



Give Me All Of You

Author: Tacarra

Category: Urban

Description: JaRue Malone is a single mother who simply tries to make ends meet. The father of her eighteen-month-old daughter, Infiniti, refuses to help take care simply because JaRue won't play by his rules. With the help of her best friend, Journei, and her bosses, Knasim and Knight Richmond, she's able to provide a somewhat stable and comfortable environment for her daughter. That is until her child's father tries to get the upper-hand on her situation, leaving her in shambles, not knowing which way to turn.

Hassan Ashby is the heir apparent to The Ashby Crime Family in Wood Haven. After his father steps down and appoints him the new head of the family, he's thrown headfirst into his role and everything it entails. Working closely with The RCF, Hassan is given a direct order from Knasim that he has to adhere to, or it could cost his family more than he could afford to lose.

Journei is JaRue's best friend. She's down to ride with JaRue 'till the wheels fall off. She's been by her friend's side through everything that she's been dealt with, leaving her to have very little time for herself. That is until she crosses paths with Rakeem Ashby. Sparks fly immediately, but what Journei doesn't know is that Rakeem is keeping a part of his life from her, and it could put a nail in the budding relationship that they're trying to build.

Rakeem Ashby is his brother's right hand and enforcer. Whatever problem The ACF has, he's the man for the job. He just wishes his personal life is as easy. Rakeem has a lot on his plate, but when Journei enters his life, he feels compelled to make it easier to insert her in it. The only problem is, he hasn't revealed every aspect of his life.

Not knowing the outcome of what the Universe has in store for them, these two couples navigate through every storm and obstacle in order to conserve solace in their lives. Will they get knocked down at every turn, or will they defy the odds that are thrown at them?

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

JaRue 'Rue' Malone

“Shit...shit...shit.”

I was running late for work, and I couldn't afford that shit. Not right now, anyway. My car wouldn't start, and I still had to get Infiniti to daycare. It was already seven-thirty, and I had to be at work at eight-fifteen. The daycare was twenty minutes from my apartment and my job was another twenty minutes away. With traffic from the Heights all the way to the Valley...I wouldn't get to work until almost eight-thirty.

I worked as a receptionist at Richmond Crematory he let it go.

“Damn, nigga. I was right here.”

Knight mugged his brother after snatching the door back open.

“I can see, nigga.”

“The fuck you close the door in my face for?” he asked.

“The fuck I'm a hold it for? Your hands work,” Knasim grumbled.

“You a nasty ass nigga. Sis' must be holding out on you again.”

“Stop worrying 'bout my wife, nigga. I done told you about that shit.” Knasim frowned at his brother before turning to me. “Rue, our cousins are expected to come through. You already know to send them back. If my wife and son come, send them

straight back. I don't care what I'm doing. I know there are three families due this afternoon. Let me know when they get here." I listened as Knasim ran down the details of the day while I made mental notes.

"Okay. Anything else?" I asked.

"Nah. That's all I got right now." I nodded, and he went down the hall that led to his office. I went around to my desk, then turned my computer on before going into the employee lounge and making a cup of coffee. Today seemed like it was going to be light, but I knew coffee would still be needed in order for me to get through it.

I had just come back from lunch and was about to get ready for the 2:00 consultation with a bereaved family. Right when I was setting up the meeting area, Knight came into the room.

"Aye, Rudy Rue. We're going to need you to stay over tonight. You good with that?" It wasn't unusual for them to ask me to stay over. I knew all about The RCF and what they were about, so anytime they offered me to stay over, I did because I could use all the extra money I could.

"Uh, sure. Let me call my daughter's father and see if he can pick her from daycare."

"Bet." He nodded as he walked out of the room.

I went back to my desk and pulled my phone out of the drawer before I dialed Keith's number. He answered right before the voicemail came on.

"What is it, Rue?" he asked like I was annoying him.

"I have to work over tonight. Can you pick Infiniti up from daycare?"

I could hear him huffing, but I didn't have time for his shit today. The answer was 'yes or no'.

"Working over?" He scoffed. "I know what that means. I don't know why you won't get a respectable job and leave those people alone," he stated.

He always belittled my job every chance he got but had better sense than to say that to The Richmonds. He just liked to talk shit.

"It's a job, and it's how I take care of my daughter. You do the bare minimum and that's only when you feel like it. I pay for daycare even though you told me you would. I-" he cut me off.

"I told you if you wanted me to do more, sign your rights over to me and my wife and I wouldn't have a problem taking care of her financially."

This nigga never ceased to amaze me.

"Why would you think I would give you my daughter? You know what? Don't worry about it."

I hung up in his face because I didn't have time to be going back and forth with this overgrown ass man.

"You good?"

I turned around and saw Knas standing on the other side of my desk.

"I'm fine. I just need to make sure I have someone to watch my daughter tonight. Knight asked me to work over, and I desperately need all the extra money I can get."

I sat down in my chair and put my head in my hands.

“Look, I get it. I’m a father myself, and that nigga Knight has three kids. Go home to your baby.”

