved black dress hugged her body, I was more than ready to get something to-go and take her back to the spot to fuck her to sleep. Well, not to sleep because she couldn’t stay the night, but still.

“This place is nice,” I praised once we were inside. The lights were dimmed, and the ambiance was light but fancy. “You gone spend some big money on me tonight, girl.”

Giggling, she followed the hostess as she led us to a booth tucked away in the corner. I loved the fact that she got us something with a little bit of privacy. As I walked behind her, I couldn’t help but zone in on the thickness of her hips and the bubble of her ass as she switched in front of me. Doing a quick scan of the room, the men in passing also had their eyes trained on her.

“Andre...” she gazed over her wine glass at me. We’d been seated and had ordered our drinks and dinner. We were now waiting for our food to arrive. “Why is someone as fine as you single? I know the ladies back home just love you.”

“They do...” I smiled and continued answering, “I got one that’s crashing out over me right now, but it’s not my fault. I’m honest from the beginning on my intentions and expectations.”

“Which are?”

“I just want to have a good time.” I looked her in the eyes as I spoke. “I’m not looking for love. My career and life choices don’t leave any room for romance. I just

want companionship when I need to get my rocks off—that's it. If forever is the goal, I'm not the man for you."

She said nothing as our food was placed before us. Since she swore by this place, I let her order for me tonight. After we blessed the food, I dug into the oxtail pasta, and I had to admit that her choice was valid.

"Good, huh?" She wiggled her brows at me before taking her own bite. "Damn..."

I watched her moan and lick her lips as she ate her food. The way she was squirming with excitement caused my mind to wonder how she would sound once I slid this dick in her.

"Save some of that moaning for me, girl." I wink at her, causing her to blush. "So, tell me, why are you single, Denim? You can't be this fine and not have niggas beating down your door."

"They are." She smirked as she continued to eat. "I just haven't been interested in entertaining anyone until meeting you. Something about your aura consumes me to the point where I want to explode." She nibbled her lip before leaning over the table to whisper. "Something tells me you can fuck me just the way I need to be fucked."

"How do you want to be fucked, Denim?" I asked in a husky tone as I leaned forward. We were so close our lips damn near touched. "Tell me what you want a nigga to do to you."

Leaning back in her seat, she downed her wine before making her way to my side of the booth. Sliding me over, she sank into the seat beside me before placing her lips at my ear.

"I want to be fucked into the mattress, Andre," she stated seductively. "I want my

body to experience a pleasure it's never known." She placed her hand on my thigh and began to caress it slowly. "I want to be hoarse from screaming your name all night." Her hands traveled higher as she gripped my dick. "I want to be long stroked so deeply that I feel you inside of me days after you've finished tearing my pussy up."

Rubbing my dick, she kept her eyes on me. The lust in her eyes was evident, and I knew she could see it in mine. The more she rubbed, the more she was turning me on. Grabbing her wrist, she eyed me in confusion.

"This ain't grade school, baby." I took a sip of my drink and could still feel her fingers flexing on my dick. "If this dick is going to spit, it'll be in your pussy or mouth. So, tell me, ma. Which do you prefer?"

Panting, I could see the sweat form above her lips. She was aroused, and I was pleased to know she was feeling the heat just as much as I was. To prove my point, I placed my hand on her thighs and moved up search of her panties. Her dress was short, so when I reached her middle, I raised my brow, noticing it was bare.

"Why you don't have any panties on, Dee?" She gasped as I traced her outer lips, causing her to shiver. "Most importantly, why is this pussy so wet?" I asked rhetorically.

Clenching my arm, I began to strum her clit, and her eyes glazed over. Surrounded by people, she was lost in the thrones of the pleasure I was giving her.

"Andre..." she breathed out. I knew she was on the brink of a release. "I'm going to?—"

"How is everything over here?" The waitress came over to our table to check on us. "Do you all need anything?"

Denim said nothing as I continued to work her over discreetly. Her face was flushed, and her breathing became more erratic. Biting down on her bottom lip to keep from screaming, she climaxed with so much force that I could feel the wetness on my hand.

“Oh, fuck!” Her eyes rolled backward as she caught her breath. “Damn, Dre.”

“I know...” I chuckled as I removed my hand from under her dress. It was then the waitress finally saw what we were doing. Her eyes went wide in shock as I placed my fingers on Denim’s lips. “Taste it.”

Without question, she did as I commanded, and my dick was screaming for me to let him out to play. Feeling the additional growth beneath her limp hand, Denim turned to finally address the waitress who was still standing there. “Can we get a box to go, please? I have a new craving, and it’s not for pasta.”

Eyeing me seductively, I knew that tonight would be a wild one. If Denim wished to get fucked to the ground, I had no problem making her feel cement all night long.

* * *

“Damn, shorty! Slow the fuck down.” I chuckled as Denim and I stumbled inside the penthouse. “This dick isn’t going anywhere.”

“I need it now, Dre.” She purred as she pulled me inside the living room. There was no mood to set because the moon shining as bright as it was did it for us. Pushing me onto the couch, she unzipped the side of her dress, and I watched as it pooled at her feet. Before she could hook her thumbs in her panties, the clearing of a throat caused us both to pause.

“Well, welcome home, you two.”

Creeping through the shadows of the room was none other than Jules Boudreaux. Dressed in a black hoodie and sweats, he looked like the spooky nigga I knew him to be. Frowning in confusion, I stood and tried my best to shield his view of Denim. She wasn't my girl by any means, but I didn't want her feeling humiliated.

"Nigga! What the fuck are you doing here?" I looked around as if he wasn't alone. "More importantly, how did you get in? My phone didn't buzz to let me know you were here."

"Now you know that shit means nothing to a nigga like me." He chuckled as he pulled from his Slim Jim. Chewing slowly, he dragged his eyes over to a quiet Denim. "Hello. You must be Denim." Fully dressed now, she looked from him to me once he extended his hand to her. "It's nice to meet you. You're a horny little something, aren't you?"

"Nigga! Why in the fuck are you here? I'm in the middle of something." I gritted my teeth in frustration. Not only was he able to infiltrate my space, but he was about to ruin my nut for the evening. If I didn't bust soon, I was liable to shoot up Tammy's mother's house.

"The seriousness on his face tells me this isn't a friendly visit, so um... I can go and let you guys talk." She looked back and forth between us before turning to me and standing on her tiptoes to kiss my cheek. "Call me later, okay? You owe me one."

"If you give me ten minutes to get rid of this nigga, I'll give you nine." I gripped her waist and pulled her into me so she could see how hard I was. "You don't have to go."

"Call me," was all she said. Giving Jules a tight-lipped smile, she entered the elevator and headed out into the night. Dragging my eyes to Jules, he was now seated near the window and examining the city like he was really captivated by the shit.

“Did you get the file from Mimi on Denim?” he asked over his shoulder. “You’re in a fucked-up city, and all you know are the Mills. Is it safe to have her here?”

“Nigga, what?” I reared back and asked. “I’m Andre Boudreaux. You need to ask if it’s safe for her.” I frowned as I mugged his back. “Man, if I don’t get some pussy soon, I’m killing all you niggas,” I grumbled as I turned on the living room light. Glancing over at the end table, I noticed a manilla envelope that wasn’t there when I left. Walking over, I picked it up and was confused about the contents. As I looked it over, Jules began to speak.

“It was never my intention to insinuate you couldn’t do your job as a member of the Family. You know damn well Rosier and I don’t even play like that when it comes down to it. If anybody does their job and exceeds the expectations, it’s you.” He turned to face me and added, “At the end of the day, we’re blood, Dre. I know the shit gets complex, but we work through this shit as a unit. We talk the shit out and come to a solution together. The ghosting shit is not needed.”

“You’re right.” I nodded as I continued to look through the folder. “My bad for going ghost on y’all niggas, although I’m sure my point was made by doing so.”

“And it was. It’s no worries, though.” He sneered as he pulled a pack of fruit snacks from his pocket. “Just know... I told Roselyn and Sweets on your ass, and they’re going to have a few words for you when you call them, which needs to be tomorrow.”

“Roselyn is your mama, nigga. Call her that.” Frowning at his snitch ass, I dropped my eyes back to the files and photos now spread across the glass coffee table. “What the fuck is this?”

“You’re next assignment.” He leaned back into his chair and eyed me. “Mimi had the room scanned so that we could speak freely. Since the incident with David and your father, talks of trafficking have been quiet. As you know, everything hit close to

home for us, so we couldn't just let it go. After finding out how far up the ladder this shit went, we had to back off, but now we think—no, we know—we've found the head of the organization. You know what they say about cutting off the head of a snake, right?"

"Cut off the head, and you kill the muthafucka." I stroked my chin in deep thought. "This shit is crazy."

Before me were several documents showing text messages, emails, and money exchanges about selling girls from all over the States. The more I read the information on the papers, the angrier I became.

Jules stood from his seat. "So, Zoo wants you to go ahead and eliminate the problem. If you go ahead and kill him now?—"

"Someone else will take over the operation," I mumbled, cutting him off. I glanced up at him and shook my head. "You know as well as I do... this shit will always be a never-ending cycle. We gotta make an example outta these niggas. Death by my hands is too easy. Sometimes, you have to make a nigga feel you in other ways."

I knew I was playing a treacherous game by letting these people go on with their everyday lives as if they weren't on borrowed time. Still, I believe there was a better way we could get these lowdown, dirty niggas. Death was too easy—too merciful. I wanted to see these niggas spend the rest of their lives in prison.

"What do you have in mind?" Jules eyed me curiously while crossing his arms. "How do you want to play this?"

Standing, I placed the papers in my hand on the table. I paced the room for a few moments before an idea came to me. It was risky, but if I played my cards right, it would be well worth it.

“I want to take a page from the Book of Zoo: I’m going to buy a girl.”

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

“Jerome, please act like you have some sense tonight,” I pleaded with my cousin as I placed the bowl of Rotel dip on the counter. I don’t know what made me try to be a peacemaker and host game night at my house with my cousins, but here we were. “If y’all tear my shit up, I promise you... I’m tasing every single one of you.”

Giving me a “bitch please” look, I shook my head as he sashayed his ass into the living room. I took a deep breath and prayed the night went off without a hitch. After talking to my mother, she convinced me it would be nice to host something because the other girls had been feeling left out when it came to us spending time together. Their comments were funny to me because no one had reached out to me since I’d been home. As I placed the food on the counter, I heard my phone buzz in the distance. Nibbling my bottom lip, I was pleased to see it was Andre.

Dre:

You giving me some pussy tonight or not? I’m not pressed or no shit like that. It’s just that I met a lil’ shorty at the store and she was looking kind of right in her jeans.

Me:

Is a fat ass the only thing you think about?

Dre:

No...I think about the head and pussy too. What are we doing, love?

Me:

I'm hosting game night at my house if you want to come through later.

Giving him my address, I placed my phone back on the counter and continued with the setup. I needed to be careful with Dre and remember I was trying to build a case against him. I wanted to sample the dick, but I wanted him locked up even more.

"Is that my baby daddy texting you?" Rome sang as he entered the kitchen. This fool was taking Casamigos shots like water, so I knew it was going to be a long night. "Are you going to finally give him some coochie, or do you need me to do it? You know I don't mind."

Ignoring him, I thought about how hot and bothered Dre had me at dinner the other night. I have never been so bold to do something like that in public, but I liked it. I just knew he was going to fuck the shit out of me when we got back to his place, but I was scared out of my shoes when Jules Boudreaux crept from the shadows like Candyman. From what I've gathered, he's just as dangerous as Rosier and Andre, but nothing has been proven. For all I know, he's just an ominous lawyer.

"All right! The girls are here." I clapped as I finished setting up the food and drinks. "Act like you have sense, Jerome."

Not even bothering to wait for him to respond, I took a deep breath and greeted my cousins, Rissa and Arnez. Jerome and I were both almost thirty, so I blamed their childishness on being in their mid-twenties still.

"Well, hello." I smiled and gestured for them to come inside. "I'm glad you girls could make it tonight."

"I'm glad you remembered little ol' us..." Arnez was the first to start her shit. "I thought you were too good to be in the same space with your hood rat cousins. I mean, you're a big shit officer and all."

“Federal agent,” I corrected as I rolled my eyes. “My occupation doesn’t have anything to do with why we don’t hang, Arnez. You know you and Rissa keep y’all’s distance for whatever reason y’all have conjured in your minds.” I folded my arms as I eyed them both. “If we’re going to enjoy the night, let’s go ahead and get the animosity off your chests.”

The girls looked at me with nothing but disgust and disdain. I didn’t know their real issue with me, but if they wanted to discuss it and move past it, now was the time. I wasn’t doing this foolish shit each time we see each other.

“You think that just because you have the government job and rich baby daddy, you’re better than us.” Rissa was the first to speak. “You think because you have the nice house and nice car that we’re beneath you. We come from the same family, and we’re cut from the same cloth?—”

“You’re more so cut from a dirty dishcloth, and we’re from a Louie rag.” I squeezed my eyes shut as Jerome chimed in. “All that hate y’all have in your heart for this girl is unwarranted, and it’s not her fault that y’all would rather fuck for a three-sixty frontal than to have a career.” He stood from his seat on the couch and pointed between the two of them. “I will not sit here and listen to either of you try to shame her for wanting to do something with her life—for not only her but her child. If y’all can’t stop with the madness, y’all need to go ahead and wrap a to-go plate and dip out. No need to sit up in her house while holding all that jealousy up in you.”

“Jealous! She’s nothing but a baby mama just like us!” Arnez all but yelled while smirking. She folded her arms and matched my stance. “At least we didn’t have a baby by married man. Right, Rissa?”

“Right,” Rissa said, egging Arnez and her foolishness on. I rolled my eyes, ready for everyone to get the hell out. Cousins or not, I was with Jerome—there was no need to sit in my house, hating me.

Pausing to catch my bearings so I didn't end up being the one that tore my house up from beating ass, I thought about the married baby daddy I had. This is one of the reasons it was hard for me to be cordial with Bryce. He causes unnecessary drama in my life without even being present. This is the one thing people could throw up in my face when we had disagreements. Having a baby out of wedlock is one thing, but having one by a married man is grounds to have you shunned from the church and family, especially with black people. It doesn't matter if you knew if he was married or not; you were liable to be the family's black sheep. And sometimes, that's exactly how I felt.

"Would you rather her have a baby daddy like Tyrone?" Jerome glanced at Rissa. "One that lives with his mother and won't even buy your twins a pack of beef-flavored noodles." Examining Arnez, he smirked, and I knew he was about to go too far. "How's Mark? Last time I saw him, he was at my friend Milo's house, getting bent over an ottoman. You still out here trying to be a family with a man that takes more dick than me?"

"Okay, that's enough." I stifled my laugh as Arnez turned beet red. Everyone knew Mark was a bottom when she decided to have a baby with him. She was the only one in denial about it. "I love you three. I just want us to get along. No one of us is better than the other."

"Who?" Jerome stuck his nose in the air as I gestured for them to go into the kitchen so we could eat. "I'm most certainly better than these hoes."

"Rome..." I eyed him, making a facial expression that had him lifting his arms in surrender. Thankfully, the conversation died down once the food was served and drinks started to flow. Before long, we all had loosened up and were having a good time.

"Nezzy, I saw the finest man of my life earlier today." Rissa was high as hell, and I

could tell she was feeling good. “He told me all he wanted was his dick sucked, and we couldn’t exchange numbers, but I swear... he wanted me. If I run across him again, I’m going to trap his ass.”

Giggling, I couldn’t stop myself before I was bent over in laughter. I don’t know if it was the alcohol or her delusions, but Rissa was a sad case. Yes, I loved her, but there was no way I would trap a man just to end up in a worse situation.

“You want to tell me what the fuck is so funny?” She mugged me as she stood from where she was sitting on the couch. I was stretched out on the floor and didn’t feel the need to match her energy, so I stayed put. No matter how much she jumped bad, she knew I would mop the floor with her ass. “You’re just mad no one wants your wannabe, high-class ass.”

“Uh, sis... look who I found roaming up the sidewalk. He brought a friend too!” I snapped my head in the direction of Rome’s voice and locked eyes with Dre. “Let me find out they wanted to pull a two-man.”

“Say, Dre... who the fuck is this nigga?” Skip asked as he snarled and pointed at Rome. “He must don’t know who the fuck I am. I will hurt his fruity-ass.”

“Ohhh! Hurt me, Daddy,” Rome sang, causing Skip to pull his Glock from his hoodie. We all gasped as I scrambled to my feet. “Oh, you mean business!” Jerome flailed his arms and ran to the other side of the living room. “Shit, you’re fine and crazy. Let me sit my ass down. Mama isn’t ordering a new wig until summer, and she’s going to be pissed if she looks burnt out putting me away next weekend.”

We all looked at Rome before we burst into laughter. Even Skip chuckled as he shook his head and placed his gun back under his hoodie. Scanning the room, he took a seat in the corner away from everyone and said nothing else. He’s been that way for as long as I can remember, so it wasn’t unusual.

“Hey, boo!” Rissa crooned as she walked over and wrapped her arms around Dre. I couldn’t stop myself from scowling if I wanted to. “Let me find out you followed me here so you could see me. I knew we had a connection.”

“Girl, if you don’t unhand me, I’m going to cut them muthafuckas off and slap you with them,” Dre said menacingly as he peered down at her. “Don’t ever touch me again. Got it?”

“Y-Yes,” she stammered as she stepped back from him. “I’m sorry.”

“I know this ain’t the new stepdaddy you was talking about?” Rome walked over and looked between them as Dre made his way over to me. “Looks to me like he doesn’t want you near him, let alone for you to give him some pussy.”

“Dre, you know Rissa?” I asked as he walked past me and slapped my ass before heading into the kitchen. His lack of response pissed me off. There’s no way the night would end with us in my bed if he’s had my cousin. “Dre!”

“Aye! Who the fuck you hollerin’ at?” He was back in front of me before I could blink. “I met that girl earlier and told her she had a fat ass and perfect lips for sucking dick. To be honest, I can fuck you both or neither one of you because I’m single.” He glared at us both before going back into the kitchen. “Where the plates, though? A nigga got the munchies like a muhfucka.”

Frowning at his retreating back, I could hear Rome snickering. Hearing shuffling behind me, I glanced over my shoulder and noticed Rissa gathering her things.

“This is exactly what I mean...” she fussed as she snatched her jacket from the hanger. “You’ve always been jealous and wanted to be like me. I can’t even have a man to myself without you wanting a piece of him too.”

“You must be talking about a different nigga because I know it ain’t me.” Dre came back into the room and said with a mouth full of chips. “I just wanted some sloppy toppy—just a lil’ back-alley action. It never would have gone any farther than that.”

Fuming, I could see the fire in her eyes as she mugged Dre. “Fuck you, you pussy-ass nigga!” Her words left her mouth with such force that she was spitting as she stepped to him. “You better hope I don’t tell my brother to come through and murk your ass!”

Suddenly, the room grew eerily quiet as the words left Rissa’s lips. My eyes shot back and forth between them as Dre slowly sipped his bottled water. I prayed that he didn’t spaz out on her in here. So badly did I want to tell her she went too far with the wrong nigga. I could only hope it wasn’t too late for her.

“Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?” he finally replied to her threat, cool as a cucumber. Never taking his eyes off her, he asked again as he bit into his chicken slider. “Have you?”

“What?” she asked in confusion as she pulled out her phone. “The fuck do you mean?”

“Do you accept Christ into your life and know that he died so we could live? Do you relinquish your soul to him so you can make it to Heaven?” He bit into a deviled egg and continued to examine her with dark eyes. “Do you? If you don’t, now’s as good a time as any to give your life over to him.”

“Rissa, I think it’s time for y’all to go.” I grabbed her wrist before gesturing to Arnez with my head to move toward the door. “I will get up with y’all later,” I said, opening my front door for them to exit.

“Repent your sins to Christ, baby. Don’t get caught slipping when the rapture comes.” We all froze when we reached the door. Slowly, we turned and faced Dre.

“Send your brother my way, and I will make sure he knows the goodness of God’s grace and mercy. He’s going to need it for where I’m sending him.”

Hurriedly pushing them out of the door, I locked it behind me and leaned against it as I eyed Andre. He’d walked over to the corner and seemed to be having a good laugh speaking with Skip. I was too stunned to ask him if his words were meant to scare us or if he had just threatened my cousins’ lives in front of me.

“Bitch, you can have that crazy-ass nigga...” Rome walked over to me and murmured. “I knew there was something wrong with him. You can’t be that fine without having screws loose.”

Never taking my eyes off Dre, I shuddered at how right Jerome was. Maybe I should leave well enough alone when it comes to him. If he ever found out who I was or what my true intentions were, I have a feeling I would have to make peace with the Lord because Dre wouldn’t show me an ounce of mercy.

* * *

“You know... outside one cousin threatening my life and the other sexually harassing me and my boy all night, I had a decent time.” We all were sitting on my front porch while he and Skip smoked. They didn’t know I had a daughter, and I didn’t want the smell to linger, so I appreciated them wanting to bring that outside. “It’s rare that I kick it like this, but this was nice.”

I smirked as I slid into his lap and wrapped my arms around his neck. “Let me find out you like me. I got you thinking about the possibilities, now... huh?”

I was worried the night was going to end in a blood bath, but thankfully, it went well once Rissa and Arnez left. I haven’t laughed as much as I had in a long time dealing with Dre and Rome. Skip didn’t say much, but every now and then, I would catch

him with a slight grin on his face.

“If we met in a different time, and I had a different life, I would entertain the thought of something more.” He held my stare as he exhaled the smoke. He didn’t drink much, but the man smoked like a chimney. “You’re a beautiful woman, Denim, and I know we’re still getting to know each other, but I’m good at reading people. I know the shit with you is more than surface level. But you’ll make a man happy someday—believe that. That man just ain’t me.”

The tone of his voice had my heart pounding in my chest. I was getting uncomfortable under his stare, and I felt as if he were looking into my soul. I didn’t want him to see the real me because I knew it would get me killed. Leaning forward, I kissed his cheek before standing from his lap. I could see him hardening in his joggers. “So... are you staying the night? You owe me something, sir.”

With hooded eyes, he continued to pull from his blunt but said nothing. One thing I’ve noticed about Dre is that he can be extremely serious and quiet until you place him in an environment that makes him comfortable. That could have been the reason for Skip coming tonight. Either way, I’m happy they were able to come through.

“I mean... is it safe?” He glanced up and down the empty street before settling his eyes back on me. “Your cousin did say she was sending her brother over here, and I don’t want to be in a situation where I have to defend myself.”

Staring at him blankly, I wanted to call bullshit on his claims. I knew it was nothing for this man to take a life. His sarcasm and smugness pissed me off, but I had to play it cool.

“Rissa is all talk...” I rubbed his arm and assured him. Shrugging, he said nothing. Sighing heavily, I looked around for Jerome, but he was nowhere in sight. “Where’s Rome?”

“He galloped to some black Charger down the street and rode off about thirty minutes ago.” Skip chimed in with an answer as he chuckled. He stood, walked over, and dapped Dre. “You straight here? I need to go check on something at the club. I’ll roll back through to get you.”

“Yeah, that’s fine.” Dre stood and ashed his blunt before draping his arm around my shoulder. “I’ll text you.”

We both watched as Skip trekked over to his blacked-out Suburban truck before pulling off down the street. Leading him back inside, I locked the door behind us. Jerome had helped me clean before he left, so I hit all the lights and escorted him to my bedroom. Before I could close the door, he spun me around and pinned me to the wall.

“When we went to dinner, you told me about all the shit you wanted me to do to you.” He held both my wrists above my head in one hand and kicked my legs apart as his other hand slid into the front of my tights. It was so fast and unexpected, but I was instantly turned on. “You still want that shit, Denim?”

Moaning as he began to strum my clit, my eyes rolled to the back of my head in pleasure. Rocking against his hand, I could feel my juices leak from me. My eyes popped open once his movements stopped.

“Why did you stop?” I frowned, reaching down and attempting to make his hand move again. “Please, Dre.”

“Answer my question.” He pinched my small bundle of nerve, causing my back to arch. “Do you still want to be fucked, Denim? Tell me what you want, or I’ll walk out of this door right now.”

“Fuck me...” I begged shamelessly, still trying to fuck his hand. “I want you to fuck

me, Andre.”

Chuckling darkly, he began fondling me once more, but this time, he eased two fingers inside of me. My stomach tightened as he stroked me, and I knew I was close. He breathed against my neck as he nipped it gently. “I feel that pussy gripping my fingers. How you think this dick is going to feel? You ready for that, Denim? You want a nigga to fuck that pussy and treat you like the bad girl I know you want to be?”

I’d never had anyone talk to me the way he was, and it was turning me on something serious. My hips seemed to buck against his hand on its own, but once his teeth latched onto my nipple through my T-shirt, I was done for.

“Ohh fuckkk!” I shook against him. I tried to pry my hands from his, but it was useless. “Andre!”

“Mhm. That’s all I want to hear from you tonight.” He snickered as he continued to ease his fingers in and out of me. “You been wanting this dick and to get fucked, right?”

“Yes...” I panted as I came down from my release. “Oh fuck, yes!”

“I’m going to give you what you asked for.” His eyes were on me as he slid his fingers from my pussy. Placing them on my lips, he traced them with my juices before nodding his head upward and telling me to open. Obediently, I opened my mouth and relished how I tasted as he slid his fingers in and out.

“How does that taste?” he asked. I could feel his dick against my stomach, causing my focus to shift. His face was perfect, and his lips looked luscious. I wanted to explore his mouth with my tongue, so I pushed my body closer to his.

“Kiss me and see...” I exhaled as I leaned my head toward his, only for him to move his head away. “What’s wrong?”

“I don’t put my lips on nothing that ain’t mine, baby.” He stepped away from me, going into his pocket and pulling out a gold-wrapped condom. “You ready?”

I wanted to be offended but now wasn’t the time. If he wanted to get right to it, that was fine by me. Pulling my shirt over my head, I watched as his eyes roamed my body and my bare breasts came into sight. After having my daughter, I had to get them lifted because they sagged a little. I was a solid 34C and was proud of my girls. Shimming from my tights, I stood before him in all of my naked glory.

“Damn,” he murmured as he stepped before me and slapped my ass. “You’re perfect.”

Giving him the most seductive smirk I could muster, I dropped to my knees and pulled his sweats down. The most beautiful, curved nine inches of power sprang out and tapped me on my lips. My mouth watered as the precum formed and dripped from the tip of his dick. Peering up at him, I stuck out my tongue for a little taste.

“Mhm...” I licked my lips as I took him into my hands. I giggled at its heaviness. “Oh, you brought dick, dick.”

“Man, watch out.” He chuckled as he pulled away, slowly rolling the rubber down the length of his member. After he was done, he placed his hands on his hips and eyed me. “Now, where were we?”

Confused, I just knew he didn’t expect me to take him into my mouth, covered in a condom. To my dismay, he was serious. When he swiveled his hips and placed his dick on my lips, I shook my head. “Uh, I don’t want to break the mood, but I’m not putting no nasty latex in my mouth, Dre.”

He stood firm, looking like a statue from the Renaissance era. I looked deeper into his eyes, hoping to get a read on how this was about to play out since his mouth and face said nothing. Finally smirking, he used his free hand to pull my chin down, opening my mouth. “Is that right? I beg to differ, Denim. Go ahead and open that mouth up and give it a try.”

Cautiously, I opened my mouth and allowed him to ease himself inside. I fought through the taste of the latex, and sooner than I thought, I could no longer taste the rubbery substance. After two more strokes, I loosened my jaw and took him in further.

“That’s right, Denim,” he groaned as he caressed my cheek and pushed himself in deeper. “You look good as fuck sucking this dick.”

There was something in the way he praised me that aroused me. I couldn’t believe I was allowing this man to fuck my mouth with a condom on because, in a way, it felt somewhat demeaning. But my pussy was beyond leaking—I was running like a tub faucet. Relaxing my jaw more, I started massaging his balls and was awarded with the sexiest growl I’d ever heard.

“Mhm,” I hummed on his dick and felt it jump inside my mouth. Bobbing my head faster, he gripped the bun in my hair and began fucking my face off rhythm. Once his movements became jerky, I knew he was close.

“You gone swallow this shit?” He gritted his teeth as he pumped faster. I knew my throat was going to be sore once we finished. “Fuck! I’m about to come. Open your mouth, baby.”

Pumping in and out of me a few more times, he removed the condom hastily and fisted himself as he jerked out his orgasm. Ropes and ropes of cum shot all over my mouth, face, and breasts as I watched him. It was the most erotic and vulgar thing

I've ever done, and I was surprisingly turned on to the fucking max.

"You're nasty as fuck, shorty." He stumbled back onto the bed, huffing. I kept my eyes on him as I licked the remnants of his semen from my lips. "Come over here and put that ass in the air for me."

Rising from the floor, I crossed the room and crawled onto my bed. Positioning myself in the middle, I laid my chest flat on the bed and arched my back so my ass was up, just the way he wanted.

Smack! Smack!

"Shit!" I hissed as he alternated between slapping each ass cheek. From left to right, I twerked each one as I gazed over my shoulder and watched as he placed another condom on. "I'm ready whenever you are."

With his teeth tucked between his lips, he grabbed me by the ankles and pulled me to the edge of the bed. Repositioning me back how I was, he slapped his dick against my ass before dragging it alongside my pussy.

"Know that once I give you this dick, nothing will come from it." He eased the head in before pulling it back. "Know there will never be more between us than this." He leaned forward and spit, and I could fill it drip down the crack of my ass. Using his thumb, he began to rim my anus, and I moaned from the sensation. "I might fuck you again, or you may never hear from me again. Just know... you will never experience another Andre Boudreaux. R.I.P. to this pussy."

Easing both his thumb and dick into me at once, I felt as if I was about to combust. Moaning embarrassingly loud, I gripped the sheets as he stroked both my holes. I was losing control and losing it fast. The way this man was handling my body, I knew the dick was worth each body he's caught over it.

“Shit, Dre...” I moaned, barely getting it out as he pulled out of me only to slam back in. “You’re fuckin’ me so good.”

“I know.” He held back his groan as he pushed his thumb deeper into my ass and held it there. “I didn’t come here to make love, though. Hold on tight, baby. I’m about to beat this pussy up.”

Widening his stance, he slapped my ass once more before placing his hand on my waist and stroking me long and strong. He had a steady rhythm as he fucked me better than I had ever been fucked. Rotating his hips in a way that would make the best dancers jealous, he was hitting spots I never knew existed.

“Andre!” Before I could prepare myself, I was releasing. “Fucckkk!” I screamed as I felt a gush of liquid leaving my body.

“Mhm,” was all he said as he pulled his thumb from my butthole. “You ain’t seen nothing yet.”

Without slowing his stroke, he pulled one of my legs from underneath me as he placed one of his on the bed. Straightening my leg to the side of me, he stretched me out to where his dick was going even deeper.

“I c-can’t take it!” I cried as I felt my stomach tightening once more. Looking back at him, he didn’t have a care in the world as his eyes were trained on my ass. “Andre, please!”

“Shut up and take this dick.” He pushed my head into the mattress, panting. “You can and will, Lil’ Mama. You feeling too good.” Bringing his other leg onto the bed, he fucked me harsher, and I had yet to dry up. He was fucking me harder than I’d ever been fucked. He was literally standing up in my pussy. I couldn’t help but to think about how I should’ve been in pain, and yet I was the wettest I’d ever been during

sex.

“Dear God!” I cried out as I came, having my third orgasm of the night. “Shit, Dre! I?—”

“Nah, don’t hold up the prayer line for no dick,” he cut me off and chuckled as he slammed in and out of me. All that could be heard in the room were my cries and his pelvis slapping my ass. “God has his hands full with me, baby. We won’t bother him with the petty shit. This dick is going to bless you in ways you never imagined. We’re almost there.”

Flipping me over onto my back, he placed my legs behind my head and got into the push-up position before he was right back at it. I tried my best to move from under him, but I had nowhere to go. I was bawled up like a pretzel at Auntie Anne’s, and I immediately knew I would come again.

“Tell me this is the best dick you ever had...” he groaned as he placed his hand around my neck. The pressure he applied was sending me into my fourth orgasm, as I’d just predicted, and I knew it was going to take me out. “Tell me what the fuck I already know, Dee!”

“I-It’s the best.” I looked up at him as tears streamed from the corner of my eyes. “This dick is—oh, my! Dre!”

“Yeah... that’s it, Lil’ Mama. Milk this dick up.”

Shaking violently, I came with such force that it pushed him out of me. Slamming back in, he fucked me ferociously as sweat poured from both of our bodies. My release seemed like it was never-ending. I was being fucked into a coma. Before I knew it, everything went black.

* * *

“Ugh,” I whimpered as I pried my eyes open. “What the fuck happened?”

Trying my best to move, I winced in pain. My body felt as if it had been hit by an eighteen-wheeler. As I lay there, memories of the night flooded me at once. Reaching for my phone on the dresser, I noticed three hours had passed.

“I know damn well his dick didn’t make me pass out.” I giggled as I finally turned over. “Dre, you’re?—”

Rolling to the other side of the bed, I looked around in confusion to see it was empty. Gripping my sheets, I wrapped them around my naked body and roamed room to room in hopes of finding the man who fucked me unconscious. Bummed, I sighed heavily, seeing that he was long gone. I knew staying the night was probably a no-go for Dre, but I was hoping he’d at least wait until I woke up.

“Better now than when I lock his ass up...” I murmured as I went to the fridge for a bottle of water. “Makes it easier to cut his ass off.”

Feeling my phone vibrate, I clutched my chest as my heart dropped at my mother’s name, blinking across the screen. My mind instantly thought the worst as I quickly answered the call. “Mama, what’s wrong? Is Briley okay? Daddy?”

“She’s fine, dear.” She sniffled into the receiver, causing me to stop in my tracks. I was already headed to my room to shower and dress because her tone told me something was wrong. “It’s your cousins, Rissa and Eric. There was an accident on the interstate, baby. They didn’t make it.”

Dropping the phone, I ran into my living room to cut on the television. Keeping the channel on local news, I was able to see the breaking news banner run across the

screen with a car accident shown from a helicopter. Police cars, paramedics, and fire trucks lit up the road as the horrific scene was displayed for the world to see. Tears formed in my eyes—I was in complete shock. Rissa was just here with me, and now she was gone. To know she was with her brother...

“Send your brother my way, and I will make sure he knows the goodness of God’s grace and mercy. He’s going to need it for where I’m sending him.”

“No...” I shook my head profusely.

There was no way Andre could have done this. Could he have ordered an accident while fucking me into the mattress? Or did he do this after leaving me comatose? The more I thought about it, the angrier I became. I wasn’t fond of his illegal activities before today, but now, I vowed to make Andre Boudreaux pay for crimes—especially the pain he’d just inflicted on my family.