“No, I can find somebody to watch her,” I insisted.

“Rue, you’re good. I promise. Don’t worry about staying over.” I cut him off again, but he put his hand up to stop me. “I’ll still pay you.”

I was floored.

“I can’t take money I didn’t earn, Knasim.”

“Look at it as a bonus.” He smiled, which was something he rarely did.

“Thank you! Thank you so much.”

I was on the verge of tears, but the family was walking in, so I had to straighten up my face immediately. Keith can say what he wants, but The Richmonds were lifesavers.

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After the consultations, I was able to go pick my daughter up on time. When I got ready to leave, Knasim and Knight came back upfront, and both handed me ten thousand dollars apiece. I almost fell flat on the floor. I never expected them to give me anything, especially not that much. I refused it at first because I didn’t want them to think I was a charity case. They explained that wasn’t the case at all. They knew I was a hard worker and being a single mother could be hard. I never told them about Infiniti’s father because a part of me was embarrassed that he was well off but still

refused to take care of his child without stipulations. To them, my baby's daddy was just another broke ass deadbeat. I thanked them for the money again and went straight to the bank to deposit it. As soon as I picked up Infiniti, I paid for her daycare for the rest of the year. I told Stephanie how I got the money, and she told me I would have been a fool to block that blessing. After that, I went home to bathe my baby, order groceries and house essentials. I paid my rent and lights for the rest of the year and paid off my furniture. I would call my mechanic in the morning to see how much it would be to fix my car and pay that upfront. I didn't care if I didn't have a dime left; I wanted to make sure my bills were paid, and we had food in the house.

After bathing and feeding Infiniti, I laid her down, then ordered the groceries and waited for them to arrive. While I did that, I poured a glass of wine and called Journei.

"Hey, boo," she answered.

"What you doing?"

"Nothing. Sitting here looking at the walls, look at me. My mama still out doing whatever with whoever, so I'm here by myself."

Journei still stayed at home with her mother. It was just the two of them, so she didn't see the need to get her own place. She didn't work because her mother paid for everything, and she was able to do that because she stayed boo'd up with a rich husband. She was currently on husband number four and wasn't ashamed, not one bit. We knew she didn't love these men, but she made sure that she was taken care of and so was Journei.

"Come over. I got some tea to spill, chy." I took a sip of my wine and sat on the sofa, tucking my leg under me.

“Say less. I was about to call you anyway once I realized the time. Give me twenty minutes.” I agreed, and we hung up.

I searched my Fire Stick for something to watch while I waited for Journei and my groceries. Fifteen minutes later, I heard a knock at the door.

“Damn, that was quick,” I said as I got up to go to the door.

I’m pretty sure it was the groceries because Journei wouldn’t be here that fast. Opening the door, I was greeted by the delivery person, along with Keith’s annoying ass. I watched as he walked up to my door and step around my groceries. Bastard didn’t even bother to help bring them in. After thanking the driver, I started bringing my stuff on the inside of the door so I could put them up. I had well over six hundred dollars’ worth of stuff and his ass just stood there.

“Where did you get the money to buy all of this? You got another nigga buying shit for my daughter?”

I looked at him like he had all the audacity in the world. I refused to respond. I had to continue getting my things inside. Once I did, I shut my door and faced my sorry ass baby daddy.

“It’s none of your business where I got the money. You didn’t provide it, and my daughter has everything she needs no thanks to you,” I snapped.

“If I find out that you’ve had another man around my daugh-”

“You ain’t gonna do shit.” Journei cut him off as she came through the door.

My friend was beautiful. She was thick in all the right places with the prettiest caramel colored skin that I’ve ever seen. She was a little shorter than my five foot

five frame, standing at five foot three, but that didn't stop her from running up on anybody...my baby daddy included.

"This has nothing to do with you, Journei. Learn to stay in your place," Keith spat.

"My place? Nigga, your place gonna be down that damn incinerator where my girl works at. Stop playing with me."

She stood toe to toe with Keith and dared him to clap back. Like I knew he would. He stood down and turned his attention back to me.

"I'll be back to see my daughter when you don't have stragglers around."

He looked at Journei up and down in disgust.

"You got me fucked up with your lopsided wig, wife," she spewed.

That caused me to burst out laughing. He pinned me with a nasty glare, but I gave him one right back, causing him to roll his eyes and leave. Once he was out of the door, Journei and I looked at each other and laughed.

"He mad, huh?" I laughed.

"Bitch, he big mad. But, uhm. Where did you get the money to get all of this? I was prepared to tell him I brought it and it'll still be our story, but bitch, spill it."

As she helped me put up the groceries and other supplies that I brought, I told her about the day I had at work and how my bosses gave me twenty thousand dollars as a bonus. I told her everything I did with the money and how I was going to put the rest up.

“Bitch, you sure you ain’t fucking none of those fine ass niggas?” she asked.

“I’m positive. Knasim’s mean ass is married and so is Knight. I’m good on them and would never push up on my bosses that way. I’m just appreciative that they’re family oriented and understand my situation.”

“I hear you. Let’s finish putting this stuff up so we can order food and drink this wine. I might even stay here with y’all tonight.”

We did just that and ended up drinking three bottles of wine. I’m glad I had tomorrow off because had I not, I wouldn’t be any good.

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Hassan 'Haze' Ashby

“So when you gonna talk to that nigga Knas about continuing to use the ports? It’s almost time for the next group to come in.”

Me and my brother, Rakeem or Rock, were sitting in my office at the freight yard. This was just one of our businesses...the legal one, anyway. We were a part of the Ashby Crime Family here in Wood Haven. Our pops was currently the head of our family, with me being the heir apparent. Even though we were our own family, everyone knew The Richmonds ran every damn thing. With this change, I would need to sit down with Knasim and come up with our own agreement outside of the one they had with my pops.

My family ran an illegal immigration operation. We had ports set up all over the Caribbean, Mexico, South America, and Western Africa. Our vessels made it possible for immigrants to come to the United States undetected and attain the proper documentation to live a prosperous life in a new country. We provided documents, a place to stay, a vehicle, and a job to maintain their lifestyles. It didn’t get any better than that. It was only our job to get them started; they had to do the legwork themselves to be able to stay afloat. For years we used the ports owned by The RCF to transport the families, and in return, our family allowed The RCF to use our vessels to transport their bodies that held drugs and weapons. It was a win-win for everybody. This sit down was only to assure that things would still run as usual. We also handled loans for those who couldn’t get approved at the banks. For a higher interest rate, you could get a loan from us. However, if you can’t pay and try to play in our faces about it, the penalties are much harsher and inhumane than those of a traditional bank. But hey, that’s the risk that you take when you get into business with

The Ashby's.

"I'm waiting for him to call and confirm the meeting. We'll settle everything then."

My brother nodded.

"Aight bet. Shoot me the time and you know I'll be there." My brother was my right and left hand. We did everything together when it came to business. Even though I was appointed to take over since I was the oldest; we still would run this shit side by side. I wasn't having it any other way, and my pops knew that. I hope that nigga Knasim knew shit wasn't gon' change either.

"You out?"

Rising out of the chair he was sitting in, he responded, "Yeah. I need to go check on Lu and pick Peace up from Ma."

I nodded.

"Aight. I'm gonna finish up here and go holla at Pops before I go home." I stood to dap my brother up and walk him to the door.

"I'll probably still be there, especially if Ma cooked."

"You know she did."

"Then I'll see you when I get there."

We shared a laugh, and my brother left, leaving me to finish up here. I didn't mind because this was my forte, like collections were his.

It took me close to three hours to finish looking over the latest profiles and making sure they had all the documents that they needed. I wasted no time shutting my computer down and locking up my office. No one ever came here besides my brother. We didn't even have workers at this location, and I preferred it that way. I needed to be able to work in peace. That's why I had people in place to handle the small shit for me instead of me having to do it. When I looked at my watch, I saw it was close to six o'clock. By the time I left here and fought through traffic, it would be close to seven when I got to my parents' house. As I got into my truck, my phone rang like clockwork, and it was Kari. Kari was a chick that claimed she knew how to handle her feelings when it came to us fucking around, but that turned out to be a gah damn lie. Every time I turned around, she was in her fucking feelings. That didn't stop me from fucking her, though. Her pussy was okay, but her head made up for that shit.

"Wassup?" I answered.

"Wassup? That's how you answer for me?" she sassed.

"I could've ignored the shit," I spat.

"Don't get smart Haze. You know what I meant."

"Nah, I didn't, but wassup?"

"You coming through?" she asked. I knew this was the reason for her call and shit, I needed to bust a nut. So, why not?

"Yeah. Let me go holla at my folks first and I'll come through."

"Okay, baby. I'll see you when you get here," she cooed.

"Yep," was my only response before I hung up.

I kept navigating in traffic until I got to my parents' house. Like I knew it would be. My brother's truck was still here. He probably was staying here tonight. He did that most nights if he didn't want to take his daughter out too late. Letting myself in, I followed the savory scent of whatever it was my mother cooked. I found the rest of my family already sitting at the table eating.

"Wassup, family?" I greeted. I kissed my mother on her temple before squeezing my father's shoulder. When I got close, my niece started going crazy.

"Uncle Hayzie!"

"Wassup Princess Pea?" I picked her up and kissed her greasy face, making her giggle and squirm in my arms. I placed her back into her booster seat and took a seat by my brother. My mother did her damn thing in the kitchen today. She had prepared braised beef ribs, lima beans, candied yams, macaroni and honey cornbread. I was definitely smashing this shit and taking a to-go plate.

"Have you touched bases with Knasim yet, son?" my pops asked as I fixed my plate. He knew my mother hated talking about business at the table, but he also hated being ignored, so I kept my answer short.

"I'm just waiting for his call." He nodded.