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Peering down at Denim's limp body, I couldn't help but admire her. Baby girl was fine as hell and admittedly the best pussy I've ever had. The way she gripped my dick made me believe her shit was explicitly made for me. As I ran my fingers along her lower lips, she moaned subconsciously, and I couldn't help but chuckle. I told her this dick was going to turn her every which way but loose, but I never expected her to lose consciousness. Thankfully, we released at the same time because somnophilia will never be my thing.

Leaving her sprawled on her sheets, I made my way to her en suite bathroom to clean myself. I noticed she kept a clean place, and I could appreciate that since it's rare that I find myself at a woman's house other than Sandra's. After getting myself together, I passed a snoring Denim and moved toward the front of the house. Her small, two-bedroom home was located in a decent neighborhood. I shook my head, remembering her cousin threatening to send her brother after me. I was going to light this bitch up like the Fourth of July had that threat become a reality.

"She's never mentioned a kid," I said to myself as I passed her second bedroom. The door was slightly ajar, so I pushed it open and glanced inside. The room was lightly decorated in various shades of pink and purple. The child must've been a little girl, or at least I assumed. My thoughts were proven true when I noticed a picture of Denim and her daughter on the nightstand.

"What's good, Skip," I answered my vibrating cell phone as I backtracked out of the room. "You outside?"

"Yeah, you ready?" he asked, smacking in my ear. "Or you decided to have a slumber party so you could cuddle and shit?"

Hanging up on him, I strolled out the door. The night air was brisk as fuck, and I was more than ready to get to the condo so I could shower and go to bed. Taking note of my surroundings, I liked how the streets had no form of life. It was almost three in the morning, and everyone was sound asleep.

“Damn, nigga! Those wings must be good as hell with the way you’re smacking?” I frowned as I blew into my hands to warm them up. “You could have at least asked a nigga if he wanted an order. I got money to pay.”

Pointing toward the backseat, I saw a to-go container with my name on it. The ride to my condo was on the other side of town, so we had a little way to go before we got there. Getting comfortable, I began to tear into my food. In the distance, I could see flashing lights. Sitting up, I closed my box as Skip was being flagged to stop by a uniformed officer.

“Mr. Mills, good evening.” The officer leaned onto the driver’s window and greeted Skip as we approached the scene. “I’m going to have to ask you to follow the detour signs to get to the other side of town. This ramp has been closed off.”

“Is everything okay?” Skip asked as he looked from the officer to the scene before us. “It looks pretty bad up there.”

“Car accident.” The officer shook his head as he peered ahead. “Single car that flipped and caught fire. Unfortunately, no survivors.”

Blowing a low whistle, I resumed eating my wings as the officer pointed out the route Skip needed to take. Getting a glance at the wreckage, I could see the smoke coming from the charred bodies as they lay out on the asphalt.

“Hope they made peace with God,” I mumbled with a mouth full of chicken. “Never know the day nor the hour, especially when you’re dealing with a nigga like me.”

The dinging of the penthouse elevator pulled me from thoughts of Denim's cousins. She called me the next day in her feelings about the accident, and I gave her my condolences. She asked if I could come over and see her, and I did. I didn't want to abandon her in her time of need, and although we were just casual, I didn't mind comforting her. Those folks were her family, and it was natural for her to be in mourning. I'd just fucked the lining out of her pussy, so the least I could do was cuddle with her. Killing two more people in Milly Grove was not on my agenda, but I will never tolerate someone disrespecting or threatening me. I wasn't going for it, and it was unfortunate that her cousin had to find out she was dealing with a real-life killer the way she had.

"My baby!" my grandmother sang and ran to me as soon as she stepped off the elevator. It'd been a few weeks since I'd seen my girl, and I was more than happy to have her come visit me. "You've grown so much!"

"Wanita, unhand him and let me love on my boy." My grandfather ordered with a smile. It was always funny how they treated me as if I was ten years old. "You look well, son." He pulled me into his embrace and patted my back. "How's Milly Grove been treating you?"

Pop knew of a few things I've gotten into since I've been here, and while he's not too happy about it, he's still been my main source of prayer and guidance.

"Your sweet baby has been causing a ruckus in the city since he stepped foot here," Wild's stupid ass chimed in as he and Skip helped bring the bags in. I had a meeting with Uno today, so they did me a solid by picking up my grandparents from the airport. "The ladies love his ugly tail, for one."

"You want to tell Sweets about your run-in with the ladies, or is this just about me?" I raised my brow at Wild, causing him to instantly shut his mouth. "That's what I thought."

Skip chuckled as he brought in the last bag. "Is there anything we can do for you, Mr. and Mrs. Jones? If not, Wild and I are going to get going and let you all get settled. Plus, we want you all to come back and visit us. If you stick around my brother too long, you may head for the hills early."

As I turned to face and thank him, I noticed the figure standing behind him for the first time. My mother was standing, quiet as a lamb, looking around as if waiting for a coyote to attack. My grandmother told me there would be a chance that she'd come on this trip with them, but I didn't think she would. She and I hadn't spoken since the day at my grandparent's house, so I didn't know how to greet her.

"Hey, Mama..." I walked over, deciding to pull her into my arms. She stiffened before wrapping her arms around me. I won't lie; it felt good to be embraced by her. Smiling at her, I added, "How are you doing? How was your flight?"

"I'm good, Andre." She returned a small smile as she clutched the strap of her purse. "The flight was nice. Thank you for flying us first class, but it would have been nice to have been on the jet."

The disdain in her voice caused my smile to drop suddenly and all chatter to cease. My mother had a way of ruining the simplest moment with her snide remarks and rude attitude. Taking a deep breath, I ignored her comment and turned to Skip to dap him up. After thanking him, he walked to hug my grandparents before he grabbed his brother and left.

"Now, Mattie! We agreed that we would enjoy this trip and try to mend our relationship as a family." My mother frowned as she took a seat in the living room. "We're not going to do this."

"Do what?" my mother asked as she began to stroll around the living room. Her nose was turned up as she looked at the expensive decor. "How are we supposed to heal if

I can't speak my truth?"

Leaning against the wall, I crossed my arms and watched my mother as if it was my first time seeing her. I thought that because she showed up here, she was ready to have a civilized conversation with her baby boy, but I guess I was wrong. If only she knew how imperative it was for her to convince me she wasn't a threat to the Family, maybe she would be singing a different tune.

"Mattie, have a seat," my grandfather called out to her and pointed to the empty loveseat across from him and my grandmother. "We're going to discuss this now because I'm not about to listen to this the entire week."

I could tell my mother wanted to fight him on it, but she did as instructed and plopped down on the loveseat. Walking over to the kitchen, I grabbed three bottles of water before returning to the common space.

"Say whatever it is that's on your chest, Mama." I handed her one of the bottles as she mugged me. "I'm not one to ever do the back and forth, but I will make an exception one time and one time only. Speak your peace so we can move on."

Taking a sip of the water, she eyed me before snickering. My parents and I looked at her as if she was crazy, but we let her have her moment.

"Move on?" she asked as she leaned forward and looked at each of us. "You hear that? Your grandson wants to move on and act as if he's not the reason my husband—his father—is no longer here today. You killed him!"

I could feel my jaw tick as the blood in my veins began to chill. I was so tired of the same dance and song with this woman. It was time to give her a rude awakening.

"You wanna know the truth, Mother?" I reclined in my seat and got comfortable as I

observed her. “Your husband wasn’t a good man.” She went to say something, but I held my hand up to stop her. “I let you talk, and now you will be quiet and let me.” Neither she nor my grandparents said anything as I continued, “Your husband... my father, as you keep reminding me, was a pervert. He bought and sold women against their will without a care in the world.”

“Liar!” She jumped from her seat and screamed. “How dare you say that about him?”

“He raped and beat women for his enjoyment, Ma! Hundreds, maybe thousands, of women have been beaten, raped, or murdered because of him . Not only that, but he was jealous of Uncle Samuel! He would have done anything to be in his position as head of Boudreaux Enterprises, a company that in no way was he qualified to run. Rosier and I went to school, seminars, and sat through billion-dollar meetings with Uncle Samuel, and are the only ones capable of running the business the way it should be. You know what your husband would have done?” I scooted to the edge of the seat and eyed her as tears slid rapidly down her cheeks. “he would’ve turned our billion-dollar business into a cover-up for a sex trafficking ring. He was in bed with a lot of bad people. He made a lot of bad choices that he never took accountability for. If anyone is at fault for killing your husband, it’s him.”

Looking at my mother, I knew the love she had for me was no longer there. I never wanted my mother to find out about all of the vile things her husband had done, but she kept pushing and pushing, so I had no choice but to tell her. I loved my father because he was just that, but that nigga was all bad. Nothing good would’ve come from him if he was still alive. I had made peace with his exit, and it was time my mother did the same, or she would be exiting too.

She seethed as she stood up. “Claude told me a long time ago that you thought your uncle and cousins were better than him. He told me all the time that he asked you to help him move up the ladder of the organization, and you refused.” She stepped closer to me, and I glanced at my grandparents after sending up a quick prayer. If she

put her hands on me, I was going to sling her out of the fucking window. “You’re pathetic and a sad excuse for a son. I hate you, and I can’t wait for you to meet the same fate you brought to him!”

Raising her hand to strike me, I jumped from my seat and grabbed her wrist. Her eyes bulged in fear as I hovered over her. She’d tried me for the last time, and it was time for her to know a little secret about her son.

“You want me to die, Ma? Your own flesh and blood...” I chuckled as I continued to squeeze her wrist, causing her to whimper. “Let me let you in on a little secret then, Mattie Boudreaux.” I snatched her jacket open, and just as I suspected, she was wearing a wire. Ripping it from her shirt, my grandparents gasped in shock as my mother shook with fear. “I’m not the nigga you wanna cross. I’ve been respectful because you’re my mother, and I love you, but your son is a man with low tolerance for disrespect. I’m the reason you still have the comfort to move around without a care in the world. If I ever take my hands off you, it will be you—not me—that’s resting in piss with your husband.”

“Andre!” my grandmother pleaded from the couch but didn’t move. “Let her go, baby boy.”

“The Bible says to honor thy mother and father, so my days will be long, right? Right?!”

“Y-Yes,” Ma nodded and cried. “Please don’t hurt me.”

“Hurt you?” I chuckled menacingly as I glared at her. “I’ve honored you and my father since the day I was conceived. I’ve always loved, cherished, and respected you both and never received it in return. That’s over, Mattie. Do you know what type of man I am? No...” She shook her head profusely. “Try and put your hands on me again, and I will throw you out of that fuckin’ window, but not before I break every

single bone in your body. That's two hundred and six bones that I will break one by one while making sure you're lucid for it all."

Pushing her from me, she fell to the floor as I clutched the wire in my hands. I balled my fist tightly as my chest heaved rapidly, with me standing over her. At that moment, I knew the relationship between us was tarnished—never to be the same.

"Son, where are you going?" My grandfather followed me as I went into my bedroom to gather my keys and phone. If I stayed in this house a second longer, I was going to kill her.

"I gotta get out of here..." I stepped past him and reentered the living room. My mother was still bawling on the floor as my mother consoled her. Walking past them, I pressed the button for the elevator doors to open. It didn't take long before I stepped inside. Before the doors closed, I locked eyes with my mother.

"I don't care where you go or what you do. Don't be here when I get back."

Before she could respond, the doors were closing—not just on the elevator, but the relationship with my mother. Accusing me of murder was one thing, but blatantly trying to set me up? That shit was unforgivable. I knew I had to tell Zoo about this, and it broke my heart. I tried as hard as I could to spare her. Her fate was now in his hands.

* * *

After leaving the penthouse, I drove aimlessly around the city, trying my hardest to calm down and ease my mind. I needed to have a conversation with Rosier, but not right now. I wasn't in the right headspace, but it would have to happen sooner than later. My thoughts and emotions consumed me, and somehow, I ended up parked outside of Denim's home. It was risky and unusual for me, but I wanted her company.

“Hello,” she answered the phone groggily. I shot my eyes to the dashboard for the time. It was a little after nine, so I knew she was probably sleeping. “Is everything okay, Dre?”

“Uh, yeah...” I gripped the back of my neck as I examined her dark home through my windshield. “I didn’t mean to wake you, Lil’ Mama. I was in the neighborhood and decided to pull up. You know what? My bad. I’m just going to?”

“Dre, it’s fine.” She giggled sweetly. I could hear her moving around, and I assumed she was getting out of bed. “I’m opening the door. Come on in.”

Cutting the engine, I got out of my truck and scanned the neighborhood before I walked up her driveway. By the time I reached her front door, she was opening it.

“I honestly didn’t mean to wake you,” I stated as I stuffed my hands in my joggers and studied her. Her tiny robe was a sight to see, but I wasn’t here for that. “Did I interrupt anything?”

“Not at all.” She smiled as she eased the door open and let me inside. “Come on in. Would you like something to drink?”

Just like the last time I was here, her home was clean, with nothing out of place. The smell of homemade baked cookies filled the air and reminded me I hadn’t eaten all day. Just then, my stomach growled.

“Ha! I have some leftover spaghetti. Let me fix you a plate.”

“Oh, I’m good.” I shook my head as I followed her. “I don’t eat anyone’s red sauce. You won’t have me out here crashing out over some pussy.”

Rolling her eyes, she walked to the refrigerator and pulled out all the items needed to

make a ham and turkey sandwich. I sat at the kitchen island and observed as she moved around effortlessly. Denim was a beautiful woman and seemed to have her shit together. I didn't think I would ever be able to commit to a woman, but if I were, I would like to have a woman like her on my arm. I just knew that woman could never be her.

"How old is your daughter?" She froze as she slowly trailed her eyes over to me. Nodding toward the small purse on the counter, I added, "You don't take me as a Hello Kitty type of woman."

"I'm not." She relaxed and snickered as she slid the napkin to me. The simple sandwich looked so good that I started to tell her to leave everything out so I could fix another when I finished. "She's six going on sixteen. She's my favorite girl in the world, though."

Nodding, I ate as I watched her clean. She wasn't obligated to tell me anything about her personal life. She and I were only supposed to be dealing with each other on a physical level. Still, knowing that didn't make me want to get to know her any less. She'd intrigued me enough that I would kill to know more.

"I was thinking that maybe you could accompany me to an event next weekend," I inquired as I sipped the ginger ale she'd placed in front of me. I usually wouldn't ask this of someone I'd just met, but Denim's vibe was cool, and after reviewing the file that Mimi sent over, I knew everything I needed to know. She went to answer, but a thought occurred, causing me to cut her off before she could even speak. "Are you still dealing with her father? I don't mean to be invasive—just curious. I'd hate to knock that nigga outta his shoes because you know the fellas don't play about their baby mama's."

She smirked as she peered at me over her shoulder. I couldn't help but do the same. If she didn't fix her face, I was going to give in to my intrusive thoughts and have her

head knocking into the dishwasher. Visualizing her body under the robe had me adjusting my homie and telling myself that tonight wasn't for any of that.

"I thought it was just dick and dinner with us, Dre. But give me the details of where we're going. I'll make a special exception to our previous discussion by attending." Crossing her arm, she frowned. "As far as baby daddy's go... her father and I aren't together. We never really were. He's married, but we're working on doing better with co-parenting now. It's nothing more than that there."

Her tone told me she didn't want to discuss it, so I left it alone. Sitting quietly, I continued to eat as my phone vibrated repeatedly in my pocket. I had several missed calls from my grandmother, so I did the right thing and answered. "Yes, Sweets."

"Oh my goodness, Andre Boudreaux! You had me worried sick!"

"Sweets... I'm fine." I slid my napkin back over to Denim, pointing at the fridge for another sandwich. "I just needed some air. I'm—" I paused and glanced up at Denim as she got to work on my food. "With a friend. I'll be back later. Are you and Pop okay?"

Hearing me refer to her as a friend caused Denim to grin. Being as though I disrupted her sleep for some bullshit, she could have the label for the night.

"Yes, yes... we're fine. We just wanted to make sure you're okay. I've never seen you so upset, baby."

I stiffened at her words because the last thing I ever wanted to do was make my grandparents uncomfortable in my presence. They knew what I was capable of to some extent, but I never wanted them to feel as if I could commit such actions in their company.

“I’m sorry,” I said somberly. “It was never my intention to do that. We can talk in the morning if you’re asleep when I get back.”

“Okay, baby... that’s fine,” my grandmother said as Dee slid the second sandwich and a bag of Doritos across the counter. “I’m going to bed now since I know you’re okay. Adrian took your mother back to the airport about two hours ago.”

Saying nothing in response to that, I told my grandmother I loved her and would see her later. I was relieved to hear my mother had taken my advice by no longer being at the penthouse when I got back. I meant every word I’d said to her. If she ever tried me again, I’d end her myself.

“Everything okay?” Denim asked as she snapped me from my thoughts. “You’re quiet.”

“Family shit.” I shrugged and continued to eat. “I’ve been going through a lot.”

“You want to talk about it?” she asked and seemed genuinely interested as she propped up against the counter. “I may be a clerical administrator on paper, but I was a therapist in a past life. Would you feel better if we moved to the couch?”

Eyeing her breasts as they spilled from her robe, my eyes moved back to hers, causing her to drop her head and blush. She’d better be careful before she found herself fucked. “If we go to that couch, the only thing I want to talk about is you being still while you take this dick, love.” She gasped as she balled up a paper towel and threw it at me. “Maybe this time, the dick won’t cause you to black out.”

Scoffing, she stomped from the counter, and I couldn’t help but bend over in laughter. After finishing my food, I cleaned behind myself and went in search of her. It didn’t take long to find her on the couch watching television.

“You’re an asshole.” She rolled her eyes at me as I took a seat beside her. “Don’t touch me.”

“Lil’ Mama, don’t act like that.” I pulled her into my lap and took the remote from her hand. Finding SportsCenter, she groaned as highlights from today’s games were discussed. Rubbing her smooth thighs, a sense of calmness came over me. The tension of today’s events slowly faded, and I could feel myself relax. With her head on my shoulder, I could feel her body unwind before soft hums filled my ears. Peeking down, she appeared to be asleep.

“Growing up, I had a good life,” I rattled off as she snoozed in my lap. “My two-parent household was everything I could pray for. My parents and grandparents fought a lot over who was my favorite since I was an only child.” I couldn’t help but smile at the memories before continuing my ramble. “I always envied my father and cousins because they had siblings, and I was all alone. I had them, but I resented their bonds. My cousins are my best friends now, though, and I’ll never make light of our relationship. We sometimes fight, but those are my brothers, and I’ll do anything for them.” I sighed heavily as I threw my head back against the sofa. “My parents had a love that was like no other, and I often think what it would be like to have that same love.” I peered down at Denim as she stirred in my lap and got more comfortable. “That’s not in the cards for me, and it’s cool because I’m probably not equipped to love somebody enough to adjust my lifestyle, anyhow.”

I wondered what it would be if I had a wife and kids like my cousins, but I’m selfish. The life I live is one I don’t want to step away from. Work, my grandparents, and the Family would always come first, and I wouldn’t want to add another person to the roster. I also didn’t want to share who I truly was with anyone new—enough people knew who Andre Boudreaux really was.

“When my father died, my mother blamed me...” I shook my head at how our relationship had diminished before his death. “She hates me and wishes death on me

every day. I love her and always will, but I have to let her and her accusations go for my own sanity.”

Massaging Denim’s scalp as she slept, she nuzzled into my chest. I admit it was nice to hold a woman so closely. Even though she was asleep, expressing my intimate thoughts aloud felt good.

“Psalm Chapter 34 Verse 18 says, The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. ”

Letting my mother go was the hardest thing I’d ever do, but it must be done. Closing my eyes, I prayed for her soul and mine as we entered into unknown territory. As I sat here and embraced Denim, a serene feeling of peace rolled over me. I did my part as her child. If my mother wanted this to be where our love for each other ended, so be it.

Me:

I love my mother.

Zoo:

I know it, bro.

Me:

The betrayal from her is deep, but my hands are tied.

Zoo:

What are you saying, Dre?

Me:

I accept the assignment.

Exiting the text thread to Rosier, I wrapped my arms around Denim and pulled us both down on the couch. With her laying on top of me, I let go of all thoughts of doubt. My job is to serve and protect the Family from all enemies. This time, it just so happens to be my mother. Just like her husband, she has to go. Zoo had agreed to handle her, and I had agreed to handle the sex trafficking ring. As I went back to rubbing my fingers through Denim's scalp, I closed my eyes and got more comfortable. I hate what the relationship with my parents came to, but it's no fault of mine. Maybe they can reconnect in the afterlife and discuss if turning their back on their only son was worth it.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

“Have you been enjoying the time with your father?” I stared at my daughter as she ate her ice cream. It was his weekend with her, but I wanted us to spend a little time together before dropping her off. “He told me you guys have been playing a lot of fun games at his house.”

Co-parenting with Bryce has gotten better, and I was thankful. He’s been spending more time with Briley, and while I haven’t been vocal about it, I’m glad he’s been stepping up more with her.

“Yes! He plays with me now and watches all of the princess movies!” She was beaming, and I couldn’t help but giggle at all of the ice cream splattered over her face. “I like his new house more than I like the old one.”

Nodding, I listened to her sing the praises of her dad. He’s been sticking to the schedule of getting her every two weeks at his apartment in the city. At some point, he will have to transition her to the home he shares with his wife and kids, but the current plan has worked so far, so I wouldn’t criticize.

“Are you ready?” I watched as she finished the last bite. “Your dad just texted me and said he’s ready for you to come over. Something about making pizzas and bracelets.”

“Oh my gosh! Yes!” She jumped from her seat and ran over to me. “Help me clean myself, Mommy, so we can go!”

Chuckling at her urgency, I cleaned her face before we hurriedly made our way outside. Her father’s apartment wasn’t too far from the ice cream parlor, so it took us

no time to drive there.

“Make sure you have lots of fun, okay?” I ruffled her cute little curls as we stood at his door and waited for him to open it. “I will be back to get you on Sunday.”

Mumbling a response while she played on her iPad, I chuckled to myself at how the device was a blessing and a curse. When her father finally opened the door, I gave him a polite smile before letting Briley’s hand go. Looking at Bryce, I assumed today was an off day for him because of how relaxed he was dressed. I rarely saw him out of suits and ties, so I was pleased to know he was being a dad when Bri was over.

“Hey, baby!” He smiled as he bent down and kissed Bri’s forehead before she dashed inside. Chuckling, he dragged his eyes back to me. By the smirk on his face, I knew he was about to annoy me. “You know... there’s a kiss for you, too, if you want it.” Scanning my body, he pulled his top teeth over his bottom lip. “You look good, Denim.”

Today, I had some business to attend to, so I was dressed in a simple black blazer and slacks that hugged my body. I was in no way attempting to impress Bryce, so his compliments did nothing for my ego. Instead, I scrunched up my face and pushed past him. “Bryce, move.”

The mother in me had to always check and make sure things were the way they were supposed to be before I left my child in his care. I’d thoroughly researched the area and apartment complex, and although it wasn’t somewhere I expected Bryce to rent, it was nice and seemed safe. Turning back to face him, I noticed his gaze had been on my ass. Snapping my fingers to make a point, I waited until his eyes met mine before speaking. “She’s excited about whatever plans you two have, so I hope you’ve had plenty of rest. She just had some ice cream, so maybe save any additional sugar for tomorrow.”

“Got it,” he replied, smiling as he ran his hand down his face. “I admit... I’ve dropped the ball with her, but I’m thankful for the chance to make it right. I’ve been enjoying every second of our time together, so I appreciate you for agreeing with this new arrangement.”

Giving him a small smile, I browsed the space once more. Everything was up to par, so it was time for me to head out. No matter how good we were at the moment, I didn’t want to be around him any longer than I needed to be. Bryce and I could be parents, but we would never be friends.

“Well... you two have fun. I have to go.” I stepped past him and headed for the front door, only for him to grab my wrist. Halting and looking down at his hand on me, I slowly dragged my eyes up to him. “Is there a problem?”

Stepping closer, Bryce attempted to touch my face, but I took a few steps back until my back bumped against the door. Frowning, I tried to snatch away from him, but he wouldn’t let me go.

“There’s nothing wrong with us rekindling what we had, Denim.” He caressed my cheek as he stared at me. “You’re already the mother of my child, so there’s nothing wrong with me getting what’s technically mine.”

“Yours ?” I asked, holding in the vomit that desperately wanted to escape from the close proximity.

“Mine,” he reiterated as he stepped even closer, mashing his body into mine. “I’m the only one that’s put a baby in you, Dee. You haven’t dealt with a man since me, and?—”

“And who said that?” I asked as I raised a brow at him. “Just because you haven’t seen me with one doesn’t mean I don’t have niggas.” I smirked at his eyes darkening.

He was pissed. “Sorry to break it to you, but me being single has nothing to do with you, Bryce. My focus is on my daughter and my job. You need to focus more on the kid instead of the mother because, I promise... I don’t want you.”

This time, when I pushed him off, he moved. The look of anger wasn’t missed, but he had no reason to be upset. He and I haven’t dealt with each other in a long time, and we never would again.

“You’ve been having different men around my child?” He fumed as I placed my hand on the doorknob to leave. “I don’t want Bri seeing her mother be a whore and think that behavior is okay.”

“I’ll see you guys on Sunday,” I called over my shoulder as I opened the door. His comments meant nothing to me. “While you’re worried about me and what I have going on, you need to have a conversation with your wife if you want my child to eventually start visiting the home you share with your other kids. There’s no sense why she’s more comfortable in your ‘new house’ versus the one you share with your family. I won’t tell you again... I’m not playing when it comes to my daughter. Fix your face and show my baby a good time.”

Stepping out, I closed the door behind me. I rolled my shoulders and took a deep breath before I made my way back to my truck. Bryce had a way of pissing me off, and I hated when he got under my skin the way he did. After taking a few moments to gather myself, I headed to my next destination of the day. Hopefully, the information I received would put me back in a better mood.

* * *

Pulling up to the park, I looked around in hopes that I wasn’t stood up. Surveying the area, I found her seated near a pond at the far end before the woodsy walking trails started. Gathering my things, I took a deep breath and proceeded her way.

“Good afternoon. Thank you for meeting with me, Ms. Boudreaux. It’s nice to finally meet you.”

The night Andre popped up at my home, I was shocked, to say the least. I knew immediately that something was wrong, so there was no way I was going to turn him away. He may have thought I was sleeping when he bared his soul, but I was wide awake as I turned into a recorder. It took everything in me to keep my breathing steady and my heart from beating out of my chest. When he admitted that his mother hated him, the wheels in my head began to turn. I took a chance by reaching out to her, but I had to do it if I wanted any information that would lock him away for life.

“It’s nice to meet you as well, Officer Atkins.” She stood from her seat and shook my extended hand. “Thank you for looking into my husband’s case.”

When I contacted Ms. Boudreaux, I may have lied about who I was and my intentions. I called and told her I was a highway patrol officer looking to close my file on Claude Boudreaux’s accident and was hoping she could clear a few things up for me. I offered to visit her at home, but she informed me she was in Milly Grove. I was confused at first, but then it clicked, and I assumed her being in Milly Grove had something to do with why Andre ended up at my house the other night.

“It’s not a problem at all.” I gave her a small smile and gestured for her to reclaim her seat on the bench. “First, I want to offer my condolences. I’m sure losing your husband in such a tragic way had been heartbreaking, to say the least.”

Her eyes misted as she nodded. “It has been tough, but I will feel better once my Claude receives the justice he deserves.” She dapped her eyes with her Kleenex and continued, “I’m not convinced it was an accident. That’s why I’m hoping you can help me.”

Confused, I opened my notepad and looked through my notes. “It says here... he was

in a car accident. That he was driving drunk, and?—”

“I don’t care what the file says!” She threw her fists on her legs and glared at me. “I know my son and that gang of his is the reason my Claude is no longer here. I know he murdered my husband!”

Hearing her say Andre was the cause of his father’s death caused my heart to stop. That couldn’t be true, could it? I knew Andre was a ruthless killer, but would he go as far as killing his own flesh and blood?

“Those are serious accusations, ma’am.” I shook my head and jotted down a few notes. “Based on the findings in the accident report, it says your husband’s blood alcohol level was three times the legal limit.”

“Listen here, sweetie. I don’t care what you or anyone else has to say. I know that bastard and his cousins killed my husband!” She stood and began to pace before me. “That’s why I can’t go home without him admitting what he did! He has to admit it!” The wild look in her eyes couldn’t go unnoticed, and I became a little uneasy as she continued to rattle off allegations.

“You see, my Claude was part of the Boudreaux Mafia, and he told me he was on his way to the top! He was next to be in charge. See... his brother was always jealous of him and stole the position right from under my husband’s nose. Samuel’s death was supposed to solidify Claude’s new role, but Rosier came in and took it right from under him!”

“Rosier?” I asked as I flipped through my notes, pretending not to know who he was. “Your nephew?”

“Yes!” She nodded as she continued to pace. She looked as if she was on the verge of a breakdown, and I was second-guessing my decision to come here. There was

obviously something wrong with her. “Zoo is what they call him. He has an actual zoo too! Gators, gorillas, and kangaroos—he uses the animals to murder people and dispose of the bodies. Don’t get me started on that little witch boy brother of his!”

“Jules?” I asked with a raised brow. “Did you just call him a witch?” I sighed before closing my notebook and standing. “Maybe we should end this conversation. I was hoping I would be able to help you?—”

“Don’t you see! They’re all dangerous!” She snapped, turning to face me before gripping my shoulders. “They killed my husband, and now... they’re going to kill me! I know it, oh God, I know it! I tried to set my boy up! I was wearing a wire, and he found it!” She looked around in a panic. “They’re watching me!” She looked around frantically and caused me to do the same. Snapping her eyes back to me, she shook me with so much force that I thought my neck was going to crack. “Now they’re watching you too! They’re going to kill me! They’re going to kill us both!”

Taking a few steps back, she twirled and dashed across the park before I could stop her. I shouted her name repeatedly, but there was no use. She was long gone.

Standing there stunned, I thought about the strange encounter. Ms. Boudreaux was mentally unstable, but I wondered if there was some truth to what she said. Dre killing his father in a car crash is possible because I’m all but certain he did the same to my cousins. I couldn’t prove it, but it was a feeling I couldn’t shake.

“Maybe I’m in over my head,” I told myself as I walked back to my car. “Maybe I should?—”

Stopping in my tracks, I felt the chills run down my spine as the hairs on the back of my neck stood. Looking around, I had the eerie feeling I was being watched. I glanced around, and the park was as empty as it was when I arrived. High-stepping to my car, I hurried inside and locked the doors. I didn’t give the oil time to flow before

I pulled off. I eyeballed my rearview several times to ensure I wasn't being followed, but no cars were behind me.

The farther away I got from the park, the better I felt. Maybe his mother's paranoia had rubbed off on me. Her talks of the mafia alone let me know she wouldn't be a reliable source. Mafias haven't existed for years, and if their existence were true, you wouldn't be able to prove it. No matter how much I searched, I couldn't find anything incriminating on Andre. I was thinking I should leave well enough alone. If Dre and his family are as dangerous as his mother says, I'm in way over my head.

* * *

"Damn, sis! Let me find out this is why Rissa was mad."

Slapping Rome on the shoulders as he passed, I stared at myself in the mirror. Tonight, I was accompanying Andre to his business partner's event. I was nervous—not because of the event itself, but because I would be back in Andre's presence. It would be the first time since I had a conversation with his mother, and I was anxious.

In the days after meeting with Dre's mother, I was on high alert. Everywhere I went, I felt as if I was being watched, but I could never pinpoint anyone lurking. I thought about reaching back out to her to make sure she was okay but thought better of it before I could pick up the phone. She was volatile, and I didn't want to do anything else to jeopardize what I was trying to do.

"That's not a nice thing to say about the dead," I said over my shoulder as I snapped on my earrings. "How are you not torn up about losing our cousin?"

"R.I.P. to that hoe but fuck her." He shrugged as he came over and helped me fasten my dress. "She hated our guts and shitted on us every chance she got, sis. Excuse me

for not caring about a bitch who could give two fucks about me." Spinning me back around, he judged my reflection in the mirror. "You look beautiful tonight, and whatever has been on your mind these past few days needs to be placed to the back of your mind. This is the first time in a long time that you've been able to go on a date and actually let your hair down—unless you count letting that man finger fuck you at dinner."

"Rome!" I gasped in embarrassment. "Why did you say that?"

"Rome!" he mocked me and rolled his eyes. "I'm serious! You've told me all about your work and how you have to seduce men to get the intel you want. Tonight... you're going to be on the arm of a man you didn't have to manipulate. Enjoy the company and let him put your legs in the air later. You can grieve over Rissa's dead ass later."

Hearing him speak about my job tactics caused my heart to palpate. I didn't mind manipulating men if it meant I was cleaning our country of the filth that plagued us. Men were easy targets because most were gullible and stupid. Those low-hanging qualities didn't stop them from being killers, drug dealers, and abusers, though. I was beginning to wonder if there was more to Dre because he didn't feel gullible or stupid when I was with him. He also didn't feel like a killer, even though I knew deep in my soul he was, so liking him had me looking at myself differently. That still didn't stop me from wondering if he'd see me in a different light if the circumstances weren't the same. I'd approached Dre under false pretenses, and no one knew because I was moving on impulse. My want to collar him could have me face-to-face with the corporate suit killer. Letting my hair down was not in the cards for me, and I couldn't stop the tapping thought that I'd possibly fucked up.

"Jerome, I need to tell you something. I think I messed up with Dre. I?—"

Ding Dong.

“Hold that thought...” Jerome cut me off as he walked up the hall to open the door. I wanted to confess to him what I’d been up to regarding Dre, but I would have to do that later since the very man was now stepping inside my house.

“I know you fuckin’ lying! Why in the hell are you so fine, Dre?”

“Rome, if you don’t get your gay ass away from me!” Andre shouted, but I could hear the amusement in his tone. “I don’t know how many times I have to tell you... I like pussy!”

Grabbing my clutch, I took one last look at myself. The nude and black floor-length gown fit my curves like a glove. The heels, with the high thigh split, made my legs look even sexier. Thanks to Jerome, my hair and makeup were perfect, finishing the sexy, yet sophisticated look. Dabbing myself with Dolce and Gabbana perfume, I was ready to go. Taking a deep breath, I made my way toward the front of the house. Once I entered the living room, all banter ceased.

“Well, damn...” Dre murmured as he swallowed me with his eyes. Standing from the arm of the sofa, he slowly began to walk my way. I held my breath as he walked around me and stalked my frame as if I were his prey.

Whap!

“Dre!” I gasped at the sudden slap of my ass. “What was that for?”

“Just a little preview of what you’ll get later.” He winked as he pulled his bottom lip between his teeth. “If I was a reckless man, I’d trap you. Ain’t no way you should be walking around here looking this good.” He shook his head and laughed at himself.

Getting a good look at him, I couldn’t help but admire my view. Dre was hands down the most sexist man I’ve ever seen. His cut was fresh, his jewels were dancing, and

the smell of his cologne made my clit pulse. Dressed in all black from head to toe, you could tell simply by the way he walked he knew he was the man. My eyes zoned in on the bulge resting against his thigh, and I couldn't help but lick my lips at the sight.