"Baby, how is Kari?" my mother asked. For whatever reason, she liked her, but she knew we weren't together.

"Straight I guess." I shrugged.

"You guess? You haven't talked to her?"

"I did."

“Yet, you don’t know how she’s doing?” She now her pretty faced frowned up.

“We don’t actually talk, Ma, so I don’t know what to tell you,” I stated honestly. All she did was shake her head in response.

“Rock, how’s Lu doing?”

“‘Bout the same. I’m going to take Peace home so that she can see her. She’s been asking for her.”

“That’s wassup. I’ll come through and lay eyes on her too.” Rock and his baby mama had some complicated shit going on, but I’ll let him tell his own story.

We finished our dinner, holding an idle conversation about a little bit of everything. When we were done, I grabbed the to-go plate my mother fixed for me and headed out with Rock and Peace trailing behind me. I kissed my niece and told her I would see her later and told my brother the same.

Kari stayed en route to my house so not having to go out of my way was a plus. When I pulled up, it was a car in her driveway parked behind hers. She knew I hated coming over here when she had fucking company. Those bitches she called her friends got on my last damn nerves. They were either trying to fuck me or telling her to leave me alone since I wouldn’t give her a commitment. By the car, it looked like Giselle was her visitor and she was one that was down to fuck. Getting out of my truck, I trekked up the small concrete path until I made it to her front door. I knocked and waited until she came to open it.

“Hey, baby,” she cooed when she saw me. She tried throwing her arms around me to kiss me, and I dodged that shit.

“Watch out.” I stopped her from circling my neck.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, dumfounded.

“I thought you called me over here for some dick? The fuck she doing here?”

“Excuse you, nigga?” Giselle spat.

“Aye, watch that.” I shot her a glare. “Don’t be sitting over there like you don’t want the dick, too. Be lucky I ain’t no dog ass nigga or I’ll give you just what you’re looking for with your face buried in her pussy. Stop playing with me.” I looked back at Kari, who was standing there looking crazy in the face. I side stepped her and headed toward her bedroom. I didn’t come here to entertain that shit.

It didn’t take long for me to hear them talking and the door shutting. Moments later, Kari entered the room, closing the door behind her. I had already stripped down to my boxers, and lying back on the bed with my arm covering my eyes. I felt the bed dip, then Kari fishing my dick out of my briefs.

“I ain’t come here for you to play with my shit, shorty. Either suck that muthafucka, or sit on it.” I didn’t even bother to look up and see if she was about to do what I requested. I knew she was. When I felt her slick lips wrap around my dick, I sunk my head deeper into the pillow, relishing in the feeling.

“Stop playing, Kay. Suck that dick like you miss it.” I knew by telling her that she would suck my dick like a maniac.

Slurp...Slurp...Gawk

“Hell yeah. Just like that. Shit.”

She must’ve really missed the dick because I was already on the verge of cumming. Grabbing her head, I thrust upward to fuck her mouth a few times before telling her

to get up. Reaching for my jeans, I pulled a condom out of the pocket and slipped it onto my throbbing member.

Grabbing her leg by the cuff of her knee, I flipped her over onto her stomach. She knew it wasn't no missionary shit going on.

Slap!

"Stop playing and get that ass in the air," I commanded.

She wasted no time doing as I said, and I wasted no time plunging inside of her.

"Ooh, baby," she moaned out.

"Throw that shit back."

I watched in amazement as her voluptuous ass rippled against my pelvis. I would never be vocal with a woman that wasn't mine, so I bit down on my bottom lip as I enjoyed the feeling she was currently providing. I felt my nut rising, so I increased the speed and impact of my strokes.

"Oh God, Haze! I-I'm about to...shit!" She was trying to tell me she was about to cum again, but I felt that shit and was right behind her. Quickly, I pulled out as I came inside of the condom. I left her on the bed to recover while I went to flush the condom and wash my dick off. When I came out of the bathroom, she was still in the same spot. I didn't even bother saying anything. The only thing on my mind was going home, washing my ass, smoking my blunt, and eating my food. When I accomplished all of those things, I was taking my black ass to bed. I was finally redressed and snatched my keys off of the dresser to head out.

"You're not staying?"

“Nah, I got shit to do.”

“Since when has that ever stopped you?” She was now sitting up with the only thing covering her was the afterglow that this dick provided her.

“Since when did I ever fucking explain myself to you? Aye, I’m out.” I snatched my phone and stalked to the front door. I made sure I locked her shit and got in my truck and went the fuck home. This was the exact reason why I didn’t do this shit with her.

I lit the blunt that I had in the ashtray and took a pull from it as soon as I pulled out. I was pulling into my driveway when my phone rang. I looked at the screen display and saw that it was the very person I was waiting to hear from.

“Hello?” I answered, as I blew out the smoke.

“Two o’clock at the house in The Valley,” was all he said.