"If you want to, we can go to the back and take care of this?" He smirked once my eyes landed back on his. "This isn't my event, so who said we can't be late?"

"Lock up, Jerome." I slipped my arm through his and led him out of the door. "Don't wait up."

"Baby, I will be sitting right here on this couch with a glass of wine and bucket of popcorn waiting on you. I know the sex is going to be good and nasty, and this time, I'm sticking around to watch."

As Dre threw his head back in laughter, I kissed my teeth and led us out the door. Helping me inside his car, I reached over and held his door open for him. I was used to seeing his Range Rover parked in front of my house, but we were in a two-seater McLaren tonight. I knew the car was expensive from the interior color and feel of the leather beneath my exposed thigh. I started to ask him if it was rented or brought, but glancing over, his smothering gaze had me too heated to speak.

"Did I tell you how good you look tonight?" he asked as we appeared to head toward the outskirts of town. I assumed the event was being held downtown, but I guess I was wrong. "I can see why your baby's father skeeted off in you."

"Andre, please..." I cackled at his silliness as I exhaled from the quick stare-off. "I can't stand that man, and if I knew then what I know now, we wouldn't have made my daughter. She's here now, and I love her... but I can't stand her father."

Since declining his last advances, Bryce had been making my life a living hell. What

makes matters worse is that for the last two weeks, he's backed out of plans to spend time with Briley. While she's been upset, my parents and I have done everything we can to make it up to her. She hasn't missed a beat of having fun, and I was beating myself up for thinking things would be different this time. I should've known not to trust Bryce. He had gotten Bri accustomed to spending time with him just to go back to the way things were.

"How was your week?" I shifted in my seat and asked. I wanted to change the conversation topic so the ride wouldn't be awkward. "How's things going with you and Uno making Milly Grove a real city?"

Although I'm from here, I've never really had many run-ins with Uno and his brothers. I knew of them because of the city's history, but I'd never been in the same circle with them. I have a few friends that have raved about Wild and his whorish ways, but that's about it. I can honestly say that I admire the work they've done in the different zones of the city. There was a time when I thought they, too, were involved in illegal activities, but again, it was hard to prove. The town would've been in an uproar if I had attempted to take down the very family who'd done so much for the city. I would've been crucified for any false claims.

With Andre, it was more than that. It wasn't a mere coincidence that an officer died once it was publicly mentioned he was building a case against them. It wasn't a mere coincidence that the director of the ports went missing after speaking with me about inside intel concerning their ported shipments and business. I know this man isn't who he says he is, and I wanted to prove myself right at the very least.

"My week was very interesting, actually." He glanced over at me before giving his attention back to the road. "My grandparents came into town to spend a little time with me. They love the city so much that they're thinking of retiring here."

"That's great!" I reached over and gripped his arm. "The city is beautiful and really

peaceful. You should take them down to Groves Isles when the weather gets warmer. They will love the water.”

“Trust me, they’ve heard about it.” He chuckled before quieting down. “My mother came into town with them. We got into a big argument, and she ended up leaving.” He shook his head, and I could see his jaw tick under the streetlights as we rode through the countryside. “Well... I thought she left town. Come to find out, she’s been here the entire time.”

Hearing him mention his mother caused my heart to pound. I wondered if he knew I’d gone to see her. Looking through the windshield, I noticed we were almost outside the city. Now that I was thinking about it, we should have been at the venue by now. I began to panic as I tried to figure out where we were based on any landmarks, but nothing could be seen for miles—only the sky, the road, and the green grass and trees.

“Uh... Dre, where are we going?” I asked as I tried to keep my voice steady. “I thought we were going to your friend’s event.”

“You know... she and I said some pretty hurtful things to each other—things that neither of us can take back.” I watched him with scared eyes as he gripped the steering wheel. “It’s hurtful when the ones you love betray you in ways your enemy wouldn’t dare. They use your love for them as a weakness. Everyone has their breaking point—I guess we’re both at ours.”

Turning down a dirt road, I was worried for my life. I could feel the anger roll off him as he spoke about his mother, and I panicked, thinking it would end up toward me. Ms. Boudreaux ranted about him having her followed. If he knew she was still in town, did he know about her meeting me at the park?

“I-I’m sure whatever issue you two have can be discussed...” I held onto the door

handle as he continued to speed down the dark dirt road. “You guys love each other.”

Chuckling, he tossed his head over with a sinister smile. “I’m not a forgiving man, Denim. I have the utmost respect for the ones I allow in my life. Hence, betrayal in any capacity won’t be tolerated. A nigga like me will always make you pay—one way or another.”

“Andre, I need to tell?—”

“We’re here,” he interrupted before I could purge my soul. As badly as I wanted to build a case against Andre, I had to think about the bigger picture, which is being here for my family and baby girl. I know in my soul he’s guilty of everything I’m accusing him of, but with no evidence or witnesses, I’m beating at a dead horse.

Looking around the wooded area, I noticed we were at a deserted warehouse. I felt as if I were hyperventilating as he walked over to my side of the car and opened the door.

“Where are we?” I stared up at him with worried eyes as he helped me out of the car. “I thought we were going to a charity event.”

“This is the place.” He smirked as he grabbed my hand. As soon as I stepped out of the car, my heels sank into the moist soil. My shoes were as good as ruined. “Skip said the location was in Sunset Valley. Should I have mentioned that?”

Trembling, I said nothing as I followed him up the muddy path until we reached the door of a deserted warehouse. My heart pounded in my chest as he knocked on the door and waited for us to be let inside.

“Sunset Valley is a weird place to hold an event,” I stated as calmly as I could. “The event halls in town are so much nicer.”

Humming his response, he held my hand tighter, and all I could think about was him doing it so I couldn't run. The thought crossed my mind, but I knew I wouldn't get far. Once the door opened, we stepped inside, and I let Andre lead the way. The building was much more presentable than I imagined. The open space was simply decorated in red and gold with six tables spread about, with a few guests sitting at them while others stood around, conversating. Jazz played softly in the background, and you could tell there was a lot of money in the building tonight from the various designer brands and expensive-smelling cologne and perfumes.

"It's about time you got here!" His cousin, Jules, walked up, greeting us with a beautiful woman clinging to him. "Had you not shown, I was going to haunt your dreams tonight, nigga."

"Bad enough I have to see your ugly ass while I'm awake... please don't pop up in my sleep." Dre smirked as he embraced him. Turning to the woman, he pulled her into his arms. "Hey, Bunny."

"Hello, Dre!" She giggled and hugged him back. I felt a twinge of jealousy but shook it off because I didn't have the right. Jules breaking them up caused me to snicker. All eyes shifted to me, shutting me up immediately. "Hello." She gave me a small wave. "You are...?"

"I'm Denim." I held my hand out for her to shake, which she did. "Nice to meet you."

"Nice to see you again, Denim." Jules grinned, but in a way that caused me to shiver. "Looks like Dre kept you around longer than expected..."

"What do you mean?—"

"Come on, Lil' Mama. Let me introduce you to my people."

For the next thirty minutes, we walked around and mingled with his cousin, Rosier, and his wife, Gabriella. It was then that I found out that Bunny, or Bridgette, was married to Jules. I also met their colleagues, Luca and Nicky. The way the guys carried on with each other allowed me to see another side of Dre. He was happier and more carefree when he was with his people, as he called them.

As the servers came around with food and drinks, the tension I was feeling moments earlier had disappeared. That was until Rosier set his sights on me.

“So, Denim... tell us a little about yourself.” He wrapped his arm around his wife, who was in deep conversation with Bridgette. “Andre tells us you work as a clerical administrator.”

“You’ve told your family about me?” I eyed him, causing him to smirk. I didn’t know if I needed to be flattered or worried. “Yes, that is correct,” I answered as I returned my attention back to Rosier. The server was coming around with champagne, and I was more than happy to grab a glass each time she passed. “It’s not the most interesting job, but it pays the bills.”

“What exactly is it that you do?” Jules asked as he handed his wife a drink. She smiled as she kissed his cheek, and I couldn’t help but do the same. These girls loved their husbands; you could tell through every breath they inhaled and exhaled. “Is there a certain company you work for?”

Looking between the two brothers, I tested my ability to see if there was any indication that they knew anything I didn’t want them to know. There’s no way anyone could. Dealing with this family, I knew I had to be careful with my answer.

“I work for a private institution that helps prestigious companies find people specializing in whatever service they need. Accounting, security... things like that.”

“Sounds boring,” Jules added, causing his wife to elbow him. “What, Bunny? The girl just described someone who works at a staffing agency.”

While she fussed at him, everyone seemed to have decided against getting to know me. Dre’s arm was wrapped around my shoulders as he conversed with Luca. Everyone had chosen a new study, but Rosier continued to sip his drink, with his eyes never leaving mine. Gabby was waving someone over, and as badly as I wanted to see who, I was too scared to move.

“Now, what the hell are y’all doing here with my sister?” Jules stood from his seat, causing the ones near us to stare. “Mimi, why are you walking in with a mime and a gigolo?”

“Fuck you, Harry Potter!” Wild spat as he dapped him up. “I’m locked in with Sweets, and we know she’s locked in with Big G. I ain’t scared of you anymore.”

“Oh.” Jules smirked as he kept his eyes on him. Everyone looked around in amusement. “So, if I go get my little black book?—”

Without a word, Wild took off to the bar. The fellas bent over in laughter at his antics, and I even chuckled, although I was confused. As I was introduced to Dre’s cousin, Noemi, he stood from his seat to greet yet another person.

“Mr. Boudreaux... thank you so much for coming tonight. Looks like you brought your family as well.”

Dragging my head up to meet his voice, I frowned in confusion. Standing from my seat as they made introductions, I waited for the blow-up that was bound to happen in seconds.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Bryce frowned as his eyes landed on me. “This

event isn't for someone like you."

"Whoa! Wait a minute," Andre chimed in and stood between us when Bryce stepped in my direction. "Let's be respectful. After all, she's my date for the evening." Glancing from me to Bryce, he scowled at our stare-off. "Is there an issue, Lil' Mama?"

"No issue at all..." I crossed my arms and tugged my eyes toward Dre. "This man is upset because I won't let him fuck me. He should be more upset that I'm ten seconds from knocking his head off his shoulders and embarrassing the fuck outta him for talking to me like he's crazy." Dropping my arms, I sighed heavily. "Andre, this Bryce. The Lieutenant Governor... and my daughter's father."

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

My people being in Milly Grove tonight was needed. I had a sense of peace since they were near, which I've missed since leaving South Florida weeks ago. It was cool handling business and hanging with the Mills clan, but they weren't family. As much as I was enjoying Milly Grove, I was ready for this night to be over because it would be one more step toward getting back home.

"You good?" I leaned over and whispered in Denim's ear. "Would you like me to have one of the guys take you home?"

She's been quiet since the brief run-in with her child's father. She was no longer enjoying her evening or conversing with the ladies; she'd just been sitting here, in her own thoughts. Every now and then, I would catch her peeking toward Holmes and his wife. I wanted to see where her head was because I would hate to see Lil' Mama crash out over her baby daddy—she was way too fine and worth more than that man and his riches combined.

"I'm fine," she replied, offering me a small smile as she chewed her salad. The food at this event was the worst I've ever had. Even the rolls were hard as bricks. "Bryce and I don't have the best relationship, and it's hard for me to be in the same space as him."

Nodding, I sipped my champagne as I watched her. I could tell by her posture that she was aggravated, and I wanted her to relax and have a good time if she was going to be here with me.

"Listen, I know me and you are just kicking it, but he's the fool in this situation. He shouldn't have ever approached you if he knew he wasn't ready to deal with someone

of your stature. Married niggas cheat every day, but many choose chicken heads. Baby... you're far from a chicken head." We laughed, and I was happy to see her shoulders relax. "Don't let that nigga knock you off your square—ever. Let's at least enjoy these drinks and the company because the food is garbage."

Leaning over, I draped my arms over her shoulder and pulled her into me. I could feel my people staring at us, but I didn't care. Denim had been there for me when I needed an ear, and I was going to return the favor. Kissing her forehead, I could feel her melt into my arms. I don't know what it was about Denim, but I was experiencing feelings that were abnormal for me. I wanted to, at least, consider her a friend, but my mind wouldn't let me. My mind wasn't running shit, though, and the effect she had on my body was starting to tamper with my heart and soul. I responded to her in a way I've never responded to any other woman. I wanted to like her, but I knew I had to shake that shit. My mind could not lose the current internal battle happening within me over Denim Atkins.

"Lover Boy Dre! I never thought I would see the day," Jules chimed in, sounding like a Dr. Seuss book, causing me to mug him. "Wait until I tell Sweets about this!"

"Man, go on. Wait... somebody trying to talk to Bunny over there," I said, pointing across the room. I didn't really see shit, but I wasn't in the mood for Jules or Boko tonight. One wrong word and that nigga would've been threatening to turn Denim and me into Cinderella and Prince Charming. After a few more minutes of chatter and laughing as we watched Jules stalk Bridgette, I noticed Denim had finally relaxed. Her being at ease came at the perfect time because the auctions were set to begin, and I was ready to have even more fun.

"I'm so excited! I've never been to anything like this before," she sang from the side of me. I chuckled lowly because she was good and tipsy. "I hope they have something I want to bid on."

“I doubt it...” Rosier murmured from the side of me. “People like this only sell what’s beneficial for them—things that the normal person wouldn’t dare want or could afford. Tonight is their lucky night, though, since the Boudreaux’s are in the building.”

We watched as Holmes walked to the stage, not before mugging Denim. She seemed not to notice or care as she looped her arm in mine and leaned her head on my shoulder. Eyeballing him, I nodded for him to keep it moving. She was far from being my lady. However, tonight was different. To disrespect her was to disrespect me, and that’s something I didn’t play about.

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you so much for joining me tonight at Holmes Hideaway Auction. I started this little private event more than five years ago. I’ve always been a private person, so my charity isn’t well-known, but I am grateful for all of you who decided to come out and partake in this adventure .” He gave a slight smile before he glanced around. “I want to thank my beautiful wife, Rebecca, for assisting me here tonight. She is absolutely the best thing that’s happened in my life, and I don’t think any of this would be possible without her.”

Looking around as the guests clapped, I found his wife beaming in the audience. She was a beautiful BBW, and I could tell she knew it. Something about the look in her eyes made me uneasy, though. There was a hint of sneakiness in them that I’ve seen in women who turned out to be malicious. I would have to keep an eye on Mrs. Holmes, and not in the same way I’d had my eyes on Denim’s ass all night.

“All right. Let’s get down to business. Everyone should have a bidding paddle...” Holmes went into his suit jacket and pulled out a stack of note cards. “The first item on the list is a twelve-day stay in Cabo at one of the most beautiful villas on the island. With privacy for miles on each end, you can enjoy days of fun in the sun with no interruptions.” He wiggled his brows and smirked. “We will start the bid at fifty thousand.”

We sat back and listened as men from various spots in the room shouted out number after number in hopes of winning the prize. I couldn't help but shake my head at the dollars they were willing to pay for this vacation. What was even more comical was that they thought they were doing something with their little-ass money.

"Three hundred thousand! Going once... twice... sold to the gentleman in the back."

Locking eyes with Rosier, we watched as the men clapped and cheered for the winning gentleman. Now that we saw how the evening was going to go, we knew what to do going forward.

"Next up, we have a ten-day stay at Turks and Caicos. The glamorous villa?"

"Two million..." Jules shouted before Holmes could even finish bidding. The attendants in the room gasped as Jules sat calmly with his wife tucked under his arms. "Cash."

"Wow! Do we have a higher bid?" Holmes chuckled as he shuffled his card and was met with silence. "Well, then... it's sold to Mr. Boudreaux."

Smirking, he winked at Holmes before sipping his drink. Everything was always a competition with this nigga, and I see that this auction was no different. He had just opened the doors for all of us to spend a check tonight. For the next three bids, my people who outbid everyone, and you could feel the frustration in the air. We didn't give a fuck, though. We had even gotten the girls involved, and their drunk asses were having a blast.

"This is so exciting!" Denim clapped from the side of me, holding the paddle. "What are you waiting on before you bid? I want to raise the paddle like Gabby has!"

I winked at her, causing her to blush. "Something special. I want it to be perfect."

Just then, Holmes walked back up to the makeshift stage. Although his other attendees were pissed, he was in a great mood since he made almost twelve million dollars tonight.

“All right, y’all! Bring your checkbooks out for this one.” I could feel goosebumps over my arms as I watched the excitement in his eyes. “For six days, you can have the time of your life at this newly built estate in Costa Rica. In my opinion, this particular stay is the best because no one has ever stayed at this location. The waters are the clearest and most pure you’ve ever seen.”

Once he finished describing the elaborate destination, the only thing you could hear were murmurs in hopes of winning.

“Five million dollars.” We glanced around, looking for the female voice who placed the bid. With all eyes on Rebecca Holmes, she stood from her seat with the look of victory on her face. “Anyone going higher?”

Groans and frowns filled the room as she began to smile brighter. No one was willing to spend that type of money. Well, almost no one. Tapping Denim’s hand holding the paddle, I signaled for her to raise it.

“Six million...” I leaned back coolly in my seat as Denim giggled while swinging the paddle around in the air. Rebecca glared as she watched us. “You going any higher, Mrs. Holmes?”

“Ten!” She locked her jaw as she scowled and stormed from her table, stepping in our direction. “You and your guest have had your fun—now it’s time for Big Mama to have hers.”

As she gazed, the look in her eyes transformed from anger to lust. Denim wore the disdain on her face well as she pulled the paddle down and pulled me closer to her.

Rebecca instantly snapped her eyes to our closeness, and the scorned attitude that replaced the lust didn't go unnoticed.

"Big Mama, is it?" I tapped Denim's arm for her to let go so I could stand. Smoothing the wrinkles from my suit, I adjusted my tie before stepping to her. "Big Daddy is here now and trust me... when I say these pockets are thick—" Her eyes dropped down to my crotch, and I chuckled. "They're thick as hell, love." She began to pant as she dragged her eyes back up to me. "You think you can handle that, baby?"

For a moment, we stared at each other, and I saw the sweat form above her top lip. She'd forgotten all about the bid at this point, and I knew I had her.

"Twenty," I stated, causing everyone to gasp. "How deep do you want me to go?"

"Oh God!" She wobbled slightly before fainting. Chuckling, I placed my hands in my slacks and observed a fuming Governor Holmes still on stage.

"I don't think your wife can handle my girth. I mean... you know the Boudreaux's ain't lacking in no areas—pockets include."

Standing beside his wife sprawled out on the floor, I listened as he asked if anyone wanted to outbid. As I knew, there were no takers.

"Sold to Andre Boudreaux," Holmes said through tight lips.

Cheers rang out, causing me to grind my teeth as I made my way back to my table. Passing a waitress along the way, I grabbed two glasses of champagne and downed them both.

"That was crazy!" Denim cheered and wrapped her arms around my neck. I could

smell the champagne and wine seeping through her pores. “Twenty million dollars on a trip is insane!”

“You have no idea...” Jules said from beside me. “Here’s the paperwork ensuring the property is yours for the allotted time.” He handed me a document. I frowned after looking over it quickly. “Jules! What the fuck?—”

“It’s just a vacation, Dre,” Jules sang, cutting me off. “There’s nothing wrong with taking a plus one. This isn’t a permanent situation, bro.”

I wanted to argue with him because I didn’t want Denim reading too much into tonight. However, she was so oblivious to everything that was happening around her. This vacation could align some things for her, so I said what the hell and signed the papers.

“Hey, Dee. How about you roll with me to Costa Rica?” I pulled her away from the girls as they yapped about who knows what. She nodded profusely, agreeing but never giving me her full attention. I smirked at her drunk ass and handed her the paper that needed her signature. “Sign this one.”

The girls were so enthralled in conversation that Denim barely glanced at the papers. She scribbled her name and handed it back to me, then walked back toward the group of ladies. I watched as Mimi looped their arms together before walking toward the bathroom. Glancing over at Nicky and Luca, they nodded as they knew to follow and look after the girls.

“Mr. Boudreaux, that was quite the performance.” Holmes approached me with a little too much aggression in his tone. “Are you sure you have that much money to spend on a mere vacation?”

“I have enough for the vacation, the villa, and your wife... if she’s for sale also.” I

mugged him as I crossed my arm. “Is there a problem?”

Glancing from me to my people, I could see the moment he thought differently of his response. Relaxing his shoulders, he sighed heavily before dropping his head. “No, of course not.”

“Good.” I dropped my arms and kept my eyes locked on his. “When can I get my shit?”

Looking around, he stepped closer so I could hear him over the chatter and music. “Do you know what you just signed up for? Are you sure about this?” Not trusting myself to speak, I gave him a quick nod. He smirked devilishly. “Excellent! Pickup will be ready in about two weeks. Not just for you, but for your people too. You guys are going to love what I have in store for you.”

With a wink, he stepped past me as if he had won a victory. Grabbing at my waist, Rosier placed his hand on my shoulder and turned me to face him. “Now isn’t the time or the place, bro. You heard what he said... we have two weeks to come up with a plan to kill his ass.”

Looking over my shoulder, I watched as he made his way over to his wife. They engaged in a heated conversation before he gripped her arm and dragged her out of the building.

“Are you done handling business?” Denim’s soft hands wrapped around my torso. “I was thinking that maybe we could head back to my place, and you give me some of that twenty-million-dollar dick.”

“Nah...” I pried her arms from around, causing her face to fall. “We going to mine because it’s closer.”

Smiling vibrantly, she grabbed my hand and dragged me out of the building. Along the way, we passed her daughter's dad, and I could see the steam coming from his ears in the night air.

Helping Dee into the car, I closed the door and watched through the passenger window as she bounced with excitement from the night. Locking eyes with me, I instantly felt things shift. The look in her eyes, even though the tint, was the look of a woman falling in love. I could attempt to cast doubt over my own feelings, but it would be a waste because I was fucking with Lil' Mama too.

The dilemma was more than surface. The distance was one thing, with her being in Georgia and me in South Florida, but the lies were another. Things aren't always what they seem, and the time has come for the truth to come to light. I knew more than she thought I did, but I couldn't say the same for her. Her assessment of my family and me was all wrong, and while I was busy digging her guts out, I should've been planning her demise as she had been planning mine.

She may be stuck on the idea that I'm the bad guy, but I wonder if she would still feel that way if she knew that the twenty million dollars I paid for a vacation that was me actually purchasing her daughter.

* * *

"Andre Boudreaux! To what do I owe the pleasure?" Mimi smirked as she swiveled in her desk chair. "I can never get you to come over unless food is involved."

Chuckling, I walked over and kissed my cousin on the cheek before taking a seat in front of her desk. She's not completely wrong. With my busy schedule, I barely have time for myself these days.

"Don't do me too bad, baby girl." I winked at her before I got to the reason for

today's visit. "I need you to do me a favor. It's Family business."

Turning serious, she folded her hands and gave me her full attention. "What's wrong, Dre?"

"Nothing, but I want to make sure it stays that way." I scooted down in the seat and got comfortable. "You remember the hit I did a few days ago? Paul, the director of the ports..."

Frowning in thought, she said nothing. A few minutes passed before she spoke again. "Are you talking about the guy you and Jules went to see? The one you guys caught watching the gay porn?"

"Of all things, Mimi... that's the part you remember?" I shook my head as I handed her a business card with a federal agent's name on it. "We found this in his home. I need you to run a check on that name... like yesterday."

Taking the card, she looked it over before she went to work on her keyboard. Sitting back, I thought about what the results would mean. I'm not above killing a federal agent, but I didn't mind. I just had to be careful and not make it as messy as I usually would.

"Are you sure she's an agent?" Mimi scowled as she looked at her screen. "It says here that Denim Atkins works as a clerical administrator. No parents, kids—wait..."

Watching her expression go to one of shock and wonder, I sat up in my seat, anticipating what she found. After minutes of silence, I became impatient. "All right, Mimi... what is it?" I asked as I stood from my seat and rounded her desk. Looking at the screen, the list of information was a mile long.

"I had to go into a separate database to find any real information on her. I admit, the

agency is good, but not as good as me.”

“What’s up, Mi?” I wasn’t for the talking-in-circles shit. “Lay it on me.”

“Little Miss Denim here is indeed a federal agent.” She smirked as she pointed to the screen. “The way they have her title and position with the Bureau blocked from even a back-coded search tells me she is probably an undercover agent and currently on a job.”

Staring at the picture on the screen, I eyed the brown skin beauty as she smiled in her profile picture. As I looked at her, I was already thinking about all the ways I could fuck her before I killed her.

“Keep digging and get a file together for me. I’ll call you when I’m ready for it.” I stood at my full height and adjusted my watch, seeing the time. Going into my pocket, I pulled out a stack of money and dropped it on her desk. “I need to holler at Zoo before he heads home for the day. It’s time for me to have a little fun.”

“Dre, did you hear me?” I was jarred from my thoughts as Jules began throwing fruit snacks at me. “I asked you a question, nigga?”

“Naw, I didn’t hear you.” I mugged him. “And why in the fuck are you always eating these kids shit?”

We were currently in the basement of Zoo’s hotel, about to meet with some of the other families in town. Before it started, he wanted to discuss the auction and what our plans were now that we knew who was organizing the sick-ass trafficking in Milly Grove. I was more than ready to be done with all of this shit.

“Well, Zoo is the one with all the kids, so he got all the snacks. These, so far, are the best ones.” He shrugged as if the shit made sense. “If I’m going to be a dad

someday... I have to see what the best snacks are... can't have my kids out here eating bullshit."

I said nothing as I listened to his logic because, no matter what he said, it wouldn't make any damn sense. Not feeling compelled to reply, I sat back and got comfortable again. I was trying to think of anything but Denim.

"Stay your ass out of my house and pantry, nigga." Zoo walked in and pushed his brother's feet off his table. Dragging his eyes to me, he walked over and dapped me up before taking his seat. "It's good to have you back home. We need to get you out of the Grove—ASAP. That cool weather got you looking ashy as hell."

Sticking him a bird, we all laughed and shot the shit for a few minutes. After getting an update on their wives and kids, we got down to it.

"You want to lead this one, Dre?" Zoo asked as he twirled his ink pen between his fingers. "Tell me the play."

The night Jules popped up at my condo, I wasn't expecting him to hand over a file showing the lieutenant governor as the head of the sex trafficking ring that was happening in the region. The night of the auction, it took everything in me not to kill him right where he stood. I wanted nothing more than to tell her about her bitch-ass baby daddy and how he was preparing to sex traffic their daughter. However, I couldn't show my hand that soon. It would have ruined all of the plans I had for them both.

From the moment I saw her at Club Honey, I knew exactly who she was. For the past two years, I've known Denim's every move. From her undercover assignments in various states to being a mother to Briley to her trying to build a case against me—I was aware of it all. She may have thought she had the upper hand in this situation, but I have always been ten steps ahead.

“As you know, Bryce Holmes, Georgia’s lieutenant governor, is one of the nation’s sickest men. The evidence of what he had done to countless women and children is substantial. We also have documents showing he has men and women alike who share the same sick obsession as him and have either participated in the trafficking or have purchased those being trafficked. Next week, we’ll meet up with him and receive what we bid on at the auction—children.”

When I found out that Holmes was the head of the trafficking ring we’d been attempting to pinpoint since Rosier brought Gabby, I immediately jumped into action. After days of research and surveillance, I learned about Holmes Hideaway Charity. It wasn’t a true charity, as he claimed; it was his way of selling women and kids. The number of days at an exotic location was the ages of the young girls he was selling as bids.

“As of now, I don’t know who the girls are and probably won’t know until the pickup.” I glanced around at the guys, who were just as pissed as I was. “I know you guys aren’t fond of bringing outsiders into our business, but I feel like I need to speak with Uno and Skip regarding what we have discovered. After doing some digging, I’m just about sure that Holmes has a meeting spot in Milly Grove. I want to give them a heads-up about the potential fallout that’s going to go on in their city.”

Since being in Milly Grove, Skip and I have gotten the closest. He’s quiet, but that is his natural personality. He spoke when necessary and left the extra shit for everyone else. I’d learned he didn’t have to say much for a nigga to feel what he had to say, though. He is a deadly motherfucker, just like me, so I had a genuine respect for him.

Zoo sighed and nodded. “I’m going to let you call the shots on this one, Andre because I trust you to make the right decision.” He paused, and I waited for him to give me a “but” attached to his statement. Instead, he smirked maliciously. “What are you doing with Denim?”

Sitting back in my seat, thoughts of how I wanted to end her came to mind. She can't be trusted, and I've killed niggas for less. The only thing that was keeping her alive was the fact that I wanted her to know about what her child's father was up to before her demise.

"Leave Denim to me." He eyed me for a moment and nodded. Turning to Jules, his eyes were already on me. "You got something you want to say?"

"I do." He sipped his Kool-Aid Jammers pouch, and I couldn't help but chuckle. There wasn't shit serious about this nigga today. "Would you like to know what Mattie Boudreaux is up to?"

The mere mention of my mother's name caused hurt and hatred to flow through my veins. To know she was wired up and tried to jam me up spoke of how damaged our relationship was. Her days were numbered—just like Denim's—and I wasn't sad about it.

"Is she still in the Grove, or is she back in Florida?"

"Oh, she's here in the city." Jules' smile was eerie as he eyed me. "We snatched her up the day we followed her to the park to meet your little girlfriend."

Glaring at him, he laughed as he stood and walked to the other side of the room. The day she left the penthouse, I knew she had called Wild to take her back to the airport. I paid him to stick around and keep an eye on her without approaching her. No questions were asked as he tailed my mother through the airport. He watched as she frantically made calls to who I now know was her contact at the precincts here in Florida. Too bad for them, Mimi was tracking her phone. That officer is now scattered in bits throughout Zoo's gator pit.

The night I purged my soul to Denim, I knew she was awake. She did good with

changing her breathing, making subtle movements to indicate she was in a slumber, but I was Andre motherfucking Boudreaux. Her FBI training held no weight against real-life experience. I knew what a body felt like when it was sleep because I'd put many niggas in a chokehold. Denim was taking the opportunity to learn all she could to make her next move. Being vulnerable about my relationship with my mother was real, and revealing it was comforting for me. However, I wasn't expecting Denim not to act on it. After hearing how she despised me, I knew she would jump at the chance to speak with Mattie. I trailed her as she made her move to do as I'd predicted. I was concealed as she met up in the park with my mother with a folder. I looked on in anger and disgust as they spoke with each other before my mother frantically ran off. Denim was rattled by what Mattie had said as she scanned the park, looking for what I assumed was someone following her.

"What are your plans for her?" I looked between Zoo and Jules. "I've come to peace with whatever your choice is. However, I'm worried about my grandparents, but I believe they will be okay."

"Let us worry about that," Jules stated as he reclaimed his seat. "I know this shit is tough, man. You loved your parents, and to find out they weren't solid has to be harsh. Just know at the end of the day, even without this mafia shit, we're family. We're brothers. We love you and will help get you through whatever."

Slapping hands with them both, I turned to the elevator dinging. Luca stepped off, followed by three of the family representatives for today's meeting. It was time to get down to Family business.

"Andre... nice to see you again." Mr. Laurent patted my back once he entered the room. "I was certainly going to reach out to you once this meeting was over."

"Something wrong?" I looked at the older gentlemen as the other guys took their seats. "You need my help with something?"

“Indeed, I do.” He gave me a knowing look. “There’s a man by the name of Sigmon Clay. I don’t want to elaborate, but he’s been sticking his nose in places he has no business. I have five million for you if you need more incentive to make it happen.”

In this business, I learned not to ask questions if they weren’t needed. I’ve done enough jobs for Laurent to know that if you have a hit on your head, it’s ethics. He isn’t the type to kill men to take over their business or for personal gain. It’s always about the principle with him, and it’s why he was my favorite client.

Leaning over, I extended my hand to agree to the job. With a pleased smile, he accepted my hand, giving me a firm shake.

“Consider it done, Mr. Laurent.”

* * *

It was well after ten at night, and the air around me stilled. Back in the city of Milly Grove, there wasn’t a creature in sight because they could sense that death was near. When the reaper was present, nothing or no one wanted to be in his path. Tonight, Mr. Sigmon Clay would meet his fate, and I was the one to collect his soul.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions.

Dressed in all black, I climbed the side of the building with my McMillian TAC-50 strapped to my back. This kill would be quick, even though he didn’t deserve it. Tonight, I decided to have mercy on him—something rare for me.

As I settled on the roof, I placed my rifle on the tripod and kept my eye on the club’s entrance. I’d done a quick skim of the businesses in the vicinity and scoped all the different surveillance cameras. Near the rougher parts of Grove Heights, I’d bet the

cameras didn't work even though I was going to make sure all footage of me was deleted regardless. Once I had everything set up, I crouched down to better position myself and awaited my target. Patience was key, and tonight, I had a lot of it.

Hearing a set of metal doors creak, I placed my eye on the scope of my gun and watched as Sigmon Clay stumbled out of the local strip club. My sight stayed on him as he stilled and looked around the parking lot as if he could sense something was amiss. Peering around, he fumbled with the keys in his pocket, but he didn't have a chance to remove them before I sent a bullet to his dome.

Pew!

I watched as his body dropped onto the empty lot with a smile of satisfaction. I love it when my victims never see me coming. It gives me a rush knowing that they think they've lived another day without paying for the consequences of their actions. While I don't know what he did to Mr. Laurent, I know for a fact he was not a good man.

On the night of Holmes' auction, Sigmon won the first bid. Knowing that he was on the verge of trafficking a young child was all the grounds I needed to kill him. After taking a few minutes to admire my handiwork, I began breaking my things down before creeping down the side of the building with the same ease as it took to climb it.

Trekking back to my unmarked Chevy, I whistled my favorite Yolanda Adams tune as I threw my rifle into the backseat before sliding into the front seat.

"Another day, another body," I muttered to myself.

Pulling from the empty street, I glanced out my rearview mirror and watched the lifeless body disappear as I drove further away. Sigmon is just one of many who were about to meet their demise at the hands of me. It was time for me to boost the murder

rate.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

“Mommy, I love skrimps so much! You’re the best mommy ever!”

Giggling at my daughter’s pronunciation, I watched her as she ran all over the living room as I prepared our seafood boil. We were going to go out for a day of fun, but I talked her into staying home since she was going on a trip with her father soon. I didn’t want her to go, but I couldn’t be selfish when it comes to spending time with him. With that being said, I decided that it was only right that Rebecca and I had a conversation before they left.

The night of the auction, I thought I was going to pass out with all of the Boudreaux men being in one room. Their aura was suffocating, and I knew soon enough they were going to see me for who I was. Jules was scary, but the way Rosier kept his eyes on me sent chills through my entire body. It was as if he could see through me. As the night went on, getting acquainted with their wives made me comfortable. The ladies spoke so highly of their men that I was becoming conflicted. If they were such bad men, how could they do so much good in their communities?

I knew of the charities, sponsorships, and donations on paper, but hearing about all they’ve done in person through conversation just hit differently. I sat back and watched how the men interacted with their wives and each other. It was nothing but love and respect in their circle, and I was a little envious. The Mills being there added another layer. Uno wasn’t in attendance, but Wild and Skip interacted with them as if they’d been friends forever. The Boudreaux’s even had the respect of many men in attendance. I was starting to think I was wrong about the family. Maybe they are just a group of good guys who somehow ended up linked to a lot of bad events that occurred.

Ding Dong!

Drying off my hands, I took one last sip of wine before going to open the door for Rebecca. I was going to need something to calm my nerves for sure. Taking a deep breath, I displayed a smile on my face.

“Rebecca, hi,” I greeted her and I let her inside. “Thank you for coming over.”

Dressed to the nines, I wouldn’t lie and say Rebecca wasn’t a nice-looking woman. She was a thick beauty, and she carried it well. She and Bryce look good together, and I couldn’t rationalize why he would cheat on her. With a smile equally forced, she accepted my welcome as I allowed her into my home. Gripping the strap on her purse, I watched as she looked around my house with a judgmental expression.

When her eyes landed on my daughter, she inhaled deeply before speaking to her. “Hey, Briley. It’s good to see you, sweetie.”

Glancing up from her toys on the floor, Briley was shocked to see her stepmother in our home. She grabbed her favorite bunny and walked over to me. “Mommy, am I leaving with Mrs. Becca today? I don’t want to go with her.”

“Why not, sweetie?” Rebecca pretended she was hurt as she walked over and crouched in front of her. “I was thinking we could have fun and go play with the boys later.”

“They pull my hair, and you laugh at me...” I frowned as my daughter hugged my leg. “You never stop them, and you yell at me when daddy isn’t around.” Looking at me with sad eyes, it took everything in me not to beat this lady’s ass in front of my daughter. “She’s mean, Mama! I don’t like her.”

“Go to your room, baby, and let me talk to her for a minute.”

Looking at the both of us, my daughter dropped her head and walked down the hall as I asked. Taking several deep breaths, I dragged my eyes back to Rebecca, who didn't seem moved by what my daughter was saying.

"Care to explain?" I crossed my arms and mugged her. "Why in the fuck are you allowing your boys to bully my child and not do shit about it?" I was going to be cordial to this lady, but that went out the window when my daughter told me what had been going on. She'd be lucky if she even made it out of my house alive.

"Oh, please. You know how these kids are." She waved me off as she took a seat on the couch. "They do the things that normal siblings do—they're children."

"I don't care what your kids do; I'm not playing that when it comes to mine." I dropped my arms and stepped toward the couch she was sitting on. "I called you over here because I wanted to be mature and have a conversation with you. If Bryce is to have her in his home?—"

"Our home ." She stood from her seat as she corrected me. "That's our house that he shares with our family... a family you tried to break apart with your whorish ways." She frowned as she looked me up and down. "Look at you... you got your titties and ass out around your child!" She gestured at the tank top and biker shorts I had on. "Is that what you do? You use your body to seduce men, not caring if they have wives? Is that how you got my husband? He told me you seduced him."

Flabbergasted by how idiotic she sounded, I couldn't help but throw my head back in laughter. There is no way she is being serious right now. "He told you I seduced him?" I pointed to my chest as she continued to scowl at me. "That man approached me. He's the one who initiated our fling. Granted, I didn't know he was married until I found out I was pregnant, and trust me... had I known, I wouldn't have let your husband touch me."

I stepped to her so she wouldn't misunderstand my words. "Please know that I don't want Bryce. He's still trying to get a whiff of this pussy because it was just that good. You come into my house and try to belittle me when your man would pull up over here on two wheels if I wanted him to. This conversation is over. Let your husband know I will call him later to speak about arrangements for my daughter. She will never be around you."

"Fuck that little?—"

Wham!

Before she could even get the words out of her mouth, I'd punched her in hers. It's one thing to disrespect me, but even attempting to speak on my daughter will get you checked every time.

"Finish that shit you were about to say!" I jacked her up by her collar and hit her again. "I can't hear you..."

Instead of answering me, she spit in my face. Disgusted, I dropped her onto the floor of my living room. Wiping my face, I looked from the spit to her before I hopped on top of her and beat her ass.

"You stupid-ass bitch!" I yelled as I hit her all over her face and chest. "I'm going to kill you!"

I couldn't lie; for a minute, Rebecca gave me a run for my money. The difference is I had too much anger and hate built up inside of me that she couldn't match. I was still raging way after she'd run out of energy and gave up. It wasn't until I felt arms around my waist, lifting me off of her, that I realized I'd blacked out.

"All right, Lil' Mama... you beat her ass." Dre breathed in my ear as he held me

tightly. “If you hit me in my nuts again, I’m going to make you suck them.”

Relaxing in his arms, I panted as I looked down at a whimpering and bloody Rebecca. Trying my best to get back to her, small cries from the other side of the room caught my attention.

“Oh, Briley! I’m so sorry.” I rushed over to my daughter, causing her to step back. “It’s okay, baby. Mama’s not going to hurt you, Briley Boo.”

Looking from Rebecca back to me, she ran into my arms. I held her as she cried and felt like shit for what she’d just witnessed. With her arms wrapped around my neck, she sobbed quietly. Each tear that hit my neck was another lick I wanted to give to that bitch. Hearing Rebecca groan as she rolled herself from the floor, I shielded Briley from seeing her bloody, beaten stepmother.

“You can kiss your mother goodbye because I’m calling the cops!” She huffed as if saying those few words exhausted her.

“I don’t want you to go to jail, Mommy! I don’t want to stay with her.”

Panicking, I patted my daughter’s back and watched Rebecca remove her phone from her purse. Before I could say anything, Dre had already grabbed it. “If I were you... I’d think before you did that. I mean, do you really want to involve the police?”

“Excuse me!” she shrieked as she winced in pain. “Do you not see my face?”

“I do.” Dre nodded as he lifted her chin and gave it a quick inspection. “You need to learn to bob and weave, baby. She fucked you up.”

“Hey, that’s a bad word!” Briley snapped her head and wagged her little finger at Dre. “Don’t say that.”

Dre smiled sheepishly. “You’re right, baby girl. Forgive me.”

Placing my daughter back on her feet, I told her to give the adults a few minutes and to wait in her room until I came to get her. She didn’t want to leave me, but I assured her I was okay. “If you go in the room and wait for Mommy, I’ll give you a gift when the grown-ups finish talking.”

Hearing that, she took off like a rocket to down the hallway. Rebecca said nothing as she watched the exchange through swollen eyes. Giving his attention back to her, he continued. “As I was saying... the cops are the last thing you want to involve in your business. How will your husband feel about that? A man like himself can’t afford to have any skeletons fall out of the closet, can he?”

I looked between the two of them as they communicated in a silent conversation. Slumping her shoulders, Rebecca walked over to the couch and snatched her purse before storming out the door, leaving her phone behind.

“She’s going to call the authorities—I know she is.”

I watched as he slid her phone into his pocket. “Nah, I wouldn’t worry about that. How about you go get cleaned up? I see I came at the right time because it smells good as hell in here.”

I watched as Dre made his way past me and into the kitchen. Gliding through the space, I chuckled as he looked into my pots as if he belonged there. I wasn’t in the mood to argue, so I walked down the hall for a quick shower before facing the music.

After twenty minutes of scrubbing that bitch’s blood from my hands, I redressed and went to find my daughter. Not seeing her in her room, I followed the sound of laughter into the living room. I couldn’t stop my smile at the sight of the two of them playing in the middle of the living room floor.

“Dre, are you Mommy’s boyfriend?” Briley asked innocently as she bit into her shrimp. He’d bought her a new Hello Kitty table set and had set it up for her. “She’s never had one of those before.”

“Is that right?” He chuckled as he sat in the tiny seat across from her. “What if I was her boyfriend? How would that make you feel?”

I knew I should interrupt her line of questioning, but part of me wanted to know what he had to say.

“Happy.” She smiled with seafood sauce all over her pretty face. “I want Mommy happy. She works a lot, and if she had a boyfriend, she would stay home more, and I could stay with her. The three of us could watch movies together, play games, and eat ice cream. So, you have to be her boyfriend because she likes you too.”

“Yeah?” he asked wide-eyed. I covered my mouth to hide my laughter. “She told you that?”

“No, I heard her when she was talking on the phone to my Uncie Jerome. She said?—”

“What are you two doing?” I startled them both as I entered the room. “Are y’all eating without me?”

“You may be late eating dinner, but you’re just in time for the tea.” He winked and stood. “Have a seat, and I’ll fix you something.”

Walking past him, he shocked me when he pulled me into his arms and placed a soft kiss on my lips. Too stunned to speak, we both stood and stared at each other. Clearing his throat, he let me go and nodded for me to sit down. In a daze, I did just that. So caught up, I was zoned out as my daughter bragged about how Dre was her

new friend.

Today was supposed to be a chill day with my daughter, but it ended with dinner and a movie with her and Dre. As we sat on the couch, blaring the latest version of Lion King, my mind ran rampant with thoughts, but one thing stood out above others.

I was falling in love with Andre Boudreaux.

* * *

“Well, look who remembered they have two living parents?” my father greeted me as soon as I stepped inside his home. Briley all but knocked me down as she zoomed past me, running into the house. She gave my father a quick hug before going to find her grandmother. “I see the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

“Dad, what are you talking about?” I kissed his cheek before following him into his study. It was a Friday evening, and I knew he always went into his study around this time to decompress. “We always acknowledge you.”

“Baby girl, please.” He waved me off, causing me to giggle. “You’ve always been a mama’s girl, and I’m okay with that. I’ve forever admired the relationship you two have, and I thank God I picked a wonderful woman to build my family with.” I gushed at his love for my mother. I wanted that so badly for me. “Now, tell me... what’s the matter for you to want to holler at your dear old dad?”

For the past few days, my thoughts have been in a whirlwind, and I need someone to talk to. My feelings for Andre are growing by the day, and I don’t know what to do about it. The night he popped up on Bri and me, I was nervous. I didn’t know he was coming, and I’ve never had another male around my child. Those two ended up bonding in a way that made my heart smile, and it scared me. He told her he was my boyfriend, but we’d yet to discuss anything remotely close to that. He also kissed me

twice on the lips—something he made sure I knew he didn't do during our first time together. I was genuinely confused by it all. His switch-up had me wondering if this was all a ploy and if he was gearing up to kill me.

“So, you know that I love my job with the agency. Working with the FBI has been a dream of mine for as long as I can remember.” I pulled my legs underneath me as I got comfortable on the couch. “Sometimes, lines are crossed when I'm used as bait for the male criminals?—”

“Have I ever told you how much I hate that?” he interrupted me and frowned as he sipped his scotch. “Just because you're beautiful doesn't mean you have to flaunt your assets to get the bad guy. Your skills don't start and stop there.”

“I know, Dad.” I dropped my head in embarrassment. “For the first time, I'm ashamed and regret my actions. See, there's this guy, Andre Boudreaux?—”

“Boudreaux?” my father asked, interrupting once more as he leaned back in my seat. “That family is very prominent in the business and judicial world. His cousin, Jules, is one of the best lawyers to come through my courtroom.”

“I know...” I nodded. “I know of all the good they've done and how wealthy they are, but I know they're criminals too. In my heart, I know there's a dark side to that family, and so badly did I want to be the one to prove that.”

My father listened intently and without disruption as I explained to him my feelings. From all the informants that have died or disappeared to his mother's outlandish accusations, I gave him all the evidence I'd collected over the last two years. I even told him about my theory of Dre killing Rissa and Eric. I knew the Boudreaux's doubled as a crime family, but I'm not sure if it matters anymore with the new information I'd learned from Gabby, Bridgette, and the other auction dates. I also was struggling with my feelings, which shouldn't affect my work as an agent, but for Dre,

it was effecting me.

“Those are serious accusations, baby girl.” He pushed his chair back from the desk. My eyes followed him as he walked over and shut his office door. “If you feel that way, why are you considering backing off?”

I dropped my head in shame. “I’ve fallen in love with him, Dad. Andre is so smart and funny. The way he loves his grandparents is so damn sweet. What sold me is his willingness to help people. I’ve been doing my research on him and all the things he does not only in his hometown, but here in Milly Grove too—it’s commendable. We started dealing with each other based on false pretenses, and that’s my fault. I wanted to get close to him to build my case. The only thing I did was fall in love with a man who would probably kill me once he found out who I was. By chance, he does forgive me, we still can’t be together. He’s made it clear that he doesn’t want a relationship. Now, I just feel stuck. Being honest could get me killed. Continuing to lie could get me killed as well. I just don’t know, Daddy. This happening wasn’t on my bingo card.”

For the past few days, I’ve been contemplating coming clean with Dre. I didn’t expect anything to come of our sexual relationship but coming clean will better my chances of not getting killed when he learns of the betrayal.

“I’m going to tell you what I think out of love, baby.” He walked over and took a seat beside me. His eyes held so much love for me, and I knew my father was about to give me great advice as only a father could. “You’re wrong on all levels. That man has done nothing for you to lie to him the way you have. Even if he has, you don’t go around using your body to get what you want. What kind of example does that set for your daughter?”

“Dad...” I shook my head with tears in my eyes. “I don’t mean it like that.”

“That's exactly how it looks. God forbid you try and seduce the wrong man and end up in a body bag because of it. You already have a hard job in a field dominated by men, and you're proving them right by flaunting yourself the way you do. It stops now.”

Wiping the tear that fell, I nodded my head in shame. My father was right, and I wasn't going to debate about it.

“Good. Now let me tell you something else... not all heroes wear capes. They wear suits and ties with Glock 19s tucked on their waist. Do you think your father has always been a law-abiding citizen? No. I've done things to people in my day that could have very well put a needle in my arm.” I gasped in shock because I had no idea. “My friends and I would eliminate anyone in the way of feeding our families. If someone tried to prevent us from following our destiny, they were handled too. That is the way of life—not only then, but now too. Do you know how many men commit heinous crimes against the elderly, women, and children... or flat-out terrorize the city? They have the best lawyers money can buy, and they're often let back on the streets to torment more people. The justice system doesn't always get it right, baby.”

“What are you saying?” My heart pounded in my chest as I listened to him. “Are you saying I should look the other way when it comes to Andre because he's some sort of vigilante?”

“I'm saying don't stick your nose in shit that doesn't concern you. I'm saying do your job and come home to your daughter.” He stood from his chair and walked over to his minibar. “I've met the man, and you can always tell when someone has layers to them. What I will also say is he's not the worst man that's on the streets. I may not be connected to the life like I used to be, but I know people who are. Your doctors, lawyers, teachers, judges, and politicians are the criminals of the world, and yet they're free. They are some of the most sick and dangerous people you don't hear

about. We need Andre Boudreaux's in this world to rectify what the justice system can't."

I was silent. I'd aged from seeing my father as a righteous man to seeing him as an everyday human being. He threw back another shot before continuing, "No one is perfect, baby. Not me, and not you. If you really love that man, you have to get out of your own way. Stop judging him when you're not the most perfect person yourself. You need to have a conversation with him before he decides that you're far more dangerous than his enemies. There's nothing worse than being betrayed by the one you're laying your head next to."

As much as I wanted to deny it, my father was right. I had to come clean with Andre, and I needed to do it sooner rather than later. I just hope that once he knows the truth, he can look past my reasons for lying to him. I love Dre, and I pray he can look past my indiscretions and love me too.

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During my lunch meeting with the construction crew here in Milly Grove, I texted Denim and told her to be ready by seven tonight. I knew she was still rattled about her fight with Rebecca, so I planned to take her to dinner. I wanted to tell her why she shouldn't fear consequences, but I enjoyed watching her squirm for the last few days, thinking she was going to jail. It was all an act, though; Denim knew if she went to jail, the bureau would simply handle the charges. Still, her fighting civilians was a no-no; you didn't have to be police to know that.

When I popped up at her crib that night, I was on some chill shit. I knew I shouldn't be on that type of time with her, but I couldn't help the pull. Seeing her fighting Lieutenant Governor Holmes' wife shocked the fuck out of me, and when I saw Big Bri crying in the corner, I saw red. It took a lot for me to not light that bitch on fire. I wanted to blow up Bryce's spot but now wasn't the time. The best thing for me to do was send her on her way with her tail tucked from the ass beating she'd gotten. I spent that night and the next day kicking it with Denim and her daughter, and I admit it was fun and comfortable.

Spending time with them had become the highlight of being in Milly Grove. It gave me a glimpse of what things would be like if I ever became a family man, and I liked it. I never dreamed about having kids, but if I ever did have one, I wanted a daughter just like Big Bri. She was intelligent, sassy, and funny. I was assuming these traits came from Denim because her bitch-ass daddy was far from any of those things. The more I hung out with Briley and Denim, the more I felt sad for my new little homie. She would eventually be an orphan, and I prayed Denim's parents were as good as she claimed them to be because they were going to be taking in their grandchild and raising her real soon.

Allowing the men to finish enjoying their catered lunch, I stood and exited the conference room. We'd been moving swiftly on finishing the shopping center and were now looking over the layouts for the casino. Uno and his team did a fantastic job, sending realistic drafts of what they envisioned for the casino. I had been grinding out the minor details we needed before the actual building process began. By the time we finished this newest project, I was throwing my name in the hat for the casino to be named after me.

Deciding to shut it down for the day, I grabbed my things and walked to Uno's office. Hearing some grunting as I stood outside his door to knock, I backed away quickly and reached for my Glock.

"Shit, baby... yes!" I heard a woman moan clear as day.

Laughing out loud, I caught the eyes of a few councilmen, who wore smirks themselves. I was used to Zoo and Jules fucking their wives midday, so hearing Uno, and who I assumed to be Harley, was not abnormal. Deciding to shoot him an email when I got back in the office on Monday, I headed to my car.

Once situated, I propped the phone on the dash and decided to call my favorite girl. It was hard not being able to see my grandparents the way I wanted to, so I had Jules go to their house and set up an iPad so I could video call. It took them a minute to figure out how to do the simplest thing, such as answering an incoming call, but they finally got the hang of it. Now, we've talked every day since they left Milly Grove.

"Well hello, my handsome baby. Is that a glow on your face? Hm? Who's the girl?"

"Sweets, there's no glow. Just this sun blinding me—got my skin looking all shiny." Deciding to grab a smoothie since I didn't eat much with the construction crew, I made a quick U-turn to head toward Smoothie King. I looked at Sweets and teased her. "Here I was thinking you'd be happy to see me, but you just want to harass me

instead.”

“It’s my job to be in your business, Andre.” She waved me off as she adjusted her house coat. She was the only woman I knew who still wore hair rollers to bed at night and kept them in during the day unless they were having company. “Are you finally going to tell me about the lady friend you spent the night with when we were visiting? Is she the same one you took to the fancy event you attended?”

“Sweets, who’s been telling my business?” I frowned, causing her to smirk. “I know it was nobody but Jules.”

“It was nothing like that, Andre, so you calm your tail down,” she fussed and pointed into the screen, and I couldn’t help but chuckle. “I wanted to know what’s going on with her because that Sandra girl keeps coming by here showing her tail, and I’m going to end up putting my hands on her.”

“What do you mean?” I furrowed my brows as I turned into a pack drive-thru. It was my first time hearing this, and I didn’t like it. “I didn’t know she was still coming by. I told her that nothing would become of us, and she needed to accept it. It’s cool, though. I’m going to holler at her when I get back in town.”

This is the main reason I didn’t want a serious relationship with anyone. When the relationship has run its course, I don’t have time for the extra shit. I will blow a muhfuckas brains out with no remorse. I gave her the benefit of the doubt because we’ve been dealing with each other for years. However, she’d crossed the line by harassing Sweets.

“Just talk to her, baby.” Sweets sighed and shook her head. “She’s pregnant, and?—”

“That doesn’t have anything to do with me!” I snapped unintentionally, causing her eyes to widen in shock. “I’m sorry, Sweets. That’s my bad.” I palmed my chest. “I

wouldn't dare disrespect you by raising my voice. That girl is getting under my skin with her lying and games. You forgive me? I'm your favorite grandson, after all."

Giving her my best puppy-dog look, I poked out my bottom lip, and she exploded in laughter. I didn't want her to think too much about Sandra because I sure as hell wasn't. I was going to nip that "popping up" shit in the bud, though.

"I forgive you, but I don't know about favorite..." The grin on my face fell at her words. "There's Rosier and Jules. They call me every single day, along with those Mills boys. They're coming to see me soon?—"

"Man, you're my granny!" I fussed and pouted like a child. "You don't even know those new niggas. If it wasn't for Jules out here acting like the boogeyman and scaring people?—"

She fell into a fit of laughter at my frustration, and I couldn't help but do the same. I may have talked shit, but I loved how my boys showed love to Sweets. She was so motherly, and you couldn't help but gravitate to her. She had a big heart and a loving spirit, so it was only natural for her to attract all our crazy selves.

"Oh my goodness! I needed that laugh." She caught her breath and wiped her eyes. "I know you two aren't in a good space, but I wanted you to know I spoke with your mother a few days ago. She told me she was going to take a self-healing trip to Kenya. As much as I am against it... I understand why she needs to go. I pray that when she returns, you both can sit and talk. She didn't say how long she would be gone, but she told me she would write often."

I didn't reply because I didn't want to burst her bubble. Little did Sweets know, she would never see her daughter again. I knew better than to believe my mother had gone anywhere other than wherever Rosier sent her. I didn't know if my mother was dead or alive at this point, but maybe, one day, I'd ask.

After making sure there wasn't anything that she or Pop needed, I ended the call by promising to come home soon. I checked the time on my phone and saw Skip had hit me up, saying he and Wild were at the mall if I wanted to slide through. Deciding to take him up on his offer, I headed that way, smiling at my conversation with Sweets and about seeing Denim and Briley in a couple of hours.

* * *

I questioned my motives the whole ride to Denim's house. I knew I was going to have to kill this girl, so I didn't understand why I was continuing to spend so much time with her and her daughter. I'd never brought flowers for anyone other than Sweets but passing the elaborate setup at a kiosk in the mall had me stopping and buying three dozen roses. Stepping to her door, it swung open before I could even knock.

"Roses, huh, Mr. Sexy Man?" Rome asked in a sultry voice that made me feel gay as fuck.

"Man, back up, Rome! I done told your ass about that gay shit. I like pu?—"

"Dre!" Little Briley came running into the living room. "Oooh. Those are so pretty. Mommy gonna love them. Anything for me?" she asked with the biggest, prettiest smile.

Every interaction with Briley had me wanting to pull up and murk her daddy wherever he stood. How could any man be willing to sell their child's innocence?

"But, of course..." Reaching into my pocket, I produced a small box I brought from the mall with Wild and Skip. When I saw the heart-studded diamonds, I had to get them. They screamed bougie baby, and that's exactly what Briley was.

“Oh my goodness! Oh my goodness! Look, Uncie Jerome! I got sparkly heart earrings.”

“Sparkly? Nah, Briley Boo—them is diamonds! Uncie gonna have to teach you the difference. Come on! Let’s go in the back and try them on.” I watched as they walked toward the hall just as Denim entered the living room. Lil' Mama was stacked. We hadn’t fucked since the first time, and I was intentionally trying to keep it that way but seeing her in this mid-thigh length blush-colored dress with the ribbing showing off her curvaceous body had my dick on brick. Denim was gorgeous in the face, so the body was an addition. Outside of her being a federal agent, she was cool as fuck too.

Meeting her eyes after scanning her from head to toe, I was ready to forego my original plan to not dive back into her superb pussy. “Andre?” I heard her call my name. “I’ll take the flowers so we can go...”

“Damn, my bad, Lil' Mama. You had a nigga stuck for a moment. You look beyond good tonight. I want to say fuck these reservations.”

Chuckling, she rounded the corner from putting the flowers in a vase and grabbed her phone and clutch. “Well, if you’re going to do that, let me know now so I can throw on my Birkenstocks and take off these So Kates.”

Pulling her into me, I leaned in and nibbled on her bottom lip. I’d kissed her a few times now, and the shit didn’t help my predicament because her lips were just as soft as her ass and just as sweet as her pussy. I was still stuck between the battle of my heart and mind, and kissing Denim on the lips was a sign that my heart was winning. “Nah, I’m going take your fine ass to dinner, and then I’m gone fuck the shit out of you once you’re done eating. Rome staying, I hope, because you might not make it back tonight.” Feeling her shudder in my arms, I smirked at how turned on she easily became. “Let’s go, Dee before you make me help you bust one before dinner.”

We left without saying goodbye because we both knew Briley would've begged to go with us. Letting the mix of desire and comfortability carry the silence, we arrived at the restaurant Wild had recommended. I was shocked Milly Grove wasn't riddled with traffic this Friday night because the roads were usually a mess.

Opening the passenger door of the Bentley, I grabbed Denim's hand as she stepped out. "Dre, I am so hungry, I could eat a cow."

"I'm hungry for something else, but this steak will do."

Blushing, she tapped my chest playfully, and I chuckled. In the last two months since I've been in Milly Grove, Denim and I had never been flirty. Sexual—absolutely, but kiddish banter never occurred. I was enjoying her company more than I should've, and I knew right then I was fucking up.

Once we were seated, I realized Wild's suggestion might not have been the best one. There was hardly anyone in the restaurant, and the menu wasn't diverse. The wait staff looked presentable and the place looked clean, but something about a fine dining restaurant not being booked on a Friday night didn't sit right with me.

"Well, I guess I'll get the lamb," Denim said, setting the menu on the table.

"Shit, I was thinking the same, but the porterhouse sounds just as good."

"You get the steak, and I'll let you have some of my lamb if you share some bites of your steak."

Using only my eyes to look at Denim, I couldn't help but smile because she was cheesing. "Bet. What you drinking? And no, you ain't drinking that cheap shit we had at the auction."

Denim cracked and covered her mouth to stop the loud cackle threatening to escape. “Dre! The wine wasn’t cheap... I’m just a lightweight.”

“Nah. Gabby said it tasted cheap, and she would know... buying them thousand-dollar bottles for the compound.”

“Thousand dollar bottles of wine? Oh, y’all rich, for real.” We both laughed, and I felt myself no longer worrying about the fact that I was going to have to kill her.

Deciding to force myself to enjoy Denim without worrying about the real shit lingering between us, I reached across the table and grabbed her hand. Rubbing her knuckles with my thumb, I grinned, and her face turned red.

“Denim... I like you. I know I told Bri you were my girlfriend, and while I can’t give you that... I can at least admit that I’m fucking with you. All I ask... is that you... don’t stop wearing dresses that show me how fat that ass is.”

Breaking the serious look on my face, Denim pulled her hand from mine and tossed her napkin at me. We laughed and kept the conversation light, with Briley, Jerome, and Sweets being the highlights. By the time we’d finished eating and got back to her place, she was good and tipsy, so I walked her in, helped her disrobe, and left out of her room. I could’ve gotten her consent to fuck, but the night went too good, and I had taken a break from the mission long enough. Passing Briley’s room, I checked in to ensure she was good. Seeing her asleep with her pink princess gown and the earrings I’d gifted her had my heart winning again. I had to figure out how to execute the original plan without creating too much damage.

I’d never had to think this hard about killing someone. I couldn’t help but wonder if I was struggling because I didn’t want to kill Denim anymore. Did I like her too much now, or was my hesitation for Briley to continue having a mother? Or was I struggling because I knew Denim might be the one I was supposed to settle down

with like everybody wanted?

Grunting at the possibility, I left the house and got in my car. I was a killer, and this shit didn't happen to killers.

Fuck.

* * *

Part of me wanted to pull up on Denim and Briley, but I didn't want to overstep. I hadn't seen them the entire weekend, wanting to give them time to do what girls did but also taking the time to get my shit together. I was already doing shit out of the norm with her, and I didn't want to further complicate things.

Once showered and dressed, I left the penthouse and headed to my office with Denim still heavily on my mind. Against my better judgment, I said fuck it and decided to call her instead.

"I was just thinking about your fine tail. Are you coming to see me today?"

"Jerome, get your muthafuckin' ass off my line." I frowned and chuckled. "Where the fuck is my girl?"

Shit. Did I just call her my girl?

"You're girl, huh?" he asked in an amused tone. "You know... you two need to bite the bullet and stop playing with each other. It's clear as day that y'all are in strong like. So, what's the problem?"

The problem is Denim and I can never be anything more than what we are. My life is one I don't plan on changing or slowing down any time soon. Denim's life is filled

with catching niggas going illegal shit because she's a federal agent, and she's been lying to me for months about it, so I can't trust her. I wanted to say all of that so badly, but instead, I sighed deeply into the phone, hoping to annoy Jerome.

"Rome, why do you have my phone?" I heard Denim say in the background. "Who is that?" I could hear rustling and murmurs in the background before it got quiet. "Hello...?"

"What's up, Lil' Mama?" I chuckled at her trying to act all timid. "How are you doing today? Why haven't I heard from you this weekend? How's my little homie, Big Bri?"

"I've been giving you space, Andre. I know how you feel about women being clingy, and I don't want Bri getting on your nerves." She sighed heavily. "My daughter is fond of you, and?—"

"From what Jerome says... her mother is too." I smirked as I continued to whip through town. Traffic was light, and thoughts of shooting to her side of town and just working from there came to mind.

"Yes, I like you, but I like you more than I should, Dre." The nervousness in her tone couldn't be missed, but I waited to see what else she would say. "I need to tell you something important. I know it's early, but can you come over?"

As I approached the traffic light, I started to respond when something caught my eye. Glancing over to Skip's club, I could see a blacked-out Honda creeping up on the side of the building. I slowly made a right as I watched three masked men canvas the area.

"What is it you wanna talk about, Denim?" I asked in a detached manner as I whipped into the lot on the opposite side. Letting my window down slightly, I aimed my pistol out of my passenger window. Before the last assailant could enter the

building, he was dropped with a bullet to his temple.

“What was that?” she asked, ignoring my question. “It sounded like?—”

“Let me call you back.” I disconnected the call as I cut the ignition.

Hurriedly, I made my way to the side door they’d entered as quietly as I could. I silently crept through the dark hallway, hoping that I’d made it in time. Skip should’ve been the only one here at this time, so that alone told me this was a robbery. As I got closer to his office, I could hear the voice of an unknown man making demands.

“Empty the fuckin’ safe, and we might let you live to see tomorrow, nigga!” I stayed close to the wall as I leaned forward to see if he was okay. Sitting at his desk with an annoyed look on his face, I had to stop myself from chuckling at this nonchalant-ass nigga. “If I tell you again, I’m gonna kill you, nigga.”

“You might as well do it because I ain’t giving you shit.” He eyed the one holding the gun on him as he leaned back in his seat. “If you knew like I did, you’d get the fuck out of here while you can.” He slowly dragged his eyes to the second man near the door. He’d yet to say anything. “You all right back there, lil’ nigga. You’re shaking in your fuckin’ boots.”

Once the guy holding the gun on Skip turned to face his friend, he spotted me. His eyes widened in fear as he aimed his handgun at me. He was too slow, and I’d sent one to his stomach before he knew what was happening.

“Oh shit!” the second guy screamed as he turned to me and tried to run. One bullet to his kneecap stopped him dead in his tracks. “Please don’t kill me!”

“What the fuck are you doing here, nigga?” Skip asked me as he stood from his seat

and stepped over both niggas without a care. “The kitchen ain’t open yet.”

I chuckled as I dapped him up. “Nigga, it’s almost ten o’clock. Ain’t nobody eating chicken wings this early. I was riding by and saw you might need a little help. You know these niggas?”

Walking over, he bent down and removed their masks. I shook my head at the fact that these kids didn’t look a day over twenty. Too bad they’ve ended their lives before they could begin by fucking with the wrong niggas.

“Who the fuck are y’all?” Skip stood over the one in charge and crossed his arms. “Who the fuck thought it would be a good idea to send you on this dummy mission?”

“Nigga, fuck?—”

Pew!

I sent one to the head of the guy I’d shot in the stomach. Skip arched his brow at me, and I just shrugged. That nigga wanted to be tough, and I’ve dealt with enough niggas to know he wasn’t going to tell him what he wanted to know.

“Please don’t kill me!” The scaredy cat cradled his knee as he cried in pain. “This is the first time I’ve ever done something like this. Me and my cousin were just trying to make some money.”

“That’s your cousin that I dropped at the door?” I asked as I propped up against the wall. “If so, you’re the last man standing, my boy.” Nodding toward Skip, I continued, “Tell that man who sent y’all to crash out, and I’ll make sure you make it out of here.”

We watched as he balled up and cried like a bitch. I don’t understand why these guys

always claim to be tough but want to cry out and plead the blood of Jesus when they meet the Reaper. Growing annoyed, I pushed off the wall and walked over to him. Leaning down, I lifted him by the collar of his shirt and tapped his nose with my gun.

“Shut the fuck up with all that crying, nigga. I’m gonna fuck around and give you something to cry about.”

“You shot the nigga’s kneecap off, Dre.” Skip chuckled as he pulled out a snicker. “The shit probably hurt.”

“Not as much as it’s gone hurt your pockets when you the invoice for my services populate in your email.” I smirked as his smile dropped. Frowning, he walked over and pushed me out of the way, causing the nigga to fall back to the floor.

“Who the fuck sent you, and why?” His teeth were clenched as he hovered over him. “I’m not going to ask again, nigga!”

“It was B-Big Lew. He said he’s coming for you and for us to send the message. He said?—”

Pop!

Before he could even finish, Skip popped him. Aggravated, he pulled out his phone to call his brother and their clean-up crew. We sat there in silence, but it didn’t take Uno any time to arrive.

“Say, Skip, why is there a dead nigga at the side door?” he called out from the hallway. “What the fuck?”

Walking into the room, he scanned the two dead bodies before his eyes went from his brother to me. Giving him a finger wave and a smile, I watched his frown deepen.

“You two niggas.” He shook his head before he took a seat on the couch tucked in the corner of the room. “What the fuck happened?”

We both gave him a rundown of the quick events and what the little niggas said. He was even more pissed by the time we were done because it was nothing to go on.

“Who the fuck is Big Lew?” He scratched his head as he asked aloud. “I don’t know anyone with that name.”

“It’s probably a nigga that wants to make a name for himself for taking out a Mills.” Skip shrugged as his clean-up crew came into the room. His brother and I made our way up the hall to the empty section. By the time the guys finished doing their thing in the office and hallway, the girls would be making their way in for the night shift. I was taking a moment to decompress after killing two niggas, so I was hoping to make it out of here before they arrived.

Skip jogged up the section steps, dusting his hands off. “Say, Dre... I appreciate you, man. I’ll never put shit past a scared man. Things could have ended for me a little differently today.”

“Ain’t nothing.” We slapped hands before Uno offered me his as well. “I’m glad everything is everything.” Sliding to the edge of the couch, I cleared my throat and looked toward Uno. “Since I have y’all here, I want to run something past y’all.”