“Bet.” I hung up because there were no more words to be said. I got the meeting, so now all we had to do was come up with terms that fit us. We weren’t our fathers, and I wasn’t doing everything the same way that my pops did, and I know he wasn’t I’ll just have to wait until Friday to see what that was. Right now, I was taking my ass in here and do what I said. I’ll take care of the other shit when it’s time.

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Rakeem 'Rock' Ashby

I planned on staying at my parents' house tonight, but since Haze took care of everything earlier, I was taking my daughter home so that she could see her mother. It's been about a week since she last saw her, and that's because I didn't want her to see her in her condition. My baby mama, Lucretia, had acute myeloid leukemia. We found out while she was pregnant with our now two-year-old daughter, Peace. When her bloodwork came back, the doctor informed us that her white blood cells appeared abnormal. After further testing, we were presented with her diagnosis. Since she was pregnant, she refused to get treatment. By refusing treatment, that caused her to progress faster than projected and as a result, my daughter had to be born via cesarean. By the grace of God, Peace came into the world healthy. She was a little on the small size, weighting exactly five pounds even, but she was still healthy, nonetheless. Now I was the sole parent that my daughter relied on while her mother resided in the guest room in my home waiting to die. Lucretia's only family was her mother, Teresa, and her sister, Jalissa. They offered to help take care of her, so they took turns coming to the house sitting with her while a nurse came in every other day to check on her. Once I got my daughter situated in her car seat, I rounded my truck and got inside to pull off.

"See Mommy?" I heard Peace's little voice say from the back seat.

I looked at her through the rearview mirror and said, "Yeah, baby girl. We're going to see Mommy." That had to be what she wanted to hear because she starting wiggling in her seat while clapping her little hands. This girl was a character and the highlight of my life. After spending all day around a bunch of niggas and handing out repercussions, it felt amazing to come home to my baby girl.

When I pulled up to my house, Lucretia's mother, Teresea's car, was parked in the driveway. I left her sister, Jalissa, here, but something had to come up if she wasn't here now. After grabbing Peace and heading inside, I found Teresea in the kitchen washing dishes.

"Na-Na!" Peace squealed as she tried to jump out of my arms. It was no doubt that my daughter loved her people. As long as they did right by her, I would allow them to be a part of her life. I didn't play those fuck ass games when it came to my child. It didn't matter who you were.

"Hey, Na-Na baby." She picked Peace up and kissed all over her chubby cheeks. "Hey, Rakeem," she greeted me.

"Hey, Teresea. How was today?" I asked. I saw the look of anguish wash over her face, and I knew exactly what that meant. Today wasn't a good day.

"It was rough. She barely ate and slept most of the day because of the pain. I had to double the meds so she could get some rest, so she's asleep now," she informed.

I took a seat at the table and leaned back. I hated I couldn't get a handle on this shit. No matter how much money I had, there was nothing I could do. Even after paying the best oncologists in the US, there was nothing that could be done. The leukemia was too aggressive and advancing at an accelerated rate. The only thing we could do was keep her doped up on medicine so she could be comfortable while we waited for her organs to shut down.

"I hate I can't get a handle on this shit," I spoke out loud. Teresea walked over to where I was seated and took a seat in the empty chair that was closest to me.

"There is nothing that any of us can do. I appreciate you stepping up and still caring for her the way that you do. Most men would have run out by now."

“I’m only doing what I know is right. I love Lu and we share a daughter, so if that means I make sure that she has a peaceful transition, then I’m going to make that shit happen.” She nodded.

“I’m going to get Peace ready for bed before I leave. I’ll be back in the morning since Jalissa had to leave and check on Jace.”

Jace was Jalissa’s five-year-old son. That would be the only reason that she wouldn’t be here with her sister.

“Okay. I’ll go check on Lu while you get Pea together.” She nodded and rose with Peace in her arms.

While they went upstairs, I went and poured myself a drink before going to check on Lucretia. Even though I was fully aware of her condition, I was never prepared to face the shit. Once I downed two shots of Remy, I rinsed my glass out before sitting it in the dishwasher and heading to the guest wing where Lucretia’s room was located. When I walked in, she was sound asleep with just the lamp and TV on. The room was set up like a suite, with a separate sitting area on the opposite side. Since she had that small hospital bed, I was able to still fit a king sized bed in here. Her bed was set up closer to the window, so she was able to get natural sunlight during the day. I don’t know when the last time I slept in my own room. When I was home, me and Peace slept in here with her mother.

I walked over to her, and she looked so peaceful as she slept. If it wasn’t for the faint rise and fall of her chest, I would’ve sworn she had already left us. I let my eyes sweep over her ashen skin. I know her mother made sure she was moisturized well, but her skin developed this permanent bluish hue that made her look dry as hell. Her mouth stayed dry as well, so we made sure that they stayed hydrated. Her dark brown hair, that was once healthy, was now thinning and brittle. Her sister would wash it as best as she could once a week and braid it so that it wouldn’t be all over her head. I

couldn't stop the panging in my chest as my heart beat relentlessly against my ribcage. Before me lied the woman who I knew I would spend forever with, yet I already had her funeral planned out because it was just a matter of time.