While Skip’s office was being cleaned, I told them the real reason for the lieutenant governor’s auction. Skip was pissed he attended something so vile, but he offered to help me with whatever I needed. I told them I had it covered, but I wanted Uno to be aware of the commotion I might make in the city. After knowing his uncle had a hand in the trafficking as well, he was more than willing to help.

For the next two hours, I went over some of the plans I had for the men involved, as

well as some possible assistance I may need from them. Once we were done, I emailed Skip an invoice for three million dollars for the bodies I dropped, and he started fussing. Uno and I sat back, clowning his ass because it seemed money was the only thing to knock him off his horse. I told him what happened was on the house this time and to hit me up later with a wing plate to call it even.

Since my plans for the day were altered, I figured I'd just go back home, check in with the crews at the shopping center and the casino, and chill for the day. What was to come was now weighing heavily on me, and I was ready to get it over with so I could take my ass back home. Between Denim, the sex trafficking ring operators, and the people I've already had to kill, I had overstayed my welcome. I was positive the longer I stayed here, the more bodies Uno would have to discard. He'd just gotten his city back on track to being the peaceful town it's known for. The last thing he needs is for its citizens to wonder why the population is decreasing.

* * *

Standing a few yards away from Denim, I held my phone to my ear and watched as she silenced my call for the third time today. For the past two days, I've been feeling like a hoe for blowing up her phone just to be ignored. I wanted to cause a scene at this park and show her who Andre Boudreaux really is, but the last thing I wanted to do was scare these little-ass kids.

"Mommy, your phone has been ringing all day..." Briley looked up at her innocently as Denim bent over to tie her shoe. The way her ass was sitting up in the jeans she was wearing had me looking around before I adjusted my dick in my sweats.

"Today is all about us, baby girl." Denim beamed up at her as she adjusted her little necklace before straightening her jacket. "Plus, Mommy doesn't want to talk to the person that keeps calling. They'll get the message soon enough."

“Damn... I thought we were better than that.” I scared the girls as I approached them. “Let me find out y’all don’t like me no more.”

“Dreee!” Bri screeched as she jumped into my arms. “Oh my gosh! I asked about you. You told me you were going to have a tea party with me, and you didn’t come back to the house.”

“I never make promises I don’t intend to keep, Big Bri.” I pinched her cheek and was rewarded with a damn near toothless smile. “Go have some fun, and maybe if Mommy is nice to me, I can take my girls for some ice cream later.”

Squeezing my neck, I placed her on her feet before she hugged her mother’s legs and ran to the sandbox. I watched her for a few minutes before I turned my eyes to Denim. She looked good as hell in her oversized sweatshirt, with her hair pulled up in a messy bun and a fresh face. Denim made me feel things, and I didn’t like that. At the same time, I couldn’t stay away from her, no matter how hard I tried.

“Why have you been ignoring my calls, Dee?” I mugged her as she tried her best to keep her eyes off me. “What the fuck did I do to you?”

Pouting like a child, I waited for her to answer me. I’ve never been one to give a damn about women ghosting me because I usually ghosted them first. I’ve dealt with many, but it was different with Denim—I cared even though I shouldn’t. I enjoyed all of the time we’ve spent together, even when sex wasn’t involved. Our time together would be coming to an end soon, but it didn’t stop the brewing feelings within me.

“I don’t have anything to say to you. The time for talking was days ago when you hung up in my face.”

Frowning in confusion, I watched as she rolled her eyes and strutted to a nearby bench. I didn’t have the slightest clue what she was talking about. Suddenly, it hit me,

and what confused me even more was that I felt bad about it.

“Damn, my bad, Denim. I got caught up with some shit with Skip, and—that’s my fault.” I took a seat beside her on the bench, but she remained focused on Briley, saying nothing. “Dead ass, Lil’ Mama. I’m sorry. You gotta accept my apology, though, because I ain’t never said that to a woman in my life.”

Still not trying to hear what I had to say, I grew irritated when she sat unmoved. I could have very well left well enough alone, but I really was sorry for snubbing her. Just as I was about to hem her ass up and make her talk to me, I noticed Briley appeared to be in distress. She was surrounded by a couple of kids as one pointed at her, making a mean face. Before Denim could walk over and assess the situation, I was already on it.

“Aye!” I barked out when I noticed one of the little boys push her. “Keep your hands to yourself, lil’ nigga.” I’ve never been in a situation that involved a bunch of kids, and I’m sure my approach could have been better, but seeing Briley with tears in her eyes did something to me, and I wasn’t going for it.

“We had a bet! If she doesn’t go down the big slide, she had to eat a mud pie! It’s time for her to pay up!”

Picking up Bri, she wrapped her arms around my neck and sobbed quietly into my neck. Her little body was shaking, and that pissed me off even more. Kids will be kids, but her reaction raised a couple of antennas. With her mother and me being close by, there’s no reason she should have been this scared.

“Come on, Briley. Let’s go, baby.” Denim walked over and tried to pry her from my arms, which made Bri hold on tighter. “Sweetie, it’s okay...”

“I want to stay with Dre, Mommy.” She sniffled and eyed me. “They said a lot of

mean things to me, just like my brothers. They were going to hurt me.”

Dragging my eyes to Denim, they turned into slits as she pulled her phone from her back pocket. I’m not sure who she was calling, but that wasn’t my concern. By now, several children and a few parents surrounded us, wanting to know the issue.

“What’s going on here?” some Vin Diesel-looking motherfucker stomped over and asked. “Why are you in my son’s face?”

“Ask your son what he did to my kid to make her cry?” I mugged him with the same energy he was giving me. “I want to know exactly what he said to her.”

“Are you serious?” He chuckled as he looked back and forth between me and his son. “They’re playing and...” The look on my face told him I was deadass serious, which caused him to change his tune. “Fine. Ricky Jr., what did you say to this—” He peered over his shoulder and eyed me and Bri. “Girl to make her cry?”

“She didn’t want to do like I said, so I told her to shut up and do as I say before I give her something to cry about.” He smirked as if he’d done the right thing. “I was going to make her pay for not doing what I told her.”

A few of the parents frowned in disappointment as they listened to the boy speak. He didn’t look to be any older than ten years old and already had the wrong idea about life and how things worked in the real world.

“Here’s what you’re going to do...” I shifted Briley in my arms as a heated Denim rejoined us. “Both of you are going to apologize to Briley.” I looked from the father to the son. “You’re a child, but the things you’re being taught will have you in for a rude awakening in the real world. You can’t go around threatening girls—hell, anybody—to do something they don’t want to do. If you were a little bit older, I would show you what it felt like to be picked on.”

“I beg your pardon!” The father turned red in the face. “How dare you speak to my son that way. Do you know who I am?”

“The question is, do you know who I am? If you did, I promise you, you’d be thankful that I’m considering letting you walk away on your own accord for the disrespect you’ve not only shown to my baby girl but to me as well.” Stepping to him, I added, “I’m the real, big bad wolf in this situation. Don’t make me come blow your house down with you inside. If I have to make a house call, I won’t be so nice about it.”

Scared out of his mind, he apologized for his son’s actions and encouraged him to do the same. Seeing his father scared made the little bitch-ass kid shiver in fear of what would happen if I went through with my warning.

“What do you say, Big Bri?” I tapped her chin and was given a small smile. “Do you forgive them?”

Tapping her nose to think, I saw the moment her eyes lit up in amusement.

“I will... if Ricky eats a mud pie!” She covered her mouth and giggled. “I think that’s only fair.”

“Briley!” Denim gasped from the side of us. “Are you serious?”

“She is.” I eyed the little boy. “You hurt her feelings trying to be a bully, so it’s only fair you experience first-hand what it’s like to have someone pick on you.”

“Sir, I don’t think that’s necessary.” He grabbed ahold of his son’s shoulders as people around us began to murmur in anticipation of what was going to happen next. “How about we put this all behind us and go on with our day?”

Nodding, I kissed Bri on her temple and handed her to her mother. I took one step toward the father and son duo until I was hovering over them both. Peering down at him through hooded eyes, I grinned as I crossed my arms.

“I got fifteen reasons under this hoodie that will rock your world and ruin your day.” His eyes bulged as tears ran down his son’s face. “You got two options here: eat the mud or get buried underneath it. Either way, you’re eating that muthafuckin’ dirt. Hurry up and make your choice; my girls want ice cream.”

Dropping to his knees and taking his son with him, I watched as the father scooped up a handful of mud and made his son do the same. People gasped in shock before going into a fit of laughter at the scene before them. Glancing over my shoulder, Briley happily clapped as her mother’s mouth was on the ground.

“Next time... think about that before you decide to bully somebody’s kid. The next man might not be as nice as me. Help your punk-ass daddy up, and y’all get out of here before I change my mind.”

Jumping to their feet, people cheered as the two took off running to the other side of the park and jumped in their station wagon. I turned to face my girls, and I couldn’t help but hug them both.

“You’re insane.” Denim giggled as I locked my hand in hers and carried Bri. “I can’t believe you did that.”

“Believe it.” I chuckled as people damn near broke their necks, getting out of my way. “I’m not letting anybody mess with my girl.”

“I like you, Dre!” Bri giggled as she threw her arms around my neck. “Can you come over and watch movies tonight? Mama is making spaghetti.”

Approaching the ice cream truck, I couldn't help but wonder what I was doing with these girls. Here I am, holding hands in a park and threatening to kill kids and their fathers for making her daughter cry. I know this shit is going to end badly, and although I knew how to clean up my messes, this was an unfamiliar mess that was growing by the day.

“Yeah, I'll be there.” I placed her on the ground and watched as she cheered before running over to the truck. Pulling her mother toward me, I lifted her chin and kissed her lips. “I'm sorry for hanging up on you and not calling back. That was fucked up. I don't know what this is with us, but I like you. Let's just kick it and go from there, and to show you I'm serious, I'll come over tonight and eat your red sauce.”

Grinning from ear to ear, I laughed as Denim threw her arms around my neck and kissed me. Her lips felt like pillows, and I found myself sinking into them. Breaking away, she wiped her gloss from my lips before walking over to Bri. As I kept an eye on them, I pulled my phone from my pocket and shot a quick text.

Me:

Say Jules, tell me what to look for when I'm eating red sauce a girl done made.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

“Good morning, Miss Atkins. Nice to see you back.”

I greeted my fellow agents with small smiles and curt nods as I walked through the building. Today was my first day back after three months, and I was already contemplating another leave. I’ve enjoyed spending so much time with Dre and Briley that coming back in was extremely hard.

Walking down the small hallway, I locked eyes with Agent Micheals. He called and tried to link a few times, but I let him know in the nicest way I was seeing someone. I haven’t heard from him since.

“Good morning, Agent Micheals,” I spoke before I rounded the corner to my office. “How are you doing today?”

“Good.” He glanced up from his computer and spoke dryly. “You?”

“Wonderful.” I giggled and kept moving. I don’t know what his problem was, but I hate it for him. He wasn’t going to make me feel bad for not wanting to date his ass.

Andre and I have been getting closer these past few weeks, and I’m the happiest I’ve ever been. I saw him in a new light the day he defended my daughter at the park. Speaking of Bri, she loves herself some Andre. The way those two are with each other, you would think they were best friends. Every time I’ve wanted to come clean, their growing relationship is what stopped me. I never want to break the bond those two share. I would feel awful.

Stepping into my office, I powered on the lights and electronics before placing my

briefcase on my desk. Opening the expensive leather case, I found the folder with the information I'd gathered on Dre and his family. I'd added very little to the file because somewhere within my investigation, I stopped asking the questions I needed to ask. While I was not convinced he and his family were law-abiding citizens, I no longer cared. Underneath the many layers Dre possesses, his kindness and loyalty shined through the most to me. He's a no-nonsense type of man, and my best guess is that he used bullets to ensure no one did wrong by the Boudreaux family. He is good to my daughter and me, and that's all that matters now.

After shredding everything, I logged into my email and groaned at the hundreds of messages waiting for me. Of the ones marked important, there was a link about Nate's case.

"Guilty on all counts." I blew out a deep breath. Seeing him get life without parole wasn't shocking to me at all. The man was diabolical in the streets of California. I read over the court transcripts and felt proud of myself. While I had agreed to stop using my looks and gender to entrap criminal men, I still accepted this outcome with Nate as a win. I had worked tirelessly to gather all the evidence needed to indict him. "Good job, Denim."

As I continued to scroll through emails, a sea of congratulations were flooding my inbox. I knew it was about Nate, and I made a mental note to thank them all later. Hearing my phone vibrate, I groaned at seeing Bryce's name. Seeing as though it was his week with Bri, I knew I had to answer.

"Atkins here," I answered as I placed the phone to my ear. "Is everything okay?"

"I see you decided to return to work instead of being a hoe. Good for you." I could see his smug expression through the phone, thinking his words had affected me. I rolled my eyes as he continued, "I can't believe you've had that man around my daughter."

“Bryce, what do you want?” I was already tired of the conversation. “The last thing you need to do is be worried about me and what I have going on. Where is my child?”

This is the first time he’s been able to get Bri since I beat his wife’s ass, and while I didn’t want to let her go, my parents reminded me it was important to let him be a part of her life. He and I sat down and had a serious talk about my wishes when it came to his spouse being around my child. I wasn’t sure if he heard anything I said because the whole time, he wore a mixture of lust and disgust on his face. I relented anyway and let him take Briley for their time together.

“Briley is fine.” I could hear the frown in his voice. “We’re headed to breakfast before I take her to the zoo. She’s going to have a fun week with just the two of us. Ain’t that right, baby?”

Hearing her say, “Yes, sir,” so sweetly caused me to smile. She and I also talked, and I made sure she was okay with going to her father’s apartment for a week. Assuring me that she was okay as long as Rebecca and her brothers weren’t around, she was more than happy to spend a long week of fun with him. I was still skeptical, so I made she had all her devices so I could keep up with her while gone.

Briley nor her father knew about the necklace I had gifted her a couple of weeks ago. It was embedded with a tracking device, and I made sure she knew not to take it off under any circumstance. Rebecca is his wife; I’m not naive to think she would never be around my child. Nevertheless, I needed to know where my baby was at all times when she wasn’t with me. She had her iPad and can call me at any time, but if there’s a time I can’t get in touch with her or her father, I’m pulling up.

“If there’s nothing else, I need to go.” I looked up to the sound of a knock at my door. Senior Special Agent Roberts stood, waiting for my nod to enter. He had a smile on his face that I couldn’t read. “Tell my daughter to call me, and don’t forget what I

told you, Bryce.”

“You don’t need to worry about me or my wife. You should be kissing her feet for not calling the cops on you!” He gritted through clenched teeth, likely trying to keep his voice hidden from Briley. “You’re so concerned about her and who’s around my daughter when you know nothing of the man you’re fucking. I can’t wait to see when your perfect little love affair blows up in your face.”

Not in the mood to go back and forth with him, I disconnected the call and gave my attention to Agent Roberts. Since I’ve been on leave, he hasn’t tried to contact me outside of the email wishing me well. Now that he was here, it was time for a long overdue conversation.

“Good morning, Agent Roberts.” I stood from my desk and extended my hand, which he happily accepted. “How are you doing today?”

“I’m good... thank you.” He nodded and took a seat. “Did you enjoy your leave? How are you feeling?” Agent Roberts didn’t play about mental health. He was a hard ass, but he cared about his team’s well-being. While we didn’t agree on a lot, I did like his leadership skills.

I smiled. “I’m feeling great—refreshed. The time away did me some good and made me think about some things I wanted to discuss with you.” Taking a deep breath, I looked at him intently as I continued, “First, I want to say thank you for all of the opportunities you’ve given me. I know you may think I don’t deserve my position within this division, but?—”

“I never once said you didn’t deserve anything.” He frowned and leaned up in his seat. “I hate the fact that you think your greatest asset to this team is using your body as bait. Yes, you’re beautiful, and at times, these men are weak enough to fall for your traps, but that’s not all you are. You’re smart, and you can do so much better.

The amount of time you invest into meeting these men and luring them into giving you information can be used in the office, making phone calls and connecting dots to get the same information without taking your clothes off.”

Leaning back in my seat, I cracked my knuckles because I felt like I was having another conversation with my dad. “That’s what I wanted to speak with you about, sir. I love my job and what I do. Being a field agent is one of my greatest accomplishments in life outside of my daughter. I take pride in knowing I’m here because of my hard work and dedication—nothing else. I will be submitting a formal request soon to be no longer selected for undercover assignments. I no longer desire to be in the field if I’m there as bait. I would like to sharpen my skills as an investigator in the office—I hope you understand, sir.”

He said nothing as he looked at me. I wasn’t nervous about this decision affecting my job security. However, his response would set the tone for if I was still going to be on his team in this division.

“That’s all right with me.” He stood from his seat, causing me to do the same. “I’m sure you also want to speak about being more local instead of traveling...”

“Actually, yes—” I frowned slightly, pulling my hand back from him. “Wait, how did you know?”

“Oh, come on.” He chuckled as he stuffed his hand in his slacks. “It’s only logical with your new life change. I admit, you had me fooled.” He smiled and wagged his finger at me. “I thought you really had a hard-on for the Boudreaux family, especially Andre. This whole time, you were looking into this man because you wanted to be sure you were making the right choice.”

Words could not describe how confused I was by what he was implying. Andre and I did have a sexual relationship, but I wouldn’t say it was life-changing. Seeing me

dumbfounded, he continued to chuckle as he pulled out his phone and began to type. Before long, he was handing it to me. What I saw made my jaw drop.

“Congratulations on your nuptials, Agent Boudreaux. I wish you a lifetime of happiness.”

Clear as day, an email was sent to my superiors and human resources saying I’d married Andre Boudreaux. As I scanned the email, I clicked an attachment displaying a marriage license I’d signed.

“I-I...” I stammered as I handed him his phone. “I don’t know what to say.”

“You don’t have to say anything.” His smile wavered at my reaction. “I’m just glad to know that was the real reason for you looking into him and not because you wanted to build some make-believe case. That family is very powerful, and the wrong accusation would land the agency in more trouble than I care to discuss.”

Nodding, I said nothing since I didn’t trust my words. I was married to Andre Boudreaux, and I didn’t know how. I didn’t know when this happened. More importantly, I didn’t know why.

“T-Thank you for understanding it all, Agent Roberts.” I tried to keep my tone steady, although I was feeling anything but calm. “I’m glad we were able to talk early on. If you’d excuse me, I need to catch up on a few things.”

He stared at me briefly before walking out of my office and closing the door behind him. I couldn’t help but sit and glare at my computer screen in hopes I’d find the answer to my latest woes. Snapping from my thoughts, I went to all the emails congratulating me. After opening them, I was more confused than ever. Here I am, thinking I was being praised for placing a bad man behind bars, when in fact, it was because of a marriage I didn’t know I had entered. Upon checking my outgoing mail,

I found the one sent from me saying I'd gotten hitched.

"What the fuck is happening?" I picked up my phone and clutched it tightly. "How did this happen?"

My hand slightly shook as I unlocked my phone and went to my contacts. I needed to call my parents and Jerome to see what I needed to do. Out of nowhere, my confusion turned to anger.

Andre Boudreaux.

I don't know how or why, but my gut was telling me he was behind this. Could he have found out who I was? I shook the thought immediately because there was no way. The more I thought about Dre doing this to me, the faster my anger turned to worry. What was his reasoning? I wasn't sure, but I had to find out.

Grabbing my keys, I locked everything and dashed out of my office without saying a word to anyone. I placed my phone to my ear and called Dre repeatedly, with no answer. One way or another, I was going to get to the bottom of this, and I hope this doesn't end with me killing my so-called husband.

* * *

"Trust me, cousin... I get why you're upset, but bitch! You act like Andre is some bum-ass nigga. Hell, let that man finesse me into marriage, and I'd be trying to get into his draws right damn now!"

As mad as I was, I couldn't help but laugh at Jerome. I'd decided to finally call him and vent about my woes with Andre. He was the better option between him and my parents since I've yet to get in touch with Dre. I've been blowing his phone up for two days now, and I still haven't been able to reach him. I even went as far as riding

to City Hall in hopes I would see him there with Uno, but he hadn't been there all week. While there, I spoke with the clerk about getting a copy of my marriage certificate, and sure enough, I was Mrs. Andre Boudreaux.

I groaned into the phone as I pulled my legs under me on the couch. "Rome! I'm being serious right now. How is that possible without my consent? I don't remember even signing?—"

Flashing through my mind was the night of Bryce's charity auction. I was drinking and so enthralled in the conversation I was having with Gabby and the girls that I didn't pay attention to what Dre asked me to sign. I assumed it was a waiver saying I was attending the trip with him.

"Oh my gosh!" I slapped my forehead and threw my head against the back of the couch. "How could I have been so stupid? Why would he even want to do this after everything I've done?"

"What you mean, bitch?" I could hear Jerome moving around and his background growing quiet. He was currently at Sephora working, but he didn't care. Whenever I called to gossip, he would stop everything and listen. "What did you do?"

Taking a deep breath, I took the next few minutes and gave Jerome the cliff notes on the reason I initially began entertaining Dre. I even went as far as telling him about Nate and I to put it all into perspective. Once I'd finished, the line grew so quiet that I thought the call was lost.

"Say something, Jerome..." I stood from the couch and paced the room, anxiously waiting for his opinion. "Tell me I didn't fuck up too bad."

He chuckled lowly. "Oh, you must certainly did. If you think he's the man you were accusing him of being, why did you think it would be a good idea to try and run game

on him?" I opened my mouth to speak, but nothing came out. "Exactly! If your gut was telling you the truth, evidence or not, you put a target on everyone you love simply because you didn't mind your business."

"I thought I was doing the right thing!" I threw my arms up in the air as tears swelled my eyes. "I thought he was a criminal!"

"A criminal you spread your legs for and allowed into your home where you and your child lay your head? For you to be so smart... you sure are dumb!"

Dropping my head, I couldn't do anything but cry. I messed up; I know I did. I shouldn't have ever tried to play my games with Andre. Now, he's playing a game that I have no control over.

"I-I love him, Jerome," I confessed as I wiped my tears. "I fell in love with the man I was supposed to be investigating, and I don't know what to do because I thought I would hate that man, Rome. But he doesn't have a bone in his body to hate." I took a breath to try to calm down. "My mind is telling me he knows who I am. It's telling me that he and I can't be together because of who we are, but my heart doesn't care. I want to be with him."

"So, why are you so against being married to him?" he asked as someone called out his name for help. Sighing, he told them to give him a minute. "You're attached to the man, so find a way to make it work."

I heard what Jerome was saying, but it wasn't that simple. He and I still had so much to learn about each other. Marriage isn't something I take lightly, and I didn't know if it's something I could go through with it, being that Dre was still a mystery.

"I need time to think, Rome. Since Andre has fallen off the face of the earth, I guess now is the best time to do just that." My phone dinged, causing me to pull it from my

ear. I was hoping it was Dre, but it was a notification from Briley's tracking app. "I'm going to make me some food and lay down. Call me later, cousin."

Placing my phone on the counter, I decided to make some leftover fajitas. I haven't eaten much these past few days because of worry, but this headache wouldn't budge, so it was best I focused on my health. Taking a seat at the island, I began to eat as I strolled my phone. Remembering the notification, I pulled up the tracking app to see what fun my girl was having.

"Looks like they've been all over the city today." I chuckled, thinking about Bri and how she was probably spending all of Bryce's money. "Make his pockets hurt, baby."

As I continued to stroll through her day's events, I went to the live footage to ensure they were home. It was almost nine, and he knew how I felt about having my baby out late. Checking the location, I frowned in confusion as I noticed him nearing Sunset Valley. That was the shadiest part of the city, and my child had no business being there. Closing out the app, I called him immediately.

"Pick up the damn phone, Bryce!" I yelled into the phone as it continued to ring in my ear. "I guess everyone's choosing to screen my calls."

I called him three more times before saying, "Fuck it!" Trashing my food, I slipped on a pair of Crocs, grabbed my keys, and dashed out the door. You give a nigga an inch, and he will take a mile every time. I don't know what business he had at this time of night, but it shouldn't have included my child being in the most dangerous part of town.

Thankfully, the roads tonight were clear of drivers and cops because the speed limit was nowhere near my mind. As I dashed through the town under the city lights, I continued to call Bryce and get his voicemail. Cursing profusely, I gripped the steering wheel and kept my eyes on Bri's location. They were no longer moving, and

I was about twenty minutes away. That alone threw me into a panic.

Seeing the sign that told me I was in Sunset Valley, my heart began to beat faster than when I first got on the road. I checked Bri's location once more and noticed I was approaching where she should be.

"What the fuck is going on?" I asked myself aloud as I parked outside the abandoned building. The location where Bryce held his event looked like a palace compared to this one. This building looked like a haunted bando, and there was no reason for my daughter to be here. Dashing out of my car with my phone in one hand and service gun in the other, I went in search of my daughter.

As the owls hooted above me, I crept to the side of the building in hopes of finding my Briley. She was definitely here because I saw Bryce's car. Pulling on the boarded doors, I almost thought I was at the wrong place until I spotted a small light coming from the opposite side. Pushing the wood softly, I eased it open and stepped inside. The dimly lit building made it impossible to see. As I fumbled to turn my phone's flashlight on, there was the faint sound of a gunshot in the distance.

Running in that direction, I thought the worst, and my heart felt like it was going to leap from my chest. Was my baby hurt? Why had Bryce brought her to this rundown shack? Who else was here with them that would shoot a gun? Entering a room with the only light shining, I stopped in my tracks and gasped at the sight before me.

"Bryce!" I placed my hand over my mouth and cried. He lay there, choking on his own blood as he bled from his torso. "Oh my gosh!"

Dragging my eyes from him, they landed on the hooded man with my sleeping daughter in his arms. Tears streamed down my face as I watched in horror at the danger that she was in. With the smoking gun in hand, he slowly rotated his head around until he faced me for a split second before turning around and sending one last

shot into Bryce, ending his life. With the gun now back at his side, he turned to face me completely.

“Andre...” I cried in confusion. Seeing Bri stir caused me to panic. “Why do you have my daughter?” Raising my gun to him with a shaky hand, I felt the tears continue to fall from my blurred vision. “You murdered my?—”

Before the words could leave my lips, a cloth was placed across my face. I struggled to break free of the unknown man’s hold on me, but the more I moved, the weaker I became. Hearing the faint sound of my phone dropping, I felt my eyes get heavy.

“Leave him here. Grab Denim, and let’s go,” were the last words I heard from Andre as he stepped past me with my daughter still in his arms.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

“Man, do y’all niggas have superpowers or something? How does ‘just the foundation’ look good?” Uno chuckled as we viewed the grounds for the casino. “I know once this place is up and running, it’s going to make the city a lot of money.”

“Facts,” I agreed as we canvased the area. “The revenue that’s coming to the city is going to be nothing you’ve ever seen before. Get ready.”

It’s only been three months, but the grounds for the casino are coming along quite nicely. The new construction team we’d put together has done a great job. I haven’t had to get on anybody’s ass, and that’s a plus to me.

“I don’t want to jump the gun or anything, but I was also thinking about gaming centers, more hotels, and even housing complexes around the city. I have a couple of guys interested in bringing more business here, but since we have contracts together, I wanted to run it by you first. Everybody is cool with it and down for whatever.”

Leaning against my Range, I folded my arms and peered through the lot. I wasn’t opposed to more businesses and knew Rosier wouldn’t be either. We would have to hire more workers to ensure there wouldn’t be any delay in the builds, but that was doable.

“You know I’m with it.” I nodded as I reached over and dapped him. “Let me get with the guys and chop it up with them, and it should be a go.”

We shot the shit for a few more minutes before we decided to leave. It would be dark soon, and the workers were packing up to go. Uno decided to hold a small press conference today with updates on some of the construction around the city, and I

tagged along in case questions were asked about the actual construction of the casino. The citizens in this town are one hundred percent for Kenneth Mills. The things he does to improve the quality of life here are commendable, and if I were a resident, I would've held the same sentiments. Uno was doing right by these people, and they will always have his full support.

"You know... I can't believe you really invoiced my brother for three million dollars." He chuckled once we were back inside my truck. "That nigga ain't said shit to us since."

"Hell, he barely talked anyway." I chuckled as I lit my blunt. It had been a long-ass week, and I needed to get my mind right. "You don't mind, do you?"

"Bitch, please." He waved me off and mugged me. Pulling out his own perfectly rolled blunt, I couldn't help but laugh. "I'm still that nigga."

As we both became lost in our thoughts, Denim came to my mind. Since getting back in her good graces, I'd been going to sleep and waking up to her, and it's the most normal I've ever felt. Big Bri has me wrapped around her fingers with no sign of letting up. I was playing with dolls, drinking tea, and singing along to princess movies with the pretty six-year-old. I didn't know what I was doing with them, and I hated it. I've prided myself on being ahead of the game and having my shit together. With them, I'm as lost as ever because I knew with them is not where I was supposed to be.

She was scheduled to go back to work a couple of days ago, and I knew then it was time to disappear. Once she found out that we were married, I knew she was going to finally show me the fury that allowed her to join the FBI. When she discovered our nuptials, she started blowing up my phone and hasn't stopped calling and texting since. I had plans for Denim once I handled her baby daddy. She'd just have to sit tight until I got my bearings to deal with her.

“Did you know Denim was the Feds?” I pulled from the blunt and asked. His choking caused me to take my eyes off the road and glance his way. “I’m going to take that as a no.”

“Fuck no, I didn’t know!” He beat himself on the chest, trying to get himself together. “Granted, I know her dad is a judge. Between us... he’s one of the officials on my roster. He’s a good dude, though. I only use him when I want to get niggas off the streets my way.” I nodded and felt his eyes on me. “You like her, don’t you?”

“Nigga, what are we? Five?” I chuckled as I thought about his childish question. “I do like her—I like her too damn much. It’s an issue I still haven’t figured out how to solve. I married her ass, though, so while it’s not a permanent solution, I have a little more time to sort the shit out.”

With his eyes damn near popping out of his head, I explained to him what took place at the auction he missed. I’d already told him and Skip about their lieutenant governor back at the club a couple of weeks ago. Uno was overly pissed off when he learned about Bryce and his extracurricular activities, but he agreed to let my brothers and I manage it. I think it was a hit to his ego that the sex trafficking had been occurring right under his nose, and he was green to it. After clueing him and Skip in, he made it a habit to check in daily on the progress of taking the lieutenant governor and his accomplices down. I was happy he had jumped on board and didn’t attempt to intervene without us leading. Holmes was my target, and I was the only one killing that muthafucka.

It was important for me to let the Mills brothers know what we were planning to do in Milly Grove. When shit started hitting the fan, I wanted those that mattered to be aware because of the list of elite people involved. I would never come here and show out without giving them a heads-up because if it were my city, I would want the same courtesy I was giving.

“Why trick her into marrying you, though? Why not just stop fuckin’ with her until you know what she’s up to...”

I glanced his way because he was right, and I didn’t have an answer to his question. Saved by the bell, my phone started ringing. Telling him to hold his thought, I noticed Jules was calling me. It was close to the time for us to pick up the girls, and everyone was on edge.

“Talk to me, bro,” I greeted as I exhaled a smoke cloud. “Everybody in the city good?”

“We’re straight... waiting for you to come home. Rosier is making me work, and I don’t like that for me. You’re his right hand—not me, nigga.” We shared a laugh before he got serious. “Who you with?”

“Uno... He knows what’s up, though.”

“I need you to make a move on Holmes sooner than we anticipated.” I cursed under my breath because I knew some shit like this would happen. “There’s talks of them buying more girls, and we need to cut off the head of the snake before it happens. We can’t save everyone, Dre. We need to make a move while we can.”

Knowing he was right, I agreed. Pulling over on the side of the empty road, I put the car in park before getting out and taking a deep breath. I was prepared to do this shit; it was just frustrating when I had to adjust my timeline because killing was a craft. There was a time and place for everything—one wrong move could be deadly.

“Aight. Holmes has his daughter this week, so it’s not a problem getting her away from Denim. I’m just going to call him and tell him I need the girl today instead of later.” Hearing the door behind me, I turned to face Uno. “Call your brother and tell him I need him to pull up... alone. When he gets here, I want you to leave.”

“Nigga, what?” Uno frowned as he paused from dialing his brother. “Why the fuck do I need to go?”

“No offense, but Skip is the one I’ve been catching bodies with since I’ve been here.” I grimaced at my logic like the shit made sense. “Come on, man. Don’t make me explain the shit, sounding like a simp. Plus, you an elected official. Ain’t nobody trying to catch a body with the mayor, homie. Tell that nigga I’ll send him some money for his services if he talks shit.”

Doing as I asked, Uno called his brother. After listening to Jules talk shit about us bonding over killing niggas, I hung up on his ass and called Holmes. It took him a few times to answer, but he finally did.

“Boudreaux,” he answered as if he was out of breath. “How’s it going?”

“Better if I can cash in tonight.” I kept the words brief. “I know we still have another week, but I need her tonight.”

Hearing him tell his daughter to watch television and he’d be right back, I gazed upward as I balled my fist and clenched my teeth. This nigga was a bitch for what he was doing, and I couldn’t wait to kill him.

“Andre, I’m not prepared to give her to you yet,” he said in a hushed tone once he returned to the phone. “She hasn’t been prepped yet, and I ? —”

“The fuck you mean... prepped?” I tried to keep the anger from my voice, but it was too late. “The shit is simple. I paid my money, and now I want the girl. It ain’t shit else to talk about.”

As I waited for him to respond, my blood boiled in fury. This man was seriously selling me his daughter with no remorse. I wanted to make his death as painful as I

could.

“Rebecca and I had plans for her before we gave her to you,” I squeezed my eyes shut as I gripped my phone so tight that I heard it crack. “If you can give me until the end of the week ? —”

“You have two hours to meet me in Sunset Valley,” I growled, and I damn near didn’t recognize my own voice. “You will not touch her. You will not even look at her. I paid for her to come to me a certain way, and that’s how I expect her to be when I get her. Don’t make me come find you, nigga, because I will. And when I come, it’ll be with zero understanding. I’m killing you and everyone attached to you. You have two hours. I will text you with the details.”

Disconnecting the call, I walked over to the woods and threw up everything I had in my stomach. That nigga was sick as fuck and didn’t deserve to live another day.

“That bad?” Uno walked over and handed me a bottle of water. “Skip is on his way. Tell me what you need from me, bro. Let me do something.”

Taking the bottle of water, I panted as I gulped it down. The cool air didn’t do anything to stop the sweat pouring down my face. Hearing how that man and his wife wanted to harm my Big Bri had me tore up. I needed to shake back because I wouldn’t be a minute late for pick up.

“If I give you a list of things, do you think you can have it at the penthouse by the time I get there?” I asked. “Other than that, I’m good.” Walking back to the car, I paused. “Tell me you have a building in the Valley I could use.”