Giving her one last look, I kissed her forehead and headed to the bathroom to take a much needed shower to get myself together. I cherished the time that I spent in the shower because this was the only time that I could be vulnerable. I couldn't show any sign of weakness at any point...to anyone, so when I was alone with my thoughts, I let the tears flow freely. I cried for Lucretia because she was so young. We weren't even thirty yet, and she would never live to see it. I cried for my daughter because she's so young and probably wouldn't even remember her mother. I cried for myself because I was losing the love of my life. Before the age of thirty, I would be a single father and it's not by choice.

Once I let the last of my tears fall, I washed my body and got out of the shower. After dressing in a pair of basketball shorts, tank top, and socks, I slipped my feet into a pair of slides and went to go get my baby so Teresea could go home and get some rest. I met her coming down the stairs with a sleeping Peace in her hands.

"She's out like a light," she whispered, handing her over.

"We'll see how long that'll last." We both laughed.

"She's still sleeping?"

I nodded. "I'm gonna stay home tomorrow. You can stay home and rest or help Lissa with Jace. I'll be fine. If I have to step out, I'll call my mama," I stated.

"There's no need to do that. I'll make sure Jalissa and Jace are good, and I'll still come. I don't mind taking care of my daughter, Rakeem." I nodded, signifying I understood before I walked her to the door. When she got into her car and pulled off,

I locked up and set the alarm before Peace and I headed back to the room. She would be sleeping for a few hours before she got back up like she worked somebody's graveyard shift. I would take the time to watch some highlights that I missed before I took a nap. I don't know when the last time I had a full night's sleep. Between Peace and her mother, I was literally walking 'round here operating on fumes, but I refuse to complain. As a man, I was doing what I needed to do for my family, and if I had to do this shit every day for the rest of my life, I would without hesitation.

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Like clockwork, Peace was up at 3 AM like she had somewhere to be. I knew it was no use in trying to get her to go back to sleep right now, so I got up to get her some juice. When we walked back into the room, Lucretia was up.

"Hey," she said weakly.

"Wassup, shorty? You thirsty? Hungry?" I asked, with Peace still in my arms.

"I could use something to drink." Her voice was low and weak. That shit hurt me to my core. I walked over to the mini fridge that was kept in here for her drinks and medication and grabbed a small bottle of water and a straw from the container that sat on top. When we got back to the bed, I took a seat in the vacant chair beside her bed and prepared the water for her to drink.

"Mommy, drink!" Peace clapped and did that silly ass dance that she always did. Leaning forward, I held the bottle and straw up to Lucretia's lips to assist her. She only took a few sips before she removed her lips from the straw. I watched as she leaned her head further into the pillow and take as much of a deep breath as she could because a task as simple as drinking took a lot out of her.

"Thank you for bringing her home," she whispered.

“You don’t have to thank me, shorty. She loves coming to visit you.” It was true. Peace knew her mother and loved seeing her. She just didn’t understand why she couldn’t get up and do things with her like I did. Even when I stayed home, I left her at my parents because, to be honest, sometimes it was just too much to care for both of them and I didn’t want my daughter to see me at my most vulnerable moments.

“You want to put her back to sleep?” I asked. She wouldn’t have to do anything but let her lie beside her and she would fall right to sleep. It was the little things like this that let her feel like she had some sort of normalcy going on in her life. She nodded, and I laid Peace beside her mother along with her cup. I would sit in the chair until they both fell asleep.

A few minutes passed before I heard Lu’s hoarse voice call my name.

“Rakeem?”

I looked in her direction and studied her face for a few seconds before I answered.

“Wassup?”

“Can you promise me something?” she asked.

“You already know that if it’s in my means, you got it.” That caused a small smile to grace her face.

“Promise me you won’t give up on love. You and Peace will need someone. I want that for you, so promise me you won’t shun the thought,” she pleaded. I could see in her eyes that she was serious. It took a lot of courage to tell someone that you love, you want them to love again. I’m not saying that I would be against it, but I’m not about to go out and look for the shit either.

“I got you, baby,” I simply replied. Leaning over, I kissed her forehead before leaning

back into the chair and closing my eyes. Peace would sleep for a few more hours and I needed to get a nap in while she slept because once she started, she was on go.

The next morning, I got up and fixed breakfast for Lu and Peace. Lu could only eat soft foods, and Peace was at this stage where she only wanted chicken nuggets. The girl didn't care what time of day it was; she wanted those damn nuggets. My freezer was stocked with those shits. While I put some cheese grits in a bowl for Lu, I plated some nuggets and eggs on a plate for my baby girl.

"Chikky nuggie. Chikky nuggie," she sang as I put her plate in front of her.

"You gonna turn into a damn chicken nugget," I joked, kissing her forehead.

While I let the grits cool, I fed my daughter. She wanted to be independent and do it herself, but most of it would end up on the floor. While I was feeding her, I heard my front door open. Looking at the monitor, I knew it was my brother. He said he was coming to see Peace and Lu and one thing about Haze; he was gonna keep his word.