Seeing him nod, I breathed a sigh of relief as he called his brother and told him where we would be. Restarting the car, I turned the air on full blast and dialed my grandfather. If I was going to get through this with my mind intact, I was going to

need as much prayer as I could get.

* * *

Standing in the middle of the room, I waited patiently for Holmes to arrive. I felt my phone vibrate in my pocket for the hundredth time, causing me to power it off. I should have left it in the car or sent it back with Uno because Denim was blowing me down. She was going to be mad as fuck when I hit her back, but I can't worry about that right now.

Hearing the door creak open, I folded my arms as I heard the clicking of dress shoes on the hardwood floor. The stench of bitch invaded the room before I even saw him. Under the dimly lit light, Holmes rounded the corner with a sleeping Briley in her arms. What pissed me off was the fact that he brought her outside in nothing but a nightgown.

"Where are her clothes?" I dropped my arms and placed them in my pocket. My trigger finger was itching, and I was trying to control myself. "She's going to get sick."

"Ahh... she'll be fine." He smirked as he patted her bottom. "Sick or not, she's still the sweetest little thing. Also, I gave her some Benadryl, so she may be out for a little while if you're up for some early fun."

"Did you touch her?" I could feel my blood pressure rising every second he was before me. "Did you ? —"

"Sample the goods?" He chuckled as he rubbed her back. "No, but I was tempted. Every time I washed her off, or even combed her sweet-smelling hair, I was tempted. You know, I'll buy her back if you want me to. Maybe I can even offer you a deal on some new girls I have coming next week."

Stepping toward him, I reached out my arms, and his beady eyes flashed with fear as he took a step back. “Hand her to me.”

“Why do you want her?” He moved to the side to stop me from grabbing her. “You’re already fucking her mother. I know her pussy is good and tight—maybe not as tight as Bri’s, but ? —”

Reaching out, I grabbed his throat in hopes I would rupture his trachea. His eyes bulged as he began to cower beneath my stare. My patience was growing thin with this nigga, and I was ready to make him feel me.

“Listen here, nigga. I don’t know who the fuck you think I am, but I’m way worse than anything you could have imagined.” I smirked as his eyes began to water. “I will cut your dick off and shove it down your fuckin’ throat if you ever refer to Bri or her mother with that much vulgarity. Do you fuckin’ understand me?” Barely able to nod, I loosened my grip and threw him into a fit of coughs. “Hand her to me. Now!”

Removing my suit jacket, I draped it over her small body as I took her from him. I peered down into her sleeping face and kissed her temple. If it were left up to me, I would save her from all the evils of this world—not just the one that went half on her DNA.

He was still bent over, choking and holding his throat. “Now, are you taking her to Florida tonight? You need to make sure—ahh!”

Before he knew what was coming, I removed my Glock from the back of my pants and shot him in the knee. Bri began to stir from his screaming, and that angered me even more.

“Andre?” She yawned sweetly as he looked around. I turned my body to keep him out of her line of sight. “What are you doing at my daddy’s house?”

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.

That's the verse my mother always recited to me as a child, and at this moment, I thought of it when I looked at Bri. Smiling at her little self, I patted her back gently. "I came to get you and take you back to your mother. Just go back to sleep, baby."

Throwing her little arms around my neck, she squeezed me tightly, and before long, she drifted off to sleep again. Once she was out, my glare returned to a crying Holmes.

"You can't do this," he cried while cradling his knee. "Do you know who I am?"

"I do... and soon enough, the world will too." I stepped toward him, and he crawled backward as if he had anywhere to go. "You're a fuckin' pedophile who gets off on raping women and children. I wish I had time to let some of the boys show you what it's like to be violated." I chuckled at his crying as if it meant anything. "They'll lick those tears right on up."

Pow!

Shooting him in the stomach, I could have sworn I heard a door opening. Aiming my Glock at his head, I heard a small gasp come from behind me.

"Bryce!" I heard her weep softly from behind. Anger soared through me as she cried over this bitch-ass nigga. Dropping the gun to my side, I shifted Bri as I peered down at him, watching him gargle and moan in pain. Glancing behind me, we locked eyes briefly before I aimed at his head and blew it off his shoulders.

Hearing her call my name out as she called me a murderer made me feel targeted, but I couldn't worry about that right now. I needed to get Briley out of here. As I turned to face her, she continued to spew in rage, but it didn't last long. Placing a cloth

doused in chloroform over her nose, I watched her struggle against Skip before her body went limp.

“Leave that nigga here. The boys are on the way.” I kept my eyes on an unconscious Denim as he threw her over his shoulder. “Place her in the back of my ride and follow me to the spot. I’ll take it from there.”

* * *

Sitting in the corner of my guest room, the only light that illuminated the room was from the stars. I nursed a glass of Hennessy as I watched Denim toss and turn in her sleep. Tonight, all truths, as well as her fate, would be revealed.

After leaving Sunset Valley, Skip helped me set the girls up at the penthouse until I figured out what I wanted to do with them. Leaving witnesses behind has never been a thing of mine, and it wasn’t my intention to start doing so now. Once they were settled, I thanked Skip and told him how I wanted to handle Bryce’s body. He agreed with my plan and was headed back to the scene to oversee his men for me.

Picking up my iPad, I logged into the penthouse’s camera system and watched Briley as she slept peacefully in the next room. Baby girl could have landed in the wrong hands tonight, and I couldn’t imagine someone hurting her. I clenched the glass tightly at the reality of that someone being her father. So badly did I want to hit Jules and ask if he could bring him back to life just so I could kill him all over again.

“Ugh... What happened?” I dragged my eyes back toward Denim as she regained consciousness. “Why does my head hurt?” She grabbed her head before shooting straight up in the bed. Looking around the dark room in a panic, she slid from the bed and headed toward the door. “Briley!”

“Sit the fuck down and be quiet before you wake her up,” I said through closed teeth

as I threw back my shot. Reaching over, I turned on the lamp, and her eyes found mine. “Don’t make me tell you again.”

Fear flashed across her face before she backed away from the door and did what I said. Tears began to fall from her eyes, and I ignored the tight feeling in my chest that began immediately after. It was time for Denim and me to have a serious talk, and nothing was going to stand in the way of that.

“Andre. Where is my daughter?” she croaked as she looked at me with pleading eyes. “Why did you do this?”

Angling my head at her, I stood from my seat and took slow steps until I hovered over her. Dropping the tablet in her lap, I watched as more tears fell from her eyes as she watched her daughter sleep.

“Briley is fine for now. If you want to keep things that way, I advise you to answer my questions honestly. If I don’t like what you have to say, well... you know the rest.” I walked back over to the spot where I previously sat to put some distance between us. My emotions were running high right now, and I didn’t want it to interfere with this conversation. “Tell me, Denim... who are you?”

Weeping, she continued to stare at the tablet as she examined her daughter. I wasn’t a patient man, but I allowed her enough time to get herself together before answering me.

“Andre... you have to understand. I-I thought you—but you are...” She looked at me with angry eyes. “You’re exactly who I thought you were.”

“I’m going to ask you one more time...” I picked up my Glock from the nightstand and placed it in my lap. Her eyes widened in horror. “Who the fuck are you, Denim?”

Looking as if she was seeing me for the first time, she sighed heavily before dropping her head. After a few moments, she held it high before responding, “Denim Atkins; special agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation.”

Hearing her finally say who she was out loud caused me to seethe in resentment. Her eyes stayed on mine as I tapped my Glock against my knee. Looking at this woman, I wanted to kick myself for not calling her out on her shit earlier. Now, here I am, conflicted about how I want to her end her life for thinking she could play with me.

“Special Agent Atkins... age twenty-eight. Daughter of Judge Joe and Mrs. June Atkins. No siblings. One daughter: Briley Jo Holmes.” I leaned forward in my seat. “I know everything about you—from the moment you graduated college, became an agent, and even when you enlisted Detective Morales to come to South Florida in hopes of setting up Rosier. Let’s not forget you’re the reason the port director, Paul, is no longer with us.”

“So you admit you killed them? Paul, Morales, my cousins... you killed them?”

“I admit that I’m considering killing you...” I smirked as her eyes expanded at my confession. “You see, Denim... you tend to stick your nose in the wrong shit. I, dear wife, am the wrong shit. And your cousins, they didn’t give a fuck about you. Nobody disrespects or threatens me—sorry they had the same fate as others who’ve tried to son me. Maybe the Big G has a way of intervening on my behalf. Enough about the worm food...” I stood from my chair and walked over to her. As I lingered and peered down into her beautiful face, my finger lifted her chin before my thumb traced her bottom lip. “Tell me, baby... why did you think it was a good idea to come after a nigga like me?”

My eyes darting to her tongue as she swiped at her bottom lip, panting heavily. Standing slowly to her feet, her eyes were trained on me as she began to speak. “When your father and David approached Morales for help to take down Rosier, they

contacted me. Morales and I had worked together in the past, and he knew I was the only one he could trust. He knew you guys didn't have me in your pockets like everyone else. He set the seed for Chris to get involved for information from Ari, Rosier's then-fiancée. When he was killed... and then Morales, I knew you all had gotten to him. I felt all hope was lost—the efforts were for nothing until Paul Reeves, the director overseeing your ports, told me about the illegal shipments you guys were docking. Then... out of nowhere... he vanishes.” Searching my eyes, I gave nothing away. “Just admit you killed them all, Andre.”

I placed my finger under her right lobe before dragging it across her throat until I made it to her left lobe. “I slit his fuckin’ throat from ear... to ear. I stood over him and watched the life leave his eyes as I mutilated him. Then, I wrapped him up nice and tight before feeding him to the biggest gators in North America, baby.” I smiled as goosebumps covered her neck. “You don’t bite the hand that feeds you and don’t expect to receive consequences. Now, tell me... what did you learn from all this? How do you feel knowing the blood of those niggas are on your hands?”

Shaking in distress, she stepped back from me with a look of horror in her eyes. She was terrified and had every right to be.

“You’re a monster,” she spoke barely above a whisper. “I wanted you to be punished for the things you’ve done. People may think you’re a good man because of the money you put into communities, but you also slaughter everyday people like cattle.”

“Men. Women. Children. Cats. Dog,” I said, taking a step toward her with each word. She took one back until her back was pressed against one of the floor-to-ceiling windows. “I’ve killed them all. I’m an exterminator. A fuckin’ reaper, baby. Tonight, you got to see it firsthand. How does it feel knowing you’re married to a murderer? The very man you thought you were going to finesse with a fat ass, wet pussy, and a smile ended up finessing you. You fell in love with the big bag wolf, Lil’ Mama.” I smirked as a tear slid down her cheek. “What a dumb lamb?—”

Whap!

Slapping the shit out of me, I growled at Denim as my head turned slowly back to face her. Gripping her neck, I wanted to choke the breath from her body. This muthafucka really put her hands on me.

“Let me fuckin’ go, Andre.” She clawed at my hand, but I refused to loosen my grip. “I’m going to kill you!”

“Kill me?” I threw my head back and laughed loudly. “Like I killed Bryce? You were so busy worried about me and the nigga you thought I was but didn’t know who the real monster in your life was. You procreated with a fuckin’ pedophile, but I’m the one that’s fucked up?”

Hearing me speak about her dead baby daddy caused her to fight even more. My grip on her neck tightened, but I was sure not to completely cut off her airway. Her movements slowed for a moment before I let her go. She dropped to the ground with her hands around her neck as she caught her breath.

“You’re a liar!” she cried. “He wouldn’t do that!”

“No?” I asked as I stood over her with my fists clenched. “Why do you think I ended up with Briley? That auction of his wasn’t for getaways, Denim! It was for selling underage children! Those vacation stays me and my people bought? They were fuckin’ kids!” Crouching down in front of her, I removed her hands from her ears so she could hear me. “Do you know all the vile things that man wanted to do to your daughter? He was sick as fuck, but you couldn’t see that. She voiced being uncomfortable with those people, but your solution was sending her to spend alone time with her father. She’s fuckin’ six; she couldn’t voice what was right or wrong. I ain’t blaming you, but I am! Instead of trying to jam me on some bullshit you think you know, you should have put that energy into making visits to his home to figure

out why your kid hated it there.”

“No!” She jumped to her feet and screamed, “You’re lying!”

“You know what... you’re delusional.” I simpered and shook my head. “You’re closer to more devils than you know, but you’re worried about me .” I placed my hands in my pockets and stepped away from her. I needed to get out of here before I killed this bitch. “Don’t worry, though. That’s one less demon you have in your life. Soon, it’ll be three.”

“Three?”

“You think Holmes was working alone?” I raised my brow at her as I placed my gun in my waistband. “You think that wife of his helped organize his event with no idea of what was happening?” I watched the blood drain from her face at the realization. “Exactly. Also, the devil before you will be a distant memory soon enough. Once I’ve washed this city clean, we’ll take care of that marriage shit, too, wifey .”

I kept my mug on her for a second longer than I should’ve. I knew deep down I was still stalling from the duty I had to off this girl. For now, I was going to leave and take some time to plan out my next moves. She and Bri would be locked in the penthouse until I figured it out. They had whatever they needed here, and I wasn’t worried about them leaving. Guards and cameras were everywhere, and any calls on the tablets would be redirected to Mimi.

“Wait...” she called out to me as I placed my hand on the knob. “Why did you marry me?”

Slowly, I turned to face her. Stepping toward her, she stood her ground with her distraught eyes on me.

“Spousal privilege is a real thing and is inadmissible in court, love.” I tapped her chin and grinned. “Anything a husband says to his wife can’t be used against him in the court of law.”

“I’m sorry, Dre...” She dropped her head as I let her chin go. I didn’t want to hear that shit, so I was out. “I was wrong for how I tried to play you. But I didn’t know who you really were before! I didn’t expect to fall in love with you! I love you, Andre Boudreaux!”

Leaving out of the room, I closed the door behind me and listened to her fall to the floor and cry her heart out. Feeling overwhelmed, I wanted to scream as I punched the wall repeatedly. This shit was a fucking mess, and this was the first time I didn’t know how to fix it.

What made matters worse was I had undeniably fallen in love with Denim too.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

“Mommy! I love Andre’s house. We get to order whatever food we want, and they bring it right on up!”

Smiling softly at my daughter, I played with her soft curls as we sat on Dre’s couch and watched a movie. We’ve been held hostage at his house for two days now, and I know my family was worried sick about not hearing from us. I haven’t seen or heard from Dre either, which had me stuck between depressed and mad as hell. He’s made sure we had food and clothing but nothing else. I even tried to dial out on the iPad he left here, but it just rerouted me to his cousin Mimi.

“Hang it up, Denim, and be thankful you’re still alive.”

That’s all she would say before hanging up the phone. The words rang out in my mind over and over. Dre could be back here at any minute to take not only my life but my daughter’s as well. He’s made it clear he’s not opposed to killing women and children, so I should probably be counting my lucky stars.

Another thing that’s played through my mind repeatedly is what he said about Bryce. Was he really who Dre made him out to be? He’s never shown me any signs to believe that he was sick, but what did I know? He hid an entire marriage and kids from me. For me to be a federal agent, how could I be so stupid?”

“Briley Boo, I need to ask you something?” I grabbed the remote and turned the television down before pulling her into my lap. “Mommy needs to talk to you about something very important, and I want you to be honest with me.” I gave her a soft, reassuring smile as she looked at me with bright and curious eyes. “Has your father ever done anything to hurt you?”

“What you mean, Mommy?” she asked innocently. “Like spank me?”

“Yes... and no.” I rubbed her cheek. It was so hard for me to ask her these questions, but I needed to know. “Has he ever done things to you that felt wrong ? Things that a daddy shouldn’t do?”

Tilting her head, she peered at me as if she were in deep thought. I never wanted my child to go through the ugliness of this world, especially at the hands of someone who was supposed to love and cherish her. If she told me he’d hurt her, I don’t know what I would do.

“Daddy’s never hurt me, Mommy. He played games with me, gave me lots of snacks, and gave me toys at bath time.” She smiled excitedly as she spoke of their time together. “He would look at me funny, but he never hurt me.”

“What about Rebecca or your brothers?” My heart beat rapidly in my chest as I awaited her answer. If she was truly helping her husband traffic kids, it was only a matter of time before she tried something with my daughter. Rebecca hated Bri, so I wouldn’t put anything past her.

“My brothers would just pull my hair and call me ugly.” Tears grew in her eyes, and I could hear the sadness in her voice. “Rebecca used to tell me that when I came to live with them, she was going to teach me how to be a good girl, but I was never bad, Mommy.”

“Hey, come here...” I pulled my daughter into my chest and held her as she cried. Angrily, I wiped my own tears as they began to fall. “You never have to worry about seeing Rebecca or your mean brothers ever again. Okay?” She nodded her head softly as she sniffled. “I’m never going to let anyone hurt you ever again.”

Right as I said that, there was a ding from the elevator. I held my baby close as the

doors glided open. Fear washed over me as Andre stepped off, looking fine as ever. For him to be the devil, he was the sexiest sinner I'd ever seen. His lineup was always fresh, and even dressed down in sweats and a T-shirt, he displayed a boss-like aura that couldn't be fucked with.

"Andreee!" Bri screeched as she jumped from my lap and padded toward him. The glare he gave me vanished when he scooped my daughter up in his arms. "I've missed you!"

"Well, damn, Bri! My feelings are hurt."

Looking behind Dre, I spotted Jerome. Relief washed over me as I saw a familiar face. If I was living in my final days, I wanted Jerome to at least be able to get my daughter to my parents.

"I missed you, too, silly!" Bri giggled as Rome tickled her. She'd yet to let go of Dre, though. "I was going to ask Mommy if she could call you later, Dre. You told me you were going to take me to the mall and get my toes done."

"How about you and me go downstairs to the bakery while Jerome and your Mommy talk?" Dre smiled as he hugged Bri. The way he was being with her was a complete contrast to the man who almost choked me to death nights ago. "Then maybe Jerome can take you to the mall tomorrow or something."

"Yay!" She cheered as she looked over at me. "Can I go with Dre, Mommy? I promise to not eat too much and bring you something back."

"I really don't want to let you out of my sight, Bri." I fake pouted, although I was serious. Knowing what Bryce was potentially trying to do with her scared me. "How about we bake cookies instead?"

Pouting, Dre rubbed her back as he eyeballed me. There wasn't hate in his eyes like nights before. Instead, there was nothing, and that scared me even more.

"How about this..." Dre placed Bri on her feet and crouched down in front of her. "We go in the kitchen and make a list of all the things you want to eat from the store, and I'll go get it, and we can make it together. You think that'll be better than going downstairs?"

"Can we do it on the balcony?" She pointed behind her. "I'm not scared, and I really want to sit outside."

He chuckled as he grabbed her hand. "Yeah, come on. Let's go in my office and find some paper."

Stepping past me without another look, I watched as he and my daughter disappeared down the hall for a few minutes before coming back up the hall. I watched them slide the patio doors open, and he helped her into her seat as they began to talk like the best of friends.

"He loves Bri," Rome said from behind me. Taking a seat next to him, I couldn't help but place my head on his shoulder and wail. "Come on, Denim. You know I hate when you're sad, bitch."

"I messed up badly, Jerome, and I don't know what to do." I sobbed into his chest as he pulled me into his embrace. "He knows everything, and he hates me."

Rome said nothing as he held me in his arms and allowed me to cry. I didn't shed tears just for what could have been with Dre but for my daughter as well. I chose the worst possible father for her. I'd let my daughter down, and she deserved better from me.

“All right... get that shit out because you’re not crying over it again.” Jerome patted my shoulder as I calmed down. “We all make mistakes, sis, but the way we bounce back and learn from them is what matters. Are you done?”

“Yes...” I sniffed and whimpered as I dried my eyes. “I’m okay.”

“Good. Now, tell me why Andre called me and asked me if I wanted to come sit with you at his house instead of yours? I’ve been blowing you up for days. No one had heard from you, and if it wasn’t for Dre letting me know to tell your father that you were with him... they would have called the cops.”

Sighing deeply, I told him everything that had transpired over the past few days. He sat with his mouth hanging to his lap as I detailed the necklace tracking Briley to the abandoned building in Sunset Valley to Dre drugging and kidnapping me. I left out the part about the murders and Bryce being dead. While I may have cared a little about Rissa and Eric being killed, I knew Jerome didn’t care at all. Still, I didn’t want him to know about Dre’s double life.

“So you mean to tell me... Bryce was trying to traffic your daughter to your husband?” He was in literal shock as he placed his well-manicured hand over his mouth. “Where is that nigga at so I can beat his ass myself? That wench of a wife is going to have to see me too!”

“Bryce... is being... treated .” That is all I could say. He eyed me questioningly but didn’t say more. “As far as Rebecca goes, I’m going to make that bitch pay. I don’t know how, but I am.”

Rebecca has another thing coming if she thinks I’m going to let her get away with the shit she’s done and planned to do. I may not be able to make her husband face the consequences, but she sure as hell can.

“Listen, I know this shit is way out of my league, but I still believe that Andre is a good man that means well.” Standing from the sofa, he pulled me into his arms and squeezed me as only he could. “That man could have let you figure this out on your own and said, ‘To hell with you and your child.’ Honestly, he could have killed you when he found out who you were when you initially started looking into his family. The same way you love him... he loves you, Denim.”

Hearing the patio door slide open, Jerome and I pulled apart as Dre and Bri walked back in. I couldn't help but smile at them holding hands because if I knew nothing else, I knew he cared for her.

“I'm about to head to the store and get the things on Bri's list.” He gazed at me keenly before turning to face Rome. “Are you chilling here until I come back?”

“If it's fine with you...”

“Bet. Just remember what I told you.” He nodded before bending to kiss Bri's forehead. “I'll be back, okay?”

“Okay!” She smiled and skipped over to the couch. Dragging my eyes back to Dre, he was staring at me as if he wanted to say something. I waited patiently for anything he was willing to give me, but instead, he gave me nothing. I watched as he walked toward the elevator, but what shocked me was Bri running behind him.

“Thank you, Andre!” She latched onto his legs, causing him to stumble. “For everything.”

For a second, I could see the emotion in his eyes as he smiled at her and nodded. My heart swelled and wept at the same time. Stepping onto the elevator, I watched as his pupils stayed on mine until the doors closed.

“I don’t know how, but bitch... you need to fix it. Whether he admits it or not, he loves you, and you love him too!”

Patting my shoulder, he took a seat beside my daughter, and I listened to her as she talked about her best friend, Andre. She told him about her bad dream she had of a monster in a suit trying to give her to another, but Andre saved her from both of the monsters. As I listened to her describe her reality and not a dream, I knew what I needed to do. Not only did I have to find a way to injure Rebecca, but I have to find a way to make things right with Dre. I no longer cared about being on opposite sides of the fight against criminals. I finally understood what my father was saying, and I finally agreed with what my superior had disclosed about the Boudreaux’s being too prominent to build a case against. I had to win Andre back. I had to show him I could love whatever version of himself that he wanted to be.

If it’s the last thing I do, I vowed to get him to forgive and love me willingly.

* * *

“Girl, now don’t let me have to keep calling your phone and you not answer. You know I get nervous when you don’t check in.”

Snickering at Jerome, I towel-dried my hair as I stepped back into the guest room. So much as my things were here, you might as well say I’ve moved in. I wouldn’t say Dre is holding me hostage, but he isn’t allowing me to go home. He did take me by the house to check on things. He even took me by the office so I could check in and get any documents or files I needed to work from home. As far as letting me leave the penthouse on my own accord? Negative. He still wasn’t even talking to me.

“I just got out of the shower, Jerome.” I rolled my eyes as I dropped my towel and began to oil my body. “How’s my girl doing?”

The day he came over to visit, it felt so good to laugh and enjoy another adult's company. Dre didn't engage with us much, but he was all in when it came to conversation with Briley. It was so sweet the way they baked cookies and made pizzas for everyone. Dre might not be fucking with me, but he thinks the world of my kid. Jerome even crashed with us that night and offered to take Bri with him the next day, so Dre and I could talk. It's been two days, and still nothing.

"Briley the Boss is doing what she does best." I could hear the frustration in his tone, and I couldn't help but smile. "She's spending my money with no regard. I'm going to drop her off with her grandparents and let her be their problem."

"Leave my baby alone." I placed the phone on the bed and bent over to oil my legs. "You the one?—"

Hearing the door behind me open, I peered over my shoulder and locked eyes with Andre. His eyes went from my face to my ass that was in the air. Closing the door behind him, my breathing became more rapid as he stepped closer to me. He locked in on my ass as he slapped it once before giving it a firm squeeze. I yelped and tried to stand, but he placed his hand on my back and bent me back over.

"Sis, what was that?" Jerome's nosy ass asked. I swear his hearing is better than a damn Labrador Retriever. "Why are you breathing like that?"

"She will call you back, Rome," Andre answered with his eyes on me. "Hang up the phone."

"Wait, I wanna listen!" Jerome shouted before the line went dead.

Still bent over, I could feel my juices running down the inside of my thighs. My body trembled at his touch in anticipation of what was to come.

“You want me to fuck you, Dee?” he asked as I felt his manhood against my thigh through his sweatpants. “You want me to drop this dick off in you.”

“Mhm...” I bit into my bottom lip as I felt him ease two fingers inside of me. “I want you bad, Andre.”

Saying nothing, I swayed my ass as he fumbled with his joggers and dropped them to the floor. Riding his fingers, I moaned once I felt him slap his third leg against my ass.

“Did you want me even when you thought I was a killer?” He sped his movements, and I could feel him stroking himself behind me. “Even when you wanted to see a nigga behind bars, did you want me to fall knee-deep in that pussy?”

Feeling my walls contract around his fingers, I tried to stand, but all he did was slap my ass once more. Glaring at him, he gave me a knowing look that made me tuck my tail and get back in position.

“Yes, Andre,” I confessed, waiting for him to resume his assault. “I wanted you even then—I’ve always wanted you.”

Sliding his index and middle finger back into me, my eyes rolled into the back of my head at the feel of him. Moving it in and out of me, I felt myself getting closer and closer. I could only hope he didn’t take too long because I was ready for him to take his anger out on my pussy.

“So you thought you’d walk your thick ass into my life, smile, and fuck me... and then I would start baring my soul to you.”

“Andre...” I panted as he eased a third finger inside of me. “Please, fuck me.”

“You thought I was going to bare my soul to you because you made a nigga nut? Because I told you I was having mommy issues? You thought you were going to play a nigga like me and get away with it. Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t blow your fuckin’ brains out.”

Placing his Glock on top of my back, he continued to finger fuck me while he jacked his dick. I was so scared, yet turned on, that I didn’t know what to do. I wanted to believe that he wouldn’t hurt me, but he sent my daughter away. All thoughts of what could and would happen were a distant memory once I felt myself about to release.

“I love you, Dre!” I cried as I felt myself about to come. “I love you, and you love me too! Oh my gosh! I’m coming!”

Never slowing his stroke down, his fingers moved in and out faster than I’d ever felt before. I shook uncontrollably as liquid gushed out of me. I fought hard to stay conscious because I didn’t want to wake up to a dead family member like last time. As I came down from my orgasm, I felt something warm sprinkling onto my back.

“Shit!” he groaned as he picked up his gun and stumbled back slightly. “Damn, man.”

My legs felt like noodles as I slowly stood and turned toward him. He was pulling up his sweats and stuffing his still-hard dick inside. I couldn’t believe he finger fucked me and busted on my back as if I was nobody—as if I was nothing. I’d never felt so used before in my life.

“Once you wash your ass and fix your face, come holla at me.”

Without a backward glance, he left out of the room as quickly as he came. Walking into the bathroom, I had to stop myself from crying over feeling so belittled. I had no one but myself to blame for the way he was treating me. After taking another quick shower, I forwent my routine and threw on my pajamas to see what he wanted. If he

was going to kill me, there was no need to get moisturized for it.

As I walked into the sitting room, I looked around and didn't see him. I peeked outside onto the balcony, but I didn't see him there either. Hearing the shower going inside his bedroom, I decided to wait for him there. Stepping inside, I noticed the room was massive compared to the ones Briley and I were sleeping in.

Still hearing the water run, I decided to look around. He was already pissed at me. Being nosy couldn't make it worse. Walking over to the desk in the corner, I found open folders with pictures inside. Picking up the first one, I saw it was a file on me. Everything from my birth certificate, graduation pictures, photos with Bri and my parents, and pictures of me meeting his mother were there. My entire life, in a nutshell, was here for this man to see, and he's known about me all along.

Closing the folder, I started to walk away until something caught my eye—pictures of Bryce, clear as day, with various children and young adults. I immediately felt sick to my stomach from what I was seeing. There were countless photos of him with chained-up women and children, some beaten and others just fearful. Seeing Rebecca in some of the photos, too, had me seeing red. I was a ball of emotions from mournful to disgust to aggravation to outrage. Images of these once beautiful girls and women will forever live in my mind. There was information about shipments, along with grab locations, clients, and even dates on when the girls would be sold and to whom. Shakily, I read through each document, and the information I found made me queasy by the second. Amongst those were also court filings where he and his wife petitioned to gain full custody of Briley. The thought of her living with them made me want to vomit.

“I guess you finally see who the real monster is...” I jumped as I dropped the photos back down on the desk. Spinning to face Dre, his expression remained nonchalant as he wrapped the towel around his waist. “Now, do you see why he died the way he did? My only regret is that I didn't make him suffer.”

“W-What is this, Dre?” I pointed to the documents. “These are real? That says some girls are being sold next week.”

“They are. My people are the ones that bought the majority of that shipment.” He stepped into his walk-in closet with me behind him. “We’re picking the girls up next week.”

“And then what?” I asked immediately. “What are your plans for them? I know you’re not keeping them.”

Although my assumptions were right about Dre, I know he wasn’t a predator. He purchased my daughter and didn’t harm a single hair on her head. I am thankful for what he did because had she gone to someone else, or even worse, her father, only God knows what would have happened.

“Oh, so now you know what type of man I am?” He chuckled and shook his head. I watched as he walked into his closet and pulled down a pair of Amiri jeans with the matching sweatshirt. He was about to head out, and my chest grew tight at the thought of him being with another woman. “I have a plan for all that, though, so don’t worry.

“Let me help.” I shook the thoughts of jealousy to the back of my mind as he dropped his towel. My eyes went straight to his dick as he covered it with boxers. “I want to help you bring those bastards down.”

“Lil’ Mama, who said I’m even going to let them live.” He chuckled at my naivety as he got dressed. I watched him douse himself in cologne, and I wanted to rip his clothes off him. “I know you’re the Feds, and this shit is right up your alley, but this don’t have shit to do with you?—”

“It has everything to do with me!” I jumped in front of him and shouted. I was pissed

at him for more reasons than one. “They almost damaged my daughter, Andre! They tried to—oh my God!”

Falling to my knees, I bawled for my baby. I was so blinded by my job and dislike for her father and stepmother that I potentially let my baby be in harm's way. I failed her.

“Hey, come here...” He pulled me from the floor and led me to the bed. Doing something he hadn’t done in a while, he held me. “I know this is a fucked up thing to find out about. I know no words will make you feel better about the shit, but Briley is safe. From the moment I found out her father was the head of this shit, he was on my hit list. I would have never let Big Bri be in any danger. That’s why I made sure to buy her the night I did.”

“He needed to die.”

“He did.” Dre nodded and held me tighter. “You saw what he wanted you to see. Just like you attempted to do with me.”

Dre—”

“He didn’t get away with the shit he was trying to do, and the others won’t either. Even those closest to me had to be punished for the sick shit they were doing. My only regret is not finding out sooner. Maybe then, I could have spared more girls from the pain and heartbreak that my sisters had to endure.”

I wanted to ask him what he meant, but I know Andre. He was tight-lipped about everything. Getting lost in the feel and smell of him, I started to relax. Taking a chance, I looked up at him as he looked down at me with hooded eyes. Placing my hand on his cheek, I reached up and planted a kiss on his lips.

“I’m sorry for everything, Andre. I know you hate me, and I know you don’t want

anything to do with me, but I promise... I will make it up to you. I love you.”

Staring at me for a few minutes, I could have sworn I saw a flicker of something in his eyes before it was gone. Sighing, he kissed my forehead before shifting me off his lap.

“I’m about to head out. Don’t wait up.”

Dumbfounded, I watched him walk out of the room and listened as the elevator dinged. Once I realized I was alone, I screamed in frustration. Falling back on the bed, I kicked like a maniac. I’d brought a world of hurt upon myself, and it felt like there was no way to undo any of it. After tiring myself out, I couldn’t help but laugh at my antics.

“Get yourself together, Denim.”

Getting up from the bed, I walked back over to the desk and sat down. The more I looked through the files, the more I knew I wanted to be a part of this process. Looking around, I found an iPad and dialed Dre’s number.

“Yeah, Denim.” I ignored the aggravated tone in his voice. “I’m not trying to hear no bullshit right now, so get straight to it.”

“I want in, Dre. Kill whoever you want, but I want Rebecca alive.”

Disconnecting the call, I went back to study the files. So many men in high-profile positions were out here, moving like they weren’t the true predators. Lost in my thoughts, I jumped at the sound of his voice.

“Aight...” I peered up and saw him leaning against the threshold of his door. He wasn’t even gone fifteen minutes before he was back here. “What are you thinking

we should do, wifey?”

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

Today was the day we collected the girls, and I was ready to get this over with. Not only am I ready to get them home to their families, but I'm ready to go home as well. Milly Grove is cool and all, but South Florida is calling my name. The sooner I can put distance between Denim and me, the better.

"Y'all niggas ready to do this shit?" Jules asked from the passenger side of my Range. He, along with the rest of the crew, came into town last night and was just as anxious as I was. "You got everyone in place?"

"Everything is what it's supposed to be," I assured him as I headed to Grove's Isles. Rebecca reached out and told us that we were to meet her tonight on the pier. I guess that it made sense to traffic the girls by water instead of land. It was easier to conceal the cargo; at least, that was the case for us with drugs. "I just hope everything goes according to plan because I'm not used to relinquishing control to someone other than family. I'm ready to get this shit over with so I can come home."

The other night at the penthouse, it took everything in me not to fuck the shit out of Denim. I won't lie and say the attraction and feelings are no longer there; it's just hard dealing with her knowing she tried to play a nigga. I thought I would feel better after treating her like a rag doll for me to bust my nut on. In my mind, she wanted to be a hoe when she tried to entice me, so I figured I would treat her like one. In the end, I just made myself feel worse.

How is it that she's the one that played me, and I'm the one that's feeling bad?

"Trouble in paradise already?" Rosier asked as he chuckled from the backseat, followed by Luca. "They said the honeymoon phase doesn't last long, but a month

has to be a record.” I clenched my jaw as I eyed him in the rearview mirror. “Marriage is hard work, bro. It’s not just a sheet of paper.”

I tuned them out as they decided that my situation was what they needed to lighten the mood. After the night was over and I was settled back home, I needed to get with Jules to see what I could do to end this marriage. In my heart, I knew I wasn’t going to kill Denim—not because of what I felt for her, but because of Briley. She was already going to grow up without a father. There was the possibility of making her an orphan, but I wasn’t doing that to my Big Bri. The worst thing I could do was break her heart, and I was already planning to hurt it enough by disappearing on her after tonight.