"Uncle Haze!" Peace danced.

"Man, why is this damn girl always dancing?" he laughed.

"The hell if I know. I let her rock out and do her shit." I shrugged.

Haze walked over to Peace and kissed her temple, and she handed him a chicken nugget that she already bit off of.

"Lu, up?" he asked.

"She was. I was waiting until after I fed Peace before I took her the bowl of grits I made for her."

“I got it. I need to chop it up with sis, anyway.”

He got up and picked up the bowl and got a spoon out of the drawer before heading out the kitchen and into Lu’s room. My family has been a big help during all of this. Even my pops would come over and lend a hand every now and then.

An hour later, I had washed Peace up for the day and got her dressed by the time Haze was done with Lucretia. We met up in the living when I walked back down the stairs. I placed Peace on her feet and let her do her thing. My brother joined me, and we chopped it up.

“Aye, Knas called me yesterday and said to meet him at eight at Murda’s club,” he informed.

“When?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Bet. I’ll have Peace stay with Ma. I don’t know what Jace had, and I don’t really want her around them like that until he fully recovers.” He nodded in agreement. While Peace tore my damn living room up, I caught him up on what Lucretia said to me last night and all he could do was look at me with sympathy in his eyes. I didn’t need sympathy. I needed this pain in my chest to go away and for my daughter to keep her mother, but just like I knew gas prices would never go down, I wouldn’t have this either.

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

JaRue

I was so glad to finally be off for the weekend. I was going to sit in the house with my baby and watch movies and eat snacks all weekend. Ever since Keith popped up at my house and saw all the groceries and supplies that I brought for Infiniti, he's been calling and harassing me about a man being around his daughter, and what he'll do to me. He does all of that, but when I bring up him seeing his daughter or picking her up, he never has the time. I was over him and his bullshit, but he was Infiniti's father, and I tried to give him the benefit of the doubt, but he wouldn't leave well enough alone. As I was gathering my belongings, one of Knasim's twin cousins walked in. By his attire, I knew it was Kyan.

"Wassup, Rue? Knas still in the back?" He stopped by my desk and propped up on his arm. The men in this family knew they were fine. I mean drop dead 90s type of fine, but I didn't do married men. Yes, my baby daddy was married, but the bastard lied to me, so it doesn't count, nor does his irrelevant ass.

"Yes. He's still in the back with his brother," I responded. With a nod, he smiled and headed to the back where Knasim's office was and left me up front to handle my business.

Best Fren (fingers crossed emoji): Drinks tonight?

I read the message that came from Journei and shook my head with a smile. Every weekend she tried to get me to go somewhere and every weekend I declined.

Me: I already have plans.

I lied.

Best Fren (fingers crossed emoji): Lies. Yo' ass ain't gon' be doing shit but sitting up in the house with Finny eating fruit snacks and looking at Bluey until she falls asleep (eye roll emoji).

Me: Don't act like you know me because that's exactly what I plan on doing lol. You're free to join us if you like (smirking emoji).

Best Fren (fingers crossed emoji): No ma'am. You never go out and I'm tired of going on these boring ass dates. Take my God baby to your parents and take that damn bun out of your hair and let's go have fun. You can put your Mumu on and go back to being an old maid tomorrow.

Her referring to my Mumu caused me to cackle louder than I intended. I was glad that no one was in here with me or they would've thought I was crazy as hell.

Me: Okay...ONE drink and I'm leaving.

Best Fren (fingers crossed emoji): That's good enough for me (kissing emoji).

Shaking my head at the thought of Journei dragging me outside tonight. I will be the first to admit that all I do is work and go home with my baby. Keith never gave me any free time, and I didn't want to burden my parents with keeping my child while I went out. Even though I rarely did, I felt guilty. My parents never made me feel bad about leaving my daughter with them. They actually encouraged me to go out and have fun. It was all me.

After I finished up some orders that needed to be placed for a funeral that we had next week, I was done with my work week. Since I agreed to go out tonight with Journei, I was going to go pick up Infiniti from daycare and head straight home.

Looking down at my gas hand, I realized I needed to stop and fill up. I would do that now before I even picked up Infiniti. It was always a task trying to get gas with her in the car. I pulled up to the nearest gas station and pulled up to the pump before trekking inside. There were quite a few people in front of me, so I went and grabbed Infiniti a snack and myself a juice before I got in line. When it was my turn, I placed my things on the counter and told the cashier I was putting thirty dollars on pump four. Before I could hand him my money, I heard the sexiest deep voice that I've heard prompting me to turn around.

"You can put her tab with mine," the fine stranger asserted.

I lost all train of thought as I drank him in. At one point in my life, I thought Keith was the finest man that I have ever seen, but now I know that to be a total illusion because the man standing before me was a true work of God. I'm definitely putting a little more in the collection plate for this one. I would say he was a little over six feet tall, with the finest tawny colored skin littered with tattoos from what I could see. There were cute freckles sprinkled over his face, and a pair of glasses were perched on his nose. I couldn't tell if they were prescription or designer like Knasim's cousin Kyandri, but either way, he was still sexy as hell. Taking notice of his hair, I saw it was braided back into four braids and it was just as long as mine. My God, this man was fine!