For the remainder of the trip to the pier, I listened to the guys as they talked about their wives and how much their kids were growing. Jules was working double-time trying to convince Bridgette to have a baby, but she wasn’t going for it. He wasn’t tripping on it too much because he knew what all she’d been through. Not even that, the girls knew what was at stake tonight. Bunny’s mental wasn’t where it needed to be, and he respected it. That didn’t mean he wouldn’t keep trying, though. It was Jules; he was going to figure out something eventually.

“We’re here.” I cut down the radio as all talking ceased. “Y’all ready?”

No one said anything as we parked near the dock. There were a few boats on the water, but nothing out of the ordinary. Spotting Rebecca at a nearby cargo ship, the guys and I exited our cars and headed her way.

“Welcome, gentlemen,” she greeted as we got closer, her eyes lingering on me. “You look exceptionally well tonight.”

“As do you.” I nodded at her floral dress. “My grandmother has that same one.”

The smile on her face dropped as the fellas behind me snickered. Turning around in a huff, she marched ahead of us. Leading us toward the nearby warehouse, I could feel my heart rate increasing. As I glanced around, nothing seemed suspicious, and I was thankful for that.

“I was expecting to be welcomed by Holmes since he is the one we’ve been in contact with,” Jules spoke as we approached the warehouse. I could kick that ignorant-ass nigga in the knees for bringing up that dead motherfucker. “Is he here?”

“Bryce is away on business.” She shrugged as if she didn’t have a care in the world. “He told me he was going out of town with his brat of a daughter in preparation for you.” She glanced over her shoulder as she placed her hand on the knob. “If you want someone more experienced, let me know. I’m more than willing to give you the time of your life.”

“Lady, you got one more time to throw that old-ass cat at me before I pull your spline out through that rancid-ass muthafucka.” She gasped in shock as I mugged her. “Open this muthafuckin’ door before you piss me off!”

Fumbling with the handle, I pushed her out of the way and opened the door myself. Stepping inside the dimly lit area, Rebecca zoomed past me to hurry and cut on the lights. Once on, my heart dropped to my stomach at the scene before me.

“I know you guys paid for what you wanted specifically, but I was thinking you could get something a little extra.” She walked over to a girl who looked as if she was barely ten years old. Reaching to stroke the little girl’s cheek, she flinched as tears streamed down her face. “Don’t you just love it when they cry?”

Stepping farther into the room, I looked around and counted at least twenty girls who were chained together and half-naked. Neither the guys nor I said anything as we surveyed their conditions. Everyone was barely dressed but seemed clean and sober.

Some of them looked malnourished, and I was ready to blow this bitch's brains out right now.

"Where's everyone else?" I looked around in hopes of seeing the rest of the men who bid the other night. "Are they not coming?"

"Why?" She looked at me suspiciously as she stepped away from the girls. "What does it matter when you're here for your purchase and yours only?"

"Chill, baby." I grinned. Instantly, she melted. "I just wanted to make a little conversation. Fuck them niggas. More girls for me."

No later than the words left my mouth, the door opened behind us, and more men were being escorted in. Looking them over, I saw that each man on my list was here tonight. Two senators, three governors, and several other politicians were being escorted by a dozen of her men. I looked on in disgust as their eyes lit up at the sight of the underage children.

"Great! Everyone is here!" Rebecca clapped as she eyed all the men. "On behalf of my husband and I, we want to thank you all for your purchase. The next shipment will be here in about three months, so you might want to double up now as it will be a small selection. The girls to the right are taken..." She pointed to the girls that we, as well as other men, had purchased before swinging her arm to the left side "While the ones on the left are free game. Let me say the one with the yellow dress on is sweeter than honey." She winked at the girl as she cried. She was no older than seventeen. "Let's get down to business."

"Before we do that, there's something I want to say." I placed my hand in my slacks and stepped forward. Dragging my eyes from her to the other men in the room, I continued, "The Bible says he without sin shall cast the first stone. I ain't perfect, and Lord knows I've sinned." I shook my head, feeling the spirit of my grandparents over

me. “But I’m judging every single one of you niggas right now.” I gestured to the fellas around the room as they looked on in confusion. “Drop to your knees and repent for the sins you’ve committed because you’re going to need His forgiveness sooner than you think.”

“I’m so sorry, gentlemen.” Rebecca placed her hand on my arm as she stepped aside. “Please excuse, Mr. Boudreaux. He’s?—”

“About to kill you in about five seconds if you don’t get those cum catchers off me.” She drew her hand back so fast that I knew she had sprained her wrist. Grimacing at her, I gave my attention back to the men. “As I was saying... y’all ain’t living right, but don’t worry. It’s judgment day, and the rapture is about to separate the righteous from the wicked. Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”

Nodding her head toward her head of security, they began to walk in my direction. Before they could mutter a word, two bullets whistled past me, splattering their brains all over the floor. Seeing the other men scramble and grab their guns, my brothers and I hurried gathered around the girls.

“We’re here to help you girls, but I need you girls to listen to me....” I eyed each of them as chaos ensued behind me. “I want you to go into that room over there, and as soon as I’m done here, I will come get you.”

“You promise?” the youngest of the bunch asked. My heart constricted because she was around Briley’s age. “I want to go home to my mommy.”

Crouching down in front of her, I placed my hands on her small shoulders and squeezed gently. “You have my word, pretty girl. I’m going to get you out of here. Now go!”

Running in the direction of the other girls, I pulled my Glock from my waist and began shooting at anything that looked strange. Skip and Wild were shooting above from the rafters, so her security didn't know which way to shoot. Right as I took out a guy trying to sneak Jules, the room was swarmed with uniforms.

"FBI! Every drop your weapons and get down now!"

Stunned, the men who tried to shield themselves from the gunfire tried to run out of the building without being detained. There were more agents than I anticipated, so the men had nowhere to go. I watched as they were apprehended, as well as Rebecca's team, who wasn't leaking on the floor.

"Nooo! This can't be happening!" Rebecca screamed from behind me. "I'm going to kill you!"

"Touch my husband, and a bullet to the head will be the first of your worries." Denim crept up behind her and placed her gun to her head. "I dare you to breathe wrong, bitch, and I promise you, I'm sending you to hell with your man!"

Now might not be the time, but the way she was handling herself in this situation was turning me on something serious. Even her badge and uniform made me want to bend her thick ass over. Shaking myself of the thoughts, I got the head on my shoulders, not the one stirring in my slacks, back in the game.

"W-Where is Bryce?" Rebecca turned and faced Denim, not caring that a gun was now pointed at her forehead. "What the fuck did you do to my husband?"

Grabbing her phone, Denim smirked as she showed the displayed image. "From what I gather, he was just discovered in your basement. Too bad you killed him. Who would be responsible for handling the money from buying the girls? Those poor kids of yours won't have a mother or father. Maybe they'll have a chance at life after all."

“You bitch!” she shouted and lunged at Denim. She didn’t make it far because Dee sent one to her left knee. “Oh my gosh! You shot me!”

Pow!

“Now, there’s one to your right one to match.” She gritted her teeth as she hovered over her. “I should kill you—right here, right now.”

“Do it,” Rebecca cried as she withered in pain. “I’d rather die than go to prison! You’ve ruined my fuckin’ life! From the moment you spread your legs for my husband to the moment you brought that little bitch home! You better be glad Dre is the one that outbid me.” She giggled uncontrollably as she eyeballed Denim with nothing but hate. “The things I would have done to her?—”

Whap!

Hitting her in the temple, Denim panted over her heavily as tears ran down her face. After a few moments, she wiped them aggressively before reaching behind her for her handcuffs. Spitting on her, she threw them on top of Rebecca’s unconscious body.

“You’re under arrest bitch.”

I stood there hard as bricks as I watched my wife switch into the room where the girls were located. Once the other agents came over and cuffed Rebecca before sending her to the paramedics, I followed the direction she’d gone. Inside the room, I watched as she eyed the girls with tears in her eyes. Walking over, I pulled her into my arms and kissed her temple.

“You did good,” I assured her as I tipped her chin and brought her eyes to mine. “I’m proud of you, Dee.”

Giving me a small smile, she pulled away and made her rounds, speaking to the girls. We had time ahead of us with getting the girls checked out and locating their families, but we were going to make it happen. As I gazed around, I found little mama from earlier. Winking at her, she gave me the brightest smile, and it made the stress of these past few weeks' worth it. As the other agents made their way inside, I took one last look at Denim. Tonight was the end of many chapters, ours included. I love the girl, I admit that, but she and I will never be. The damage has been done, and we could never exist in each other's world. I'm a criminal, and she's a federal agent.

The life I live is one that can't include love and family. I've lost both my parents to this mafia life, and I'll be damned if I lose Denim—hell, even Briley to it too. I love them enough to let them go. I'll deal with pain the only way I know how: killing niggas.

* * *

“So, brothers and sisters, I say to you today that the battle doesn't belong to you; it's the Lord. Don't worry about the enemy! Don't worry about the naysayers! We are covered by the blood of Jesus, and no weapon formed against us shall prosper! Psalm Chapter 23 Verse 5 says, Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anoints my head with oil; my cup runneth over! Don't worry about tomorrow and what may come! Know that God has you covered! The doors of the church are open!”

Standing to my feet, I lifted my hands with a bowed head and thanked God for the message I received today. I finally arrived home two days ago, and my first stop was the church. My mind and heart had been heavy since I returned, and I needed prayer, guidance, and clarity.

“I'm so happy to have you back here, baby.” My grandmother wrapped me in her arms as soon as my grandfather closed us out with prayer. “I've missed you so

much!”

“I’ve missed you too, Sweets.” I kissed her forehead. “It feels good to be home.”

As I let her go, my cousins came over and showed her love. When I called them and told them my plans for the day, they told me they would join me. Seeing all of her babies in the House of the Lord always made my grandmother’s day.

“Oh my word! I’m so happy to see all of you.” She reached up and pinched Rosier’s cheeks, causing us all to simper. “Now, I have to go home and see what I’m going to cook for you. I wish you all had told me; I would have been better prepared.”

“You don’t have to do that, Ma.” Jules smiled as he kissed her cheek. “How about we take you out to eat today? Wherever you want to go...”

“You know there isn’t a kitchen in this city that’s better than mine.” We all smiled and nodded. One thing about my grandmother was that she could throw down, and we all knew it. “Let me go and grab Earl. He will sit over there and talk to those deacons all day.”

Listening to Jules speak about all the food he was going to eat, I glanced around the congregation at all the smiling faces. Even though it felt good to be back surrounded by family, something was missing—or should I say someone?

After the warehouse was raided, Rebecca and the other traffickers were arrested. I kept my distance from Denim once the deed was done. We communicated on the strength of making sure the girls were reunited with their families, but that’s about it. She wanted me to attend press conferences with her to ensure I got recognition, but that wasn’t my thing. I also had to let her know that I didn’t want my family’s name attached to what was going on in any capacity. She understood and kept it moving.

Once I sent the final email with lingering information I had that may connect the sex trafficking ring in Milly Grove to other cities and states, I packed my shit and hit the road to South Florida. I had the front desk send a peace lily to Denim with a note that said, “Sorry for your feelings, but not for my actions.” I was hoping she understood that it was my way of wanting mutual understanding about her cousins. I didn’t regret anything I did because all of my actions were mere reactions to shit other people had done to me. But if there was one thing I did regret, it was not saying goodbye to Briley. I love that little girl, and I hate to think I disappointed her in some way.

“You aight, bro? You have been quiet all day.”

Seated in my grandmother’s living room, the fellas and I decided to watch a college ball game while the ladies cooked. Sweets had enough food to feed a small army when we got here, but she decided it wasn’t enough, so she enlisted Gabby and Bridgette to help. Mimi was only here for moral support. Sweets even told us to call and invite Luca, Trench, and Nicky. Not only that, but she insisted that I send a jet for Skip, Uno, and Wild. Jumping at the chance to have Sunday dinner with us, they were on the way and set to arrive in two hours.

“Just some shit on my mind, man.” I rubbed my hand over my face as I responded to Rosier. “Got some shit I need to sort is all.”

“Like your wife?” Jules asked as he came into the living room, pulling a chicken wing out of his pocket. “Don’t look at me like that, nigga. You know Sweets won’t let us snack on shit until she’s completely done.”

“Any-fuckin-way.” I mugged him as I gave my attention back to Zoo. “The casino is coming along well, and I’ve been thinking about the other businesses Uno’s associates wanted us to oversee.” I shrugged as if it wasn’t a big deal. His eyes were still trained on me, so I dropped my shoulders and threw my head back. “And I’m thinking about Denim. I fell in love with the fuckin’ enemy.”

“Stop cursing in my damn house, boy!” I jumped slightly when my grandfather came into the room. “Plus, you just left the church.”

“I apologize, Pop,” I stated honestly as he took his seat in his recliner. “I didn’t mean to disrespect you or your home.”

“I know, son.” He gave me a small smile as he sipped his sweet tea. “Tell me about this girl you like. I never thought I’d see the day.”

“You thought my boy was gay or something?” Jules asked as he smacked on the hot chicken. “Dang, Dre! You out here doing bad.”

Grunting, my grandfather turned his head toward the kitchen. “Sweets, the hoodoo boy stole some of your bird!”

With eyes wide, Jules stood from the couch and took off running toward the back patio when Sweets came from the kitchen with her rolling pin. We all laughed with tears in our eyes as she waved it and chased him through the yard.

“That boy ain’t got the good sense God blessed him with.” Pop chuckled before his eyes landed on me. “I’m listening.”

“Denim is hands down the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen. The way she loves her family, most importantly her daughter, is the sexiest thing to me. She’s smart, funny, and has her stuff together.”

“What’s the problem?” He eyed me in confusion. “You ain’t said nothing wrong.”

“She’s a federal agent.” I sighed heavily as I stood from the couch and walked to the living room window. I could feel everyone’s eyes following me and hanging on to my every word. “But more importantly, Denim’s an agent that was out for the

Boudreaux's. She even went as far as speaking with Mattie in hopes of finding something on us. I knew about her and her undercover attempt to accuse me and my cousins of some unsolved crimes, but that didn't stop me from investing my time into her and her daughter." I chuckled humorlessly. "I just can't reason with myself why I would get in bed with someone who would be considered an enemy. The whole time... she thought she had the one up on me, but I'd already known who she was... and I still entertained her. I still got in bed with the enemy, and I can't for the life of me understand why I did that shit because now... Lil' Mama is a constant thought."

Telling my grandfather everything that had happened over the last three to four months, I was amazed at how idiotic my situation sounded. From meeting her at the club to killing her baby's father, it all was something from a BET black drama. By the time I was done talking, everyone was quiet.

"Somebody say something..." I looked at him and Rosier in hopes of advice on what to do. "Don't leave me hanging."

"So, you're married?" is the first thing my grandfather asked as he sipped his drink. "Sweets is going to kill you."

"Pop..." I groaned as I took my seat. "A nigga is lost out here."

"I'm not privy to everything you do, but I know that you married this girl after finding out who she was to cover your own ass if it came down to it. You're not slick, son; I see right through you. You didn't have to enter that union. You didn't even have to keep her alive. You did it because you cared about her. You care about her child."

"I do." I nodded and admitted as I took my seat back on the sofa. "There's no sense in hiding it. I love them both. Even if she wasn't an agent, we could never be together, though. My life is too dangerous and?—"

“Stop...” Rosier finally spoke as he leaned up in his seat. “What you do is no more dangerous than the rest of us. Yes, you may go the extra mile with some of your methods, but even with that, you are better equipped to take care of yourself more than any of us. Add a family into the equation, and I know they’ll be protected.”

“She’s a federal agent, Zoo. I can’t trust her.” That was my biggest fear with Denim. I know she said that she was done trying to investigate us, but how could I be sure? Lying next to someone I’d put a bullet in a heartbeat doesn’t equate to a healthy marriage.

“She’s your wife, and you love her.” He stood from his seat and moved toward where I was on the couch. “You’re going to figure out where you want her, and you’re going to put her there. No matter how it happened, she’s your wife. She’s part of this family until you say she isn’t. You don’t need it, but you have the Family’s blessing with whatever you decide to do. You’re my right hand, Dre. I don’t doubt you, nor will I ever second guess a choice you make.”

Extending his hand to me, I looked from it to him before I stood from my seat and pulled him into my embrace. Hearing him say that felt as if Uncle Samuel was also approving of my role and contribution. Knowing he trusted my judgment in every aspect meant a lot to me. I would never do anything to jeopardize the organization, and I was happy Rosier believed that too.

“I have one request of you.” My grandfather stood and walked over to us. “I know Mattie isn’t on some type of self-help journey. All I ask of you is that we can have a proper ceremony to say goodbye if it comes to it.”

Looking over at Rosier, I said nothing because I didn’t know where she was. I don’t even know if my mother is dead or alive. Looking my grandfather in the eyes, I extended my hand to him.

“You have my word, Pop.”

Two hours passed, and we were finally eating. The Mills clan really came into town with empty stomachs, and I eyed them all in disgust as they ate up the homecooked food.

“You mean to tell me you really flew all the way here just for dinner.” I dug into my oxtails and shook my head. “Don’t make this a habit.”

“Shut up, Andre, and stop being a hater,” Wild spoke with a mouth full of cabbages. “If Sweets wasn’t already married to Pop?—”

“Say it, lil’ nigga.” My grandfather walked over behind the China cabinet and grabbed his twelve-gauge shotgun. “I dare you to say it.”

We all went silent before the room erupted in laughter. This is what I missed the most after spending time in Milly Grove. As we continued to eat, we fell back into conversation as the doorbell rang.

“I’ll get it,” Mimi said as she stood up. Skip grabbed her wrist and caused us to look at them both in confusion. “What’s wrong, Jordyn?”

“We don’t let ladies open doors.”

“That nigga don’t talk much, but when he does... it makes sense.” Jules simpered as he stood. “Mimi, you know we don’t go for that either. Sit down.”

Kissing her teeth, she did as she was told, but the way she smirked at Skip wasn’t missed by me. I wasn’t one to get in anyone’s business, especially with my own shit going on, but I made a mental note for later.

“Hey, Dae Dae! That crazy chick out there again!” We heard Jules yell and laugh from the front door. “She’s looking a little hostile, and I ain’t letting her in here. You better come get her, Dre, because if she puts her hands on me again, I’m turning her into the moose she looks like.”

Pushing my chair from the table, I walked to the front door to see what this nigga was talking about. Once I got there, I was pissed to see Sandra.

“So, Dre... you come back in town and don’t call me?” she shouted as soon as I stepped behind Jules. “You can’t run from me and this baby!”

“Look, Sandra. I don’t know what the hell is wrong with you, but you gone have to get from around my people’s house with this foolishness. You know I don’t even play like that.”

“Plus, he’s married.” Jules’ ass chimed in. “His wife doesn’t play, either. I saw her knock a bitch out after shooting her kneecaps off.”

Chuckling, I stepped out onto the porch so I could defuse this situation. I was already mentally tired from trying to figure out what to do about Denim, and now this girl was popping up with nonsense. While Jules was threatening to turn her into a moose, I was going to turn her into ashes is she didn’t get the fuck on.

She was in my face the second both of my feet hit the porch concrete. “What does he mean you’re married? How could you do this to me?” she cried as she hit me in my chest while her hand held he protruding belly. “I’m about to be the mother of your child and?—”

Psss!

Hearing what sounded like air leaving a balloon, we both looked down to see

Sandra's once protruding stomach deflating. Beside us was Bridgette with a steak knife. I had no plans to touch her stomach because I knew whatever was inside wasn't related to Andre Boudreaux. No one had come close to bearing my children—no one except Denim Atkins.

Before I could address the obvious, Bridgette dropped the knife and stepped toward Sandra, slightly shoving me out of the way. "I saw this girl at the club last week, throwing back Patron shots like water—game over, hoe. Leave my brother alone, and I'm not going to tell you again. Next time, we gonna make you a flying playmate for Jules' ex. Now, you've come over here disturbing our meal, plus you touched my man. You're about to get these hands, hoe. Come here!"

In the blink of an eye, Bridgette had Sandra on the ground and was beating the shit out of her. Stunned, I let her get off a few hits before I called for help. "Y'all come out here and help me!" I shouted toward the house. "Bridgette, you strong as fuck girl. Shit!"

Grunting, I tried to get her off the ground, but it was useless. Seeing Jules run from the porch, I sighed in relief until I realized he wasn't coming to make it any better.

"Beat her ass, baby! Beat them lying demons right on up out of her." Dousing oil all over the girls, this nigga was commanding the spirits of whore-ism to loosen its bind on Sandra. I tried my best to break it up plus stop him, but I gave up.

"I know that ain't my damn good oil!" my grandfather hollered as he pulled his belt from his waist. "Jules, I'm about to beat your ass, boy!"

Hearing my grandfather and seeing him with a belt, Jules took off running through the front yard. Not only him, but Bridgette, too, as she tried to save her man.

"Andre—"

“Sandra, get up and go, man.” I chuckled as I looked down at her. She was bloody and greasy as fuck. “Stay away from me and my people. Next time, I’m chopping you into little pieces and spreading them in your mama’s yard. Bye.”

Leaving her with what I said, I returned to the porch. Everyone was entertained by the chaos. As I made my way to the door, Sweets and Wild were standing off to the side, with their plates still in hand.

“Your family is ghetto, Sweets,” Wild mumbled as he bit into his cornbread. “I love it here.”

“Me, too, baby.” She winked at me as I shook my head at them both. “Me too.”

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

“Good afternoon and thank you all for joining me here today.” I adjusted the microphone as I stood at the podium. “I wanted to come and give an update on a major case that my team and I have been working on for a few weeks now.”

Looking into the crowd at the sea of reporters, I took a deep breath. There had been speculation in town for weeks about what was going on. It was time to clear the air, and a press conference was the best solution to get everyone the information we’d been collecting.

“First off, I want to thank my agency, as well as our city and state officials, who have lent a hand to make all of this possible.” I gestured toward the representatives as they stood behind me. “Mayor Mills, we couldn’t have done this nor pulled it off without your efforts. We thank you.” Giving him a curt nod, I turned back to the audience and continued, “Human trafficking of any kind is something that we as a society have to take a stand against. Too often do we turn on the news or radio stations and hear about a mother begging for help to bring her child back home. I’m sick and tired of seeing billboards with missing children on them, vanishing without sight. Here recently, we managed to bust one of the biggest sex trafficking ring this nation has ever seen. While we were able to work swiftly and get a lot of women and children back home to their families, there’s still more work that needs to be done. We need those responsible to pay for their involvement. Whether a seller or a buyer, we won’t tolerate such inhumane activities, especially not in Milly Grove.”

Turning toward the projector, I clicked my pointer, showing each individual who was being held accountable for their role in the illegal operation. Whispers rang out amongst the crowd as a list of well-known officials was displayed.

“Question, Agent Atkins?—”

“That’s Senior Special Agent,” Agent Roberts stepped to the mic and interrupted. “She’s been promoted.”

“My apologies,” the reporter corrected himself, and I nodded with a smile. I was recently promoted after the sting by my team, and I was excited about it. No one was privy to my name change, and for the time being, I wanted to keep it that way. “How did you know what was happening and that it was going on in this city?”

“Rebecca Holmes, wife and co-conspirator to former Lieutenant Governor Bryce Holmes, was in an altercation, in which her phone was confiscated. During a warrant search and an internal investigation, we found her recent plans to sell not only children and women to very prominent members of our nation’s elite but also plans from the past and in the future. We had to act swiftly on the opportunity to intervene so that those heinous actions could be stopped. And I’m pleased we did just that.”

“And the lieutenant governor?”

“As reported, she and her husband got into an altercation that turned physical. He succumbed to injuries inflicted by his wife, and she will serve time for his death as well as her connection to the illegal sex trafficking.”

Clearing my throat, I leaned on the podium and spoke directly into the mic. “Ladies and gentlemen... we want to send a message here today that no matter who you are, you will not get away with something as serious as this. Any crime you commit or partake in, you will be subjected to the judicial system regardless of your status, wealth, or title. No amount of money can save you once we find out what you’ve done. We hope this message is clear for those working with someone or committing such a deplorable act. To the families and victims of trafficking, we stand with you. If you know anyone who needs help of any kind, please don’t hesitate to reach out.

Thank you all, and God bless.”

With flashing camera lights and questions still being asked, my superior stepped to the mic to answer any additional ones. As I stood off to the side, a familiar face caught my eye. Closing my eyes tightly for a second, I reopened them, and the face was gone. I missed Dre so much that I was starting to see him everywhere I went.

After the arrests, I was hoping he and I would have a chance to sit and talk, but it was to no avail. My calls went from being dry and short to him not answering at all. I even went as far as going to his penthouse, but they told me that not only did I not have access, but he had left. They did have a plant he’d left for me, and when I read the note, I bawled. I knew he was attempting to amend for Rissa and Eric, and although it was fucked up, I was choosing to forgive him because I loved the damn corporate killer.

I needed him to know that we could work it out. There was a ton of bad blood running a river between us, but we could build a bridge. I was determined to find him and make him have a conversation with me in person, so I visited City Hall in hopes of catching him at work. I was told he’d gone back home to Florida. Uno even approached me and said Dre’s business was concluded for now, and he chose to go back home. I sent messages through Skip, but they all went unanswered too. I tried my hardest to reach him and make things right, but it was no use. It seemed his mind was made up about us, and I needed to move on. The only thing I had left was a broken heart and his last name.

“You did good up there today,” my father greeted me as I stepped from the stage.

My mother followed close behind him, beaming in admiration. “I’m so damn proud of you. We both are...”

“Damn, right! My baby is a senior special agent.”

Once everything went down, I confided in my father and told him all about what Bryce and Rebecca were into. He was so hurt and disgusted by not just what they'd done, but possibly losing Briley. We took her to see a therapist to see if there was anything we needed to do or watch for, but they assured us that she was fine and to keep all lines of communication open with her. Briley was adamant that she was never hurt in any way, and I believe her. I don't know what I would do if they'd harmed my baby, especially since I couldn't touch either of them now.

"Thank you, Mama and Daddy." I smiled as we made our way out of the state building. "It's been stressful but worth it. I can't wait to see all of those men, and Rebecca, spend the rest of their lives in prison."

Rebecca tried her hardest to say she wasn't involved and was being set up by me. At first, I was worried because her lawyer was relentless in making the judges believe her. Thanks to a late-night visit from Andre, her old attorney succumbed to a tragic overdose. Rebecca's newly appointed attorney urged her to accept her fate and all the consequences that came along with it. She opted out of a trial for the murder of her husband and the various counts of trafficking. From what I hear, she's facing at least four life sentences for what she's done over the years. Sentencing will be in a couple of months, but she will never see the light of day again. I almost feel sorry for her kids because they now have to go into the system. Then again, they didn't give a damn about mine so fuck them kids.

"So what's next, Senior Special Agent Atkins?" My father smirked with his brow raised. "You want to go home and take a nap to celebrate?"

Crossing my arms, I mugged him as he and my mother snickered. They thought they were so damn funny because I wasn't the going-out type. After what I've been through, I feel like a night on the town would actually do me good.

"You two got jokes, but guess what? I'm putting y'all on grandparent duty for a few

days.” Their smiles dropped instantly. “Tonight, I want to party.”

* * *

“Okay then, bitch! It’s giving legs and hips and body, body, body!” I chuckled as Jerome sang the ridiculous song by Kandi as I entered the section he’d reserved for us at Club Honey. When I told him I wanted to go out and party tonight, he was more than happy to help me celebrate.

I decided to spice things up a bit tonight with my attire. Dressed in leather shorts and a bralette top draped in thin gold chains, I felt like the finest woman in the club. In my mind, no one could tell me differently. Normally, this would be my outfit when I wanted the attention of a mark, but tonight I was stunting for me. From now on, I was going to be apologetically me—mother, agent, daughter, and friend. Tomorrow, I would worry about being an ex-wife. Dre didn’t want me and it was evident. That’s something I have to live with, but I’m not Tina. I’m not keeping his last name because it didn’t serve a purpose in the new chapter I was about to embark on.

Swaying my hips to the sounds of Chris Brown, I walked over to our table that was decked in food and drinks and decided to start my night of fun. I wasn’t driving tonight, so I planned to really get loose.

“I’m proud of you, sister!” Rome cheesed, showing all thirty-two as we clinked our shot glasses together. He looked nice in his denim romper and go-go heels. One thing about my cousin that I admired was that he was going to be himself at all times. “Here’s to living life and accepting everything that is meant for us. Love, life, and family!”

“Cheers to me being the boss that I am!” I added. “Let’s goooo!”

Throwing the patron back, I bit into my lime and kissed his cheek. I loved Rome so

much, and I was appreciative of him always being in my corner. As we ate, drank, and danced to the music, we laughed at how tipsy we were getting. Skip walked into our section with a mug on his face that I was accustomed to always seeing.

“Good evening, ladies...” He side-eyed Jerome. “Are you a lady or man? I don’t want to offend you.”

“I’ll be whatever you want me to be, baby.” Rome smirked as he stepped toward him. “How about after this?—”

“Jerome, I will kill you,” Skip said through gritted teeth with his Glock now by his side. “Find you somebody else to play with.”

“On second thought, let me go find your fine-ass brother.”

We watched Jerome try his best to run out of the section. I couldn’t hold my laughter if I tried. He loved messing with Skip, and I didn’t know why. Once he reached the dance floor, we watched him approach Wild. I was nervous for a minute because of Wild’s defensive stance. Everyone around them had gone still until Wild began to laugh, putting Jerome in a headlock and pulling him from the floor. Shaking my head at them, I watched as Wild led him back to our section.

“You know we fuck with Jerome, but any other nigga would have been somewhere in a river.”

“Yeah, yeah.” I waved him off as I sipped my drink. “Is there something you need?” Skip intimidated me sometimes with his quiet demeanor, so I kept conversations short. Hell, they’re bound to be short regardless.

“Nah, I was just checking on you. Don’t get these niggas fucked up tonight. At the end of the day, you’re a married woman.”

Frowning, I approached him so he could hear me loud and clear. “Fuck my so-called husband, and you can tell him I said it.”

Saying nothing, a slow smile spread across his face. He stuck his hands in his slacks and retreated from the area, taking his brother with him.

“Girl! I didn’t know Adrian’s ass was that strong.” Jerome huffed as Wild pushed him off. “I need to stop fuckin’ with these niggas before they kill me.”

“Please!” I chuckled loudly as I finished off my drink. “Come on! Let’s dance.”

Letting the sounds of Trina take over my body as it flowed through the speakers, I placed my hands in the air and danced as if I were home alone in the mirror. Throwing nothing but ass, my tongue hung from my mouth as I peered over the balcony at the crowd below. The club was going crazy tonight, and I was having a damn ball.

“Get that shit, Senior Special Agent Boudreaux!” I mugged Jerome as I continued to sway to the beat. “Fuck it up, sis!”

Feeling myself, I turned my back to the crowd, placed one leg on the banister, bent over, and twerked my ass like never before. I don’t know if it was just me letting loose or the shots of liquor, but I felt liberated.

“All right! That’s enough.” Jerome chuckled as he grabbed me and pulled me away. “You’re doing too damn much. Gone show these folks your goodies!”

“I just want to have fun!” I sniggered as my words slurred. It had only been an hour, and I was already close to being drunk. I was such a damn lightweight. Sweating, Jerome led me to the sofa and handed me a bottle of water. “Thank you.”

Taking sips of water, I could feel the swimming in my head slow down. Once I caught my bearing, I placed my head in my hand and burst into tears.

“Ah shit!” Jerome hissed and laid my head on his chest. “What the hell is wrong with you?”

“I miss him.” I cried harder than I wanted. “I want and miss Andre, Jerome. What am I going to do?”

I tried my hardest to wear this brave face as if I didn’t care about losing him. The truth of the matter is that I’m struggling every day. Not just me, but Briley. She mopes around the house, and I know it’s because she misses Andre as much as I do.

Drying my face with my hands, I looked at Rome. “I love my job, but I will give it up today if I could have him back. I don’t care about the shit he does anymore. I know we can be happy together. I want my husband, Rome.” I was crying again and knew it was the liquor that had me unable to control my emotions.

“Shit, if you want that man, then go up that mountain and save your marriage!” My sobbing stopped as I peered up at him and frowned. “What, bitch? You’re in the club, drunk off your ass, crying like Shelia did about Mike. At least your man is fine and not a dickhead.” We laughed before he grabbed my shoulders. “You and Dre are going to figure this shit out. It might not be tonight. It might not even be tomorrow. But you and him will find your way back to each other.”

“How do you know?”

“Because you’re still alive,” he said bluntly and shrugged. “If he didn’t care about you, you’d be in the same hole with Bryce, rotting.” Pulling me up from the couch, he handed me a few napkins so I could wipe my face. “Now, come on, so I can get you home. In here showing your ass and crying in front of these people. Then, you got me

wasting my money on all this food and liquor. Let me go find Skip and see if I can take this shit home.”

Giggling as I got myself together, I said a small prayer and hoped that Jerome was right. All I wanted was Andre, and I would do whatever it took to get him back to me. Tonight, I would wallow in my drunken pity, but tomorrow, I was going to get my man. I don’t care if I had to hop on the first flight to Florida to make it happen.”

After going back and forth with Skip for over thirty minutes about taking his food and alcohol home, Skip relented, packed us up, and put us the hell out of his club. He offered to get his brother to follow or drop us off, but Jerome assured him I had killed his vibe and buzz, so he was okay to drive.

“See you tomorrow, cousin! I love you!”

I waved and giggled to Jerome as he gave me the middle finger and waited for me to get inside. Stepping in and closing the door behind me, the strong smell of weed invaded my nostrils. The only thing that came to mind was my man.

“Andre, baby! Is that you?” I asked as I walked through my darkened living room. I could have sworn I left the lights on, but I couldn’t be sure. Bumping into the end table, I used the light on my phone to find the light switch, but it was snatched immediately.

“Dre, what are you?—”

My words were clogged in my throat as the lights came on, and I was face-to-face with Nate’s friend, Kurt. I hadn’t seen this man since I’d left Los Angeles and could not believe he was now in my house. Taking slow steps back, I kept my eyes on his crazed ones.

“K-Kurt... what are you doing here? Why are you in my house?”

Smelling like a pound of weed and cheap vodka, he was dressed in all black as he stalked in my direction. A sinister smile spread across his face, and I knew I was in trouble.

“I’ve been looking for you for a long time, baby.” I continued to backtrack as I bumped the side of the sofa. “You should have never brought your ass to Cali, sticking your nose in places it didn’t belong.” He eyed me lustfully as he shoved me into the wall. I stared at him quietly, thinking of a plan. My service weapon was under the coffee table, and I just needed to get to it. I wanted to beat his ass as I knew I could, but the liquor and adrenaline may not mix well. “Nate is pissed with the predicament you left him in. It took me a little time to find you, but here I am. He’s adamant that I kill you, but when he told me how sweet you tasted...” He traced his finger over the top of my breast, causing me to slap it away. “Oh, I’m going to have fun with you.”

Not giving him a chance to touch me again, I kicked him in the dick and sidestepped him when he bent over in pain. Fuck the alcohol. This nigga was going to get whatever I could do in my current state. Dashing to the other side of the living room, I was almost at the coffee table when I felt him grab my hair from behind.

“You stupid bitch!” He screamed as he threw me to the floor. “I was going to be gentle with your fine ass but now, I’m fucking you until my dick no longer hurts.”

I scooted backward on the floor in horror as I watched him unfasten his belt. Looking around the room for something to use against him, I spotted a red light through the window.

Pew!

“Ahh!” I screamed in shock as a single shot came through my window, blowing off the side of Kurt’s face. His lifeless body dropped at my feet, and in an instant, I was on mine. I needed to get out of this house. Right as I reached the front door and swung it open, there was a figure leaning against the threshold. With wide eyes, I gasped and took a step back inside.

“Going somewhere, wife?”

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

As I was sitting on the roof of Denim's neighbor's home, I saw Kurt the minute he jimmied her front door. I'd been watching Denim for years, so I knew all about her case with Nate and him going away for life. A nigga like him was bound to send someone after her once he found out who she really was, and I knew it would be his flunky. Too bad I was going to make sure he'd be lying in his cell when he woke up. I may have given him a little leeway tonight, but there wasn't a chance in hell I was going to let him hurt my girl.

"Andre..." Her lips trembled as she continued to step back. She looked from me to my gun. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm here for you, baby." I walked further inside and closed the door behind me. "And Big Bri, of course."

With tears streaming down her face, she nodded before running to her coffee table and grabbing her little service weapon. Angling my head in amusement, I watched her aim it at me as tears streamed down her face.

"I love you, Andre. I love you so much that it fuckin' hurts, but if you're here because you decided to finally kill me and my child, that's going to be a problem." She aimed shakily at me as she confessed her feelings.

Laughing, I set my gun on the entryway table and stood with my hands crossed. "Denim, ain't nobody trying to kill your Fed ass. Well... that nigga was, but not me, Lil' Mama."

She dropped her gun on the floor and walked toward me. "Good, because I'm

charging you for stealing my heart.” The tears flooded her face faster, and seeing her crying like that did something to me. Placing my finger under her chin, I lifted it and brought her tear-stained lips to mine. I pecked them a few times before I used my thumb to wipe the waterfall of tears cascading down her face.

“Dre, I never intended to fall in love with the man I wanted to see behind bars. You were supposed to be another criminal that I put away. I don’t know how to fix this with us, but I will spend the rest of my life making it up to you if you let me. I want to be with you and no one else. My daughter? She adores you. You stole her heart just like you stole mine. If I need to find another profession, I’ll do it. I just want you to trust me—to love me. I’ll do whatever it takes to be with you.”

Kissing her lips again, I looked into her eyes and pulled away so she could see how true my words were about to be. “For months, I’ve tried to fight my attraction to you, Dee. Even before you approached me, I knew by looking at a mere photo of you that you would be my prettiest problem.” She blushed under my assessment, but I wouldn’t let her shy away. “You’ve done things that would have gotten any other nigga or bitch killed.” She went to speak, but I placed my finger on her lip to quiet her. “There are a thousand reasons on why I should kill you; hell, just as many reasons why we shouldn’t be together, period. Even knowing all of that, there’s only one thing that matters.”

“What’s that?” She breathed, barely above a whisper. “What’s the one thing?”

“I love you too.”

Placing my hand on the back of her neck, I pulled her close to me, placing a kiss on her lips with all the passion I could muster. Denim was my sweetest temptation, one I didn’t mind indulging in. Things between us weren’t perfect, and they never would be. I’m no longer unsure of where I want her in my life. Now, I’m unsure if there was even a life without her.

“Tell me we're going to be together, Dre...” She moaned into my mouth as I lifted her from the ground and wrapped her legs around my waist. “Tell me we're going to do this together.”

“We're going to do this together.” I gripped her ass and carried her to the couch as I stepped over Kurt's dead body. “Shit with us won't be perfect, and we still have a lot of things to work on, but I love the fuck out of you and Briley. I don't think I want to be without you, baby.”

Placing her on the couch, I removed my hoodie and undershirt. I dropped to my knees before her and removed her heels, before placing kisses up her legs and thighs.

I tapped her thighs. “Stand up for me.” With her eyes on me, she watched as I took my time undressing her, starting with those underwear she calls shorts. “I should kick your ass for wearing these panties to the club.”

“Andre, they are not they bad.” She giggled as I pulled them down her thick-ass thighs. “They just—ugh!”

Pecking her lower lips, I wasted no time spreading them and latching onto her clit. The first time she and I were together, I told her I would never put my mouth on a woman unless she were mine. Now was a good time to show her that I liked both sets of lips. Throwing her leg over my shoulder, I held onto her waist and wrote my name all over her pussy because that juicy motherfucker belonged to me.

“Ride my face, Denim,” I mumbled as I glanced up at her. She pulled her lip between her teeth as her eyes rolled into the back of her head. Slapping her thigh, her eyes snapped open and landed on me. “Keep your eyes open and tell me what you want.”

She began to wound her hips as my tongue slid in and out of her. “I want you to eat this pussy like you know it's yours, baby. Fuck, Dre! Just like that!” She placed her

hand on the back of my head and peered down at me through lust-ridden eyes as she rode my tongue, fucking my face.

My dick was harder than Chinese math, and I would bust in my pants right now if I wasn't a real nigga. Once she began to rock faster, I knew she was near her peak.

“Shit! Dre! Yes, right there, baby!” She gripped her breast through her bralette. “I’m going to come, baby!”

Nibbling on her clit gently, she held both sides of my head as her movements became jerky. A few more licks of my tongue, and she was busting on my face like a hydrant.

“Oh, shit!” she squealed as she began to wobble. “Fuckkk!”

“Mhm.” I chuckled as I licked her slowly. “That’s what happens when the tongue is just as good as the dick.”

Removing her leg from my shoulder, I stood to my feet and dropped my joggers as she removed her top. Dipping my head to her chest, I pulled her right nipple into my mouth as I pinched the left. Every ounce of this girl was sweet and addictive, and I could slowly find myself becoming obsessed with her. After getting my feel of her, I stood to my full height before sitting on her couch.

“This your dick, Denim?” I roamed her naked body as I stroked myself. Licking her lips, she nodded as she eyed me with desire and hunger. “Come mount this muthafucka and show me then.”

With a sly grin, I just knew Denim was about to fuck my world up. Climbing onto my lap and placing her knees on each side of me, she grabbed ahold of my shoulders, placed my dick at her entrance, and slowly slid down.

“Gah damn...” I moaned as my hips bucked upward. I wanted to take this shit slow, but I was too anxious. “I knew this pussy was going to feel good without a rubber. Denim, I’m telling you now?—”

“No need for the threats, husband. This pussy is all yours.”

Slamming her lips onto mine, she began rocking her hips at a slow and steady pace. I gripped her neck and tried my best to swallow her face whole to keep from moaning again like a bitch. I could feel all common sense leave me each time her walls contracted. Her pussy was so tight and moist, I could feel her juices sliding down my nuts.

“I love you, Denim.” I eyed her and placed my hands under ass, bouncing her faster. “Every day... that you’re my wife... I plan on showing you... how much I love your fine ass.”

“Hm, shit...” she cooed as she threw her head back in ecstasy. “Say that shit again.”

“You’re my wife, baby.” Her rocking got erratic, and I knew she was close to coming again. “I love the fuck out of you, Denim Boudreaux.” Feeling my balls grow tighter, all it took was the grip of her muscles to pull the nut right out of me. Slamming into her, we both came and cried out in pleasure.

“Fuck, Dre!” She threw her hands around my neck and shook uncontrollably. “I love you, baby!”

“Shit!” I all but screamed as I held onto her waist and dumped the biggest nut I’ve ever released inside of her. “Muthafuckin’ gahdamn!”

Catching our breath, we were wrapped in each other’s body fluids without a care in the world. Denim’s pussy was top-tier, and I had to stop myself from psyching out

about the possibilities of her allowing someone else to invade my new favorite place.

A few minutes passed before I shook her slightly to wake her ass up. She would bust a nut and fall asleep in a minute. “Aye... what was that hot shit you said about me to Skip at the club?”

“Boy!” She giggled and slapped my chest. “I’m not worried about you or your snitching-ass friend.”

“Oh, you ain’t worried about me?” I pinched her nipple, causing her to cry out. I loved the sounds she made, and my dick was already getting back hard. “Say that shit again.”

“Ugh, Dreee,” she moaned as I thumbed her clit. “Wait!” She stopped me and slowly dragged her eyes to the floor beside us. Following her line of sight, I zoned in on Kurt’s dead body. “What about Kurt?”

“Fuck that dead-ass nigga. He’ll be delivered to Nate’s bitch ass soon enough, and then it’s lights out for him too. But, aye...” I placed my finger under her chin and brought her eyes back to me. “You know how you was twerking with your leg over that banister?” She frowned in confusion before recollection hit. “Yeah, I was watching your freaky ass. Tell me, wife, can you do that on my dick?”

Biting her lip, she turned around and got into the reverse cowgirl position. She left one knee to the side of me as she straightened the other leg and placed it on the back of the couch.

“Hold on, husband.” She winked at me over her shoulder. “This ride might get a little wild.”

Fuck, I love this girl.

* * *

“Are you sure you want to do this so soon?” Denim spoke as I drove through the city. “We can just go back to the house and enjoy a nice day at home.”

Intertwining my fingers into hers, I brought the back of her hand to my lips and kissed it. I’ve never been this affectionate with a woman before, and I’m not mad about it. “Trust me, Lil’ Mama... everything is going to be fine.” I glanced her way and winked. “Just relax and enjoy the day. I promise you—I got you.”

Giving me a small smile, she leaned over the console and kissed my cheek. Feeling my dick stir in my slacks, I shift in my seat to relieve some of the pressure. I respected her enough to not let her pull up at her parent’s house with dick on her breath.

Being back in Florida for those few days was the most miserable time of my life. I loved being home and missed my people when away, but I missed my girls more. After praying with my grandparents and talking it over with my brothers, I chose to work for Boudreaux Enterprises remotely, choosing to take a stay in Milly Grove. Denim and I were going to figure out how to be together while keeping our jobs, and we were going to do it together.

“My parents can be a little pushy,” Denim stated nervously as we approached the small stairs to the front door. Her family home was located between Highland Meadows and Mills Manor. It was immaculate, nonetheless, and it made me envision us staying in something more humble than a mansion here or back in South Florida. “Don’t take anything my father says to heart and?—”

“It’s about time you two showed up.” Her father snatched open the front door and interrupted her little spill. “Bri has been worrying the hell out of me.”

“Papa Joe, is that my mommy?” I shook his hand and peeked behind him, hoping to see Big Bri. “You said she was coming today and—Andre!”

Once she laid her eyes on me, everyone else was an afterthought. Moving her grandfather out of the way and bypassing her mother, Briley ran right into me.

“Hey, Big Bri!” I gushed as I picked her up into my arms and hugged her tightly. “I’ve missed you so much.”

“I missed you too, Dre.” She hugged my neck as only she could. “You left me and didn’t say goodbye!”

Only Briley could make a nigga feel less of a man. Hurting her little feelings was the last thing I ever wanted to do, and if I could help it, I would never do it again.

“I’m sorry, baby girl.” I kissed her temple and rocked her slowly. Her mother and grandparents watched our interaction with smiles on their faces. “How about I make it up to you by taking you to get a new tea set. Then, we can talk about me staying around a little longer. Are you okay with that?”

Nodding wildly, she gave me the brightest smile before kissing my cheek. Holding onto her while her grandfather ushered me inside, she refused to leave my arms, so I held onto her as she greeted her mother.

“It’s nice to see you again, Andre.” Mrs. Atkins beamed and patted my arm, much to Denim’s surprise. Winking at her daughter, she greeted her as well. “You look refreshed, Denim Boudreaux .” I chuckled, watching Denim’s eyes double in size. “Brunch will be ready shortly, so make yourself at home.”

“You’ve all met?” Denim looked around at each of us in confusion. “You told them about us? When?”

“When you decided to go on your little hiatus and shack up with him a few weeks ago.” Her mother winked as she came over and pried Briley from my arms. “You told me you were going to help me with the waffles, Bri. Maybe I could get your mother to help me with the meats.”

“But I don’t want to leave Andre...” She pouted as tears welled in the corners of her eyes. “What if he leaves without saying goodbye again?”

“Big Bri, I promise you... I will be right here with Papa Joe, okay?” I assured her as I stood from the couch. Bending to kiss her forehead, she gave me another smile. “I promise.”

“Okay!” She giggled and grabbed her mother’s hand. “Come on, Mommy! Let’s go. This time, we have to do the bacon right. Andre said you burnt it last time.”

Gasping at her daughter, we all shared a laugh as the girls went into the kitchen, leaving me and her father alone in the living room. He and I stood in silence for a moment before he nodded for me to follow him toward his study. As stated, this wasn’t my first time in his home, so I knew the way.

“It’s good to see you back.” He got right to it as soon as he closed the door behind him. “Would you like a drink?”

“No, thank you, sir.” I declined as I took a seat in a nearby chair. “Who knows what all Bri is going to have me doing today? I need to be alert, focused, and sober. There’s no telling where she’s going to drag me off to.”

We both chuckled, and I watched as he walked over to his bar to pour himself a shot of scotch. For a moment, my mind drifted to my own father because it was his drink of choice too.

“You know... the last time you were here, I wasn’t sure about you.” He took a seat across from me instead of behind his desk. “You came into my house and flat out told me you’d married my daughter. That’s not the way a father wants to find out his baby girl got hitched.”

The morning after I took Briley and Denim to my penthouse, my first stop was at her parents’ home before her father could leave for work. I had already asked Jerome to talk to them about Denim and Briley being distant, but I knew she would be missing for more than a few days, so I decided to introduce myself and assure them she was okay. It was helpful that Judge Atkins was familiar with Jules and who my family was, but their child was still married to a stranger.

“I admit, the way we went about things wasn’t the best way,” I said, gesturing understanding with my hands. I’d told Mr. Atkins all about Jules and me tricking Denim into signing the marriage license. He and I had never said the words aloud, but he knew I was into some illegal shit, and his baby girl was FBI’s current savior. Marrying her was the only way to keep her alive, and my brothers and I from having to use a lot of pull to keep me out of prison. “My decision was the only way to keep us both safe. I knew what was going to happen once Denim got what she wanted out of me, and instead of doing what I normally do, I chose to protect us both.”

“Ha. My daughter told me how she initially wanted to lock you up.” He sipped his drink and eyed me. “Seems to me she knows firsthand that all of her assumptions about you were true.” I said nothing in response because at the end of the day, he was a federal judge. Seeing that I was electing to neither confirm nor deny, he continued, “The law isn’t always black and white, and I know that. We all have done things that may not be deemed right or ethical in the court of law. My concern here is the well-being of Denim and Briley. You’re married, and I don’t know where you guys will go from here. But what I do know is... I don’t care who you are or what connections you have. I’m not playing with you, or anyone else, when it comes to the livelihood and safety of those two in the kitchen.”

Eyes locked on one another, I understood and received his message loud and clear. He wasn't coming to me as the enemy; he was coming to me as a husband, father, and grandfather. My sentiments mimicked his. My only plans were to love and protect the girls as well.

"You have my word that I will love and protect them both with everything I have in me." I held my hand to my chest and gave him my word. "As long as I can help it, no form of hurt, harm, or danger will come to either of them."

"Do you love my daughter?"

"I do," I answered without an ounce of doubt or hesitation.

"How do you know?"

"Because I don't wake up in the morning wanting to put a bullet in her head," I said honestly. "Denim has done some things that I wouldn't take lightly and would never forgive anyone else for. We have a lot of things to work through personally within our relationship, but I know I don't want to work on the issues with anyone but her. She and Briley have my entire heart. Me hurting them is not an option, and I'm laying down anything or anyone that tries. That's my word."

He eyed me for a moment before standing to his feet and extending his hand for me to shake. Standing, I accepted as he pulled me into his embrace and patted my shoulders.

"Welcome to the family, son. Thank you for loving my girls the way you do."

We sat again and talked for almost an hour before we heard tiny feet patting down the hallway. Before we knew it, his study door burst open, and Bri marched in like a girl on a mission.

“There you are!” She ran straight to me and hopped in my lap. “My mommy told me to tell you that the food was ready and to come eat so we could leave.”

“Why the long face?” I stood and pinched her cheek as she sulked. “You know I hate to see you sad.”

Leaving the study, I followed the smell of freshly cooked food, and my stomach was pleased. Denim and I fucked all night and into the morning with only three hours of sleep, and I was running off fumes.

“I’m scared that once we leave here, you’re going to find a reason to leave me and Mommy again. You’re my bestest friend in the whole world, Andre. I love you.”

The words from this little girl almost brought tears to my eyes. I could feel the love she had for me pouring from her pores. Of all the bad shit I’ve done, I don’t know what I did to deserve Briley, but I thanked God for seeing fit that I do.

“I love you too, Big Bri.” The smile on her face could brighten the darkest sky. “You never have to worry about me leaving you because as long as you and Mommy want me to be here, you’ll have me.”

“How about we start with forever?” Denim asked as we rounded the corner, walking into the kitchen. “I think that’s plenty of time.”

Looking from Denim back to Bri’s hopeful eyes, I kissed her cheek before walking over and planting one on Denim’s lips. “Forever it is.”

Holding them both in my arms, I thanked God for allowing me to wake up and come to my senses about being here with them. The road hasn’t been easy, and I doubt that it would be. All I know is that Briley and Denim are my family now, and that’s something I don’t play about. I love these girls, and I’ll be damned if I ever leave

them. Coming to Milly Grove, I never expected to fall in love, but I'll be damned if I ever want to fall out.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:44 pm

One Year Later

“Hey there, little one. What are you crying for?” I cooed as I walked over to the crib and picked up my two-month-old son. “Are you hungry?”

Scooping him into my arms, I couldn’t help but nuzzle his fat cheek and relish in his newborn baby smell. Andre Jr., or AJ, is the spitting image of his father in every sense of the word. From his complexion to his little attitude, I know he’s going to give me a run just like Dre. I love my baby boy, though, and wouldn’t trade him for anything.

This past year and a half has been a whirlwind, but I’m thankful for it. I never expected to find love with the very man I wanted to arrest, but God has a funny way of changing your plans. I’m grateful I got out of my way and allowed it to happen.

Removing my left breast from my dress, I rubbed my nipple against my son’s lip, and he latched on immediately. I wanted to say I couldn’t believe I had an infant son, but that would be a lie. His father and I couldn’t keep our hands off each other, so it was inevitable.

“Sis, what are you—ugh!” Jerome placed his hands over his eyes as he walked into the nursery. “Every time I see you, you have your damn titties out. I’m going to need my nephew to drink Similac or something.”

Rolling my eyes at his foolishness, I continued to rock my son as he fed. We were spending time at Dre’s home in South Florida, and today, he decided to have a family barbecue. I love the fact that his family has their own compound. After going back

and forth from my home to his, we decided that we would live here. It was really a no-brainer because Dre wasn't going to have it any other way. He couldn't stand the cold weather in Milly Grove.

"Are you still loving being the queen of your castle?" Jerome gestured around the room dramatically. "Do you miss the Grove?"

"You know Milly Grove will always be home." I placed my baby over my shoulder and burped him. His little ass was already knocked out. "I just want to be where my man is. I do miss working with the guys in the office, though."

Being a federal agent is all I ever wanted to be growing up. When he and I decided to give this relationship our all, I transferred to a new location close to the city. I don't know the aspect of everything Andre does, but I know that our lives would be conflicts of interest if not for his position at Boudreaux Enterprises. As much as I love my job and what I do, I would have given it up if he wanted me too. Surprisingly, he didn't ask. What I do know is that he's my husband—the love of my life. I would never allow any harm to come to him or his family. If he ever needed me for anything or if there was anything I think he needed to be aware of, I'd tell him every single time. I'm confident that he would do the same for me.

"Girl, fuck them. I wouldn't even be working if I was you." He came and pulled my son from my arms before I could lay him back down. "You have a fine-ass husband who's paid and treats you like a queen. I would be on my hands and knees?—"

"Mommy, what are you doing up here?" Briley burst into the room as only she could. Thankfully, she didn't wake her brother. "Daddy said you better not be up here sleep."

Giggling at my daughter, I walked over and fixed her little ponytails. She's gotten to the point where she wants Dre to do everything for her, and sometimes, he has my girl looking crazy. Although her parts were crooked and ponytails were uneven, she

was still the prettiest little girl in the world.

After we decided to be together, we sat Bri down and told her that her father had been hurt and was in a better place. Dre refused to tell her he'd died and gone to Heaven because he was sure that he was Diddy-bopping for the Devil. I wasn't going to tell her that, no matter how much I hated Bryce. She understood that he was gone and never coming back. She was sad for a while, and even though Dre wasn't trying to intentionally replace Bryce, he was doing an excellent job at being her daddy.

“Go tell Daddy that I'm getting AJ ready, and I'll be down in a minute.” She nodded and ran off before I could tell her how pretty she looked in her green and white dress. Dre wanted all of us to dress in green and white today so she, AJ, and I had on stripes.

When painting the nursery, we researched the various colors and their meaning because I was adamant about painting the room something other than blue. Dre got really into the science of colors and ended up hiring an interior designer for me to work with to redo the entire house. We painted AJ's room sage green and burnt orange because it represented a good balance of calm and playful energy. Green and white paired together represented peace, unity, and prosperity, and we loved that. Dre was big on us being communicative about our thoughts and feelings because he liked balance and peace after handling his day-to-day work. He felt green and white were our colors now, and I had racked up on clothes in both colors in various shades. My green and white dress was a striped halter that matched Bri's striped smock, while AJ had a green and white striped sleeper. The baby weight had me a little self-conscious these days, so I always opted for something loose-fitting, and this fit-and-flare style always did the trick.

“Daddy, huh?” Jerome asked as he followed me to my bedroom. He'd been staying with us, along with my mother, to help with the new baby, and I fear he's never going home. While I love the women in Dre's family, I also love having my own tribe here too. “She loves that man for real.”

“Like she came from his sac.” I snickered as I looked at myself in the mirror. My curls were loose, and my face was bare with only some lash extensions. This is how Dre loved me, so I was happy to oblige. “The day she called him ‘Daddy’ for the first time, I think I shed more tears than him.”

Dre has never been an emotional man, but he reserves that for me and our kids. The night Bri called him Daddy shocked us all. We’d just told him about the baby, and she asked if she could call him dad too. It was the most precious moment, and one I’ll remember forever.

“All right! Let’s go eat.” I turned and faced Jerome and found him staring at me. “What’s wrong?” I looked down at my dress in hopes that I looked okay. “Should I change?”

Smiling, he rocked the baby in one arm and pulled me into the other. I’m so proud of you, Denim. I prayed that a man would find you and love you the way you deserve. You’re worthy of all the happiness and success you’ve had in your life, and I know it will only get better. I love you so much, sis.”

Dabbing my eyes, I wrapped my arms around Jerome and kissed his cheek. He’s been my rock through so much in life, and I pray it never changes. “I love you too, Rome.”

“Okay, okay... come on before you start wailing like you was in the club.” He chuckled as I wiped my eyes once more, smiling. “You know Dre has antennas and can sense when you have been crying, and I don’t have time for his shit today.” He grabbed my hand and led me out of the room and down the stairs. “Plus, I’m trying to bag one of these rich niggas. I can’t do that if I’m out here tussling.”

Laughing at his antics, we made our way through the house and out back, where everyone was located. The house was massive, with lots of land between the others on the compound. Bri loved it more than I did, and I was happy to raise her in the unlimited space. Andre let the girl do whatever she wanted, including decorating a

separate room specifically for tea parties. I didn't have a dog in the fight, so I minded my business at all times.

"Rome, how come every time I look up, you are always attached to my wife and kids?"

"Because we're all in this relationship together. Although you chose my cousin over me, I still love you."

"Nigga..." Dre kissed his teeth and snatched my hand from Rome's. I couldn't stop myself from folding over in laughter. "Give me my damn son."

Rolling his eyes, Rome smirked and handed us over. Kissing AJ's forehead, I saw all the love Andre had for him. I think I may have fallen in love with him a little bit more after watching.

"You ready to enjoy the day?" he asked me as he kissed my lips. The yard was covered in tents with food, a live DJ, and games for the kids. All of our family had shown up, and the grounds were full of people.

I nodded, taking in the view and feeling the joy.

"You feeling okay, Lil' Mama?"

"As long as I have you, Andre... I'm just fine."

Kissing me again, we made our way through the yard to mingle with our family and friends. Life with Dre is one I never dreamed of and never want to live without. My husband is everything to me and my family. I'm thankful he decided to let me live and give love a chance. Would I do it again? We'll never know because I don't have to. Dre is mine—forever.

“I wish your mother could have been here to see you like this, Dre. She would have loved a mini you just as much as I do.”

Placing my hand on my grandmother’s shoulder, I gave it a slight squeeze as I stood and watched her love on my son. I know she has many years of life ahead of her, but I’m happy I could give her one of the things she wanted most for me: to be in love and have my own family. Denim came into my life at a time when I thought this kind of happiness was too far out of reach, and I could never repay her for that.

“You think so?” I asked out of genuine curiosity. “You always say he’s me, made over.”

In the last few years of my mother’s life, she wasn’t the woman who birthed and raised me. While she became someone I no longer recognize, my love for her never faded. I often wondered when Rosier would come and tell me she was dead, but he didn’t have to. The cops showed up at my grandparents’ door, saying she’d been found dead in a rundown hotel from an apparent suicide. Jules confirmed because he always had eyes on her. I don’t know what was going through her head in her final days, and I never would. We never got around to speaking again before she died, but I made peace with it. I’m just glad my grandparents were able to put her away like they wanted.

“Let’s just hope this one here has a little bit more sense than his daddy,” my grandfather said as he rubbed AJ’s little fingers, side-eyeing me. “I’m yet praying for you, boy.”

“Where would I be without those prayers?” I chuckled as I bent down and kissed both of their heads. “I love y’all.”

“We love you too, baby,” Sweets cooed as she nuzzled AJ. “Can you give me one more?”

“Huh, Jules?” I called out, pretending I heard him say my name. “Here I come.”

Hearing them laugh at my back, I walked off and went to mingle with my people. Today is a beautiful day, and I want to enjoy it with my family. Looking around the yard, I can say the mission was accomplished as everyone was decked out in green and white.

“Did I ever tell you I was proud of you, baby?” My Aunt Ros approached and pulled me into a hug. “First Rosier, then Jules, and now you...” She smiled as her eyes misted. “You all have made me so proud!”

“Thank you, Auntie.” I kissed her and wiped away her tears. “I appreciate you.”

“Maybe Mimi will find happiness soon.” She sighed and glanced over at her daughter, who was laughing and talking to the ladies. “Anyway, let me go in here and finish this potato salad. I thought Jules was a mess when it came to eating. That damn Adrian is worse.”

Laughing at her frown, I agreed as she wandered back inside the house. Over the past year and some change, my family has grown extremely close to the Mills. Skip and I are closer than the rest of his brothers and me were, but they’re all good people. I invited them here today because even though they weren’t my blood, they operated as if they were whenever I was in Milly Grove for business or with Denim.

“Y’all good over here,” I asked as I walked up to the tent with the fellas. Wild and Luca were playing spades against Jules and Trench. “Y’all need anything?”

“Look at this nigga being the perfect host.” Jules chuckled as he threw down the ace of spades hard as fuck. “Eat that shit, bitch!”

“Nah, you eat this muthafucka!” Wild stood and slapped down the baby joker. “Get your sorry ass up from the table!”

With his mouth wide open, Jules sat in shock as he and Trench lost their second game in a row. When that stupid-ass grin came across his face, I knew then it was time for me to go. I was not up for witnessing any hocus pocus shit today.

“Trench, you’re sorry as fuck! I should have never sat at this table with you.” Slowly, he turned his head toward Luca and Wild. Pulling a small vial from his pocket, he placed it on the table. “You niggas ever wanted to be a turtle?”

Flipping the table and chairs, we all scrambled and ran, getting away from that nigga. Although I’m half Haitian like him, I don’t fuck around with the fuck around. Running straight to my grandfather, I tried my best to hide behind him.

“Pop, I need you to gather all the saints and tell them it’s a code red. That nigga about to lose his mind again over a card game.”

Falling into a fit of laughs, I mugged them all as if I wasn’t in distress. Seeing Jules cool as a cucumber, kissing all over his pregnant wife, didn’t help the situation or calm my nerves.

“I’m tired of y’all upsetting my man.” Bridgette pouted as she rubbed the back of his head as he lay on her shoulders. “Don’t make me go get my bag!”

“She’s just as crazy as he is,” Wild said, panting as he caught his breath. “Where is Rosier?” He looked around the yard and found my brother. “I’m about to see if I can steal some ribs and take my ass home. I’d rather be ducking bullets in the Grove than for a nigga to be out here calling me Franklin.”

Bent over, I all but cried in laughter at how serious he was. This is all I wanted in life: to be surrounded by my family and to be at peace. We may not be good people according to the rules of society, but we’re loyal to each other and have each other’s back consistently. We might joke with you here and there, but we never allowed anyone to play with us.

“Unk, tell Briley she can’t have a boyfriend until she’s thirty.” RJ’s badass ran up to me with a pouting Bri on his heels. Those two clicked instantly when they met each other, even though they were constantly bickering. He was only two years older than her, but swore he was the boss. “She’s about to make me mad.”

“Man, what the hell are y’all talking about?” I crossed my arms and mugged them both. “Bri, what do you know about a boyfriend?”

Briley had officially deemed me her father, and I had seamlessly stepped into that title. Her bitch-ass father didn’t deserve the honor, but she knew nothing of his wicked ways, and if it was left up to me, she never would. Sharing the same DNA wouldn’t make me love her more than I do right now, so if she wanted me to be her father, I was more than willing.

“I told him when I get big, I want someone like you. You love me and are nice to me, AJ, and Mommy.” She pouted before mugging RJ. “You’s a hater.”

“Man, y’all go play.” I laughed and patted them both on the head. “I don’t want to hear y’all fussing either.” Bri ran off, but I called out to RJ before he could. “Beat up all the lil’ niggas that ever look her way.”

He nodded with a sparkle in his eye from being coached to hit other people. The boy was Zoo’s child through and through.

“You got this shit set up nice out here,” Skip greeted me with a dap, followed by Uno. “Shit was like a maze coming through this bitch, though. I started to turn my ass the fuck around.”

Waving him off, I thanked them for coming as I made my way over to Rosier. He and Uno had business to handle back home, so they were a little late getting into town.

“Where’s my girl, Harley?” I asked Uno as I handed him a beer. “She told me we

were going shot for shot today.”

“Man...” He dragged his hand down his face before nodding toward her. “She left the baby home with our parents, and she has been on one. Look at her ass.”

Chuckling, I glanced over near the tent where the DJ was and found the ladies dancing. Bridgette and Denim sipped from their bottles of water while Mimi and Harley were dancing with Patron bottles on their heads. The girls were having the time of their lives.

“Who the fuck is that?” I could hear Skip’s frown as he noticed Chandler walk over and whisper into Noemi’s ear. We watched as she looked up at him before nodding, and they both walked off. “That’s her nigga?”

“Something like that...” I responded as I sipped my drink. “That’s her fiancé.”

Watching his eyes turn into slits before his face went blank, he nodded before taking a sip of his drink. I don’t know what was up with him and my cousin, and I’d determined it wasn’t my place to know. If something needed to be brought to my attention, it would be. In the meantime, I was going to mind my own shit.

“Hey, y’all. The food is ready.” Rosier walked over and grabbed a beer from the cooler. “You gone round ’em up.”

Nodding, I finished off my drink before making my way over to the DJ booth. Asking for the mic, I tapped it before gaining everyone’s attention.

“Excuse me... Can I bother y’all for a few minutes?” I called out as he cut the music down. “It won’t take long. The food is ready, and I know no one wants to hear Jules’ and Adrian’s mouth, so y’all better beat them to the tent.” Everyone laughed, with some nodding in agreement. “I just wanted to say thank you all for coming today. I appreciate every single one of you and the position you all play in my life. As you

know, family and loyalty mean everything to us, and without it, we wouldn't have the bond we share." They all nodded and agreed, so I continued.

"I ask that you bow your heads for a word of prayer." Giving everyone time to quiet down and bow, I started. "Lord, we come to you today, to not ask of anything but to simply say thank you. Thank you for your grace and thank you for your mercy. Thank you for the wins and thank you for the losses. Thank you for what you've done and what you will continue to do. Without your love, grace, and mercy, we would be lost. I want to personally thank you for never taking your hands off me." I had to pause for a moment to get myself together. "I'm not a perfect man. I know that I have sinned and fallen short, but you love me anyway. Through all my faults and imperfections, you've blessed me with a woman that I only dreamt of. I know sometimes, she often thinks she doesn't deserve me because of how we started, but it's me who doesn't deserve her." I lifted my eyes to find Denim's on me with tears streaming down her face. "She's brought peace into my life when it was pure chaos. She's blessed me with two wonderful and beautiful children. For that, I can't thank you or her enough. Thank you for giving me a clear mind and heart to love her and treat her the way she needs. Thank you for removing me from blocking my way to peace, so I could receive what was tailor-made for me. If I had a thousand tongues, Jesus, I wouldn't be able to thank you enough." Wiping my eyes, I sniffed and winked at her. "Thank you for everlasting love, Lord. Thank you. All these blessings in Jesus' name, I pray, Amen."

"Amen!" everyone replied as they smiled and cheered. Denim was in my arms in an instant. It took the restraint of God not to smack her ass with my grandparents watching.

"Whew!" Jules shouted as everyone filed in line to fix their food. "The doors of the church are open! Pastor Jones, you got some more oil?"

"I got some bullets for you today, boy. Don't come playing with me!"

Shaking my head, all I could do was laugh at them. Jules didn't have a serious bone in his body. Alone in the tent, the DJ resumed the music as I stood with Denim planted against my chest.

"I love you so much, Andre." The way she looked at me, I could see all the adoration she spoke of. "So, so much."

"I love you more, wife." I kissed her lips tenderly. "Thank you for saving me when I didn't know I needed to be rescued."

I've been called many things and worn several hats and titles when it came to my personal and professional life. Being called a husband and father is by far the titles that have carried the most honor. While I love it, there's another one that I'll always wear with righteousness. Being with Denim has shown me I can have it all, and I don't have to choose. For that, I owe her. I can be the family man I didn't think was possible, and I can also be Andre Boudreaux, the corporate assassin.

The End