"Uhm, thank you. You don't have to do that." I finally stopped gawking at this man and found my voice.

Licking his lips and giving me a once over, he responded. "No pressure, baby. It's cool." He slid his card to the clerk and leaned on the counter. The cashier gave me my items, and I thanked the stranger again before heading out the door. I wasn't at the door good before he swooped around me and held the door open for me to pass through.

“Thank you,” I swooned.

“You want to give me your name, beautiful?”

I kept steady strides toward my little Camry so that I could fill up my tank. I was thankful for the bonus I got from Knasim and Knight a few weeks ago, so now I have some breathing room to do the little things like fill up my tank and not worry about it.

“It’s JaRue,” I responded as his hand landed on top of mine to stop me from picking up the gas nozzle.

“Let me get that for you, and a date.” He flashed a smile, and I saw that his bottom row of teeth were dripped in diamonds and gold.

“Thank you for pumping the gas, but I’ll have to pass on the date.”

He placed his hand on his chest and feigned hurt.

“Damn, shorty. Just shoot me down then. It’s like that?”

“I’m sorry. I don’t date, but I do appreciate the gas. I can even pay you back.” I reached inside of my purse to get \$40 so I could give him for paying for my has and Infiniti’s snacks.

“Nah. It’s all good. I’m pretty sure I’ll be seeing you around again.” With that, he smirked and swaggered off. I shook my head at the impure thoughts that were running rampant inside of my head. I may have turned down his offer to take me out, but I’m pretty sure he would be imbedded inside of my mind for a while.

???

I don't know why I let Journei drag me outside tonight. This line was wrapped around the building, and I didn't have time to be standing outside in these damn heels. Even though this club belonged to the Richmonds. I was going to stand in this line like everybody else. The way it was crowded, you would think that they had Chris Brown, or somebody was in the building. It was typical though because his cousin Kyan ran this particular location, and it was in the heart of the city. If you wanted a grown and sexy vibe with a laid back atmosphere, then you were in the right spot.

Surprisingly, the line moved quickly, so we didn't have to stand out there long. Once we made it inside, I followed Journei straight to the bar. I wasn't surprised because that was the sole purpose for us coming out tonight. When we got to the bar area, we both took a seat and waited for the bartender to come and take our drink orders.

"See, aren't you glad you came out tonight?" She looked at me with a silly as smirk on her face.

"We literally just sat down and that's it. I can hardly judge the night by only walking into the place, Journei."

Shaking my head, I gave my attention to the bartender, who approached us. She was pretty and her cropped off t-shirt was tight and displayed her toned stomach and pierced belly button. I wonder if Kyan's girlfriend had a problem with all the pretty women that worked here. After giving her my order for a Mexican Mule, along with an extra shot on the side, I turned my attention to the crowd.

"Them Richmonds really got that bag," Journei voiced. "You sure you can't hook me up with one?"

"I told you they were all attached. I'm not getting in the middle of that." I side-eyed her.

The bartender brought our drinks back, and we downed our shots before sipping on our drinks. By the time we took our second round of shots, I had loosened up some. That was until I felt someone close to me. When I turned around, I noticed the guy from the gas station standing in my space. He looked even sexier than he did earlier. He was now in front of me donning a creamed colored GIVENCHY shirt that had the signature going across the right chest area. He paired the shirt with a pair of fitted but not tight dark distressed jeans and a pair of matching GIVENCHY sneakers on his feet. He wore a gold Cuban Link necklace along with a smaller, yet longer one that had an 'AB' pendant on it dripped in diamonds. He still had on those glasses that only added to his sex appeal, and his hair was still in the same four braids. When I heard his voice rumble, it broke the trance that I was currently in.

"It seems like fate wants us to get to know each other better." He smiled and I swear I melted right on this damn stool.

"I wouldn't say all that." I finally found my voice. I heard Journei clear her throat next to me and I glanced her way, and she still had that stupid grin on her face.

"Uhm..." my voice trailed off because I realized I didn't know this man's name and here he was in my presence for the second time.

"Hassan," he asserted.

"Okay, Hassan. This is my best friend, Journei. Journei, this is Hassan. I met him earlier at the gas station."

"And she shot me down after I asked her pretty ass out on a date."

I blushed at his words.

"She'll go. I'll make sure of it," Journei blurted out.

“Bitch!” I snapped my neck toward her, glaring at her like she was crazy. She had to be sitting here acting as if she was my damn pimp. I heard Hassan chuckle, and that brought my attention back to him.

“How about we start off by me inviting you to my VIP section to chill with me and my associates,” he suggested.

“I-I don’t know about that. I don’t even know you,” I uttered.

“That’s the purpose of the invite, sweetheart. Consider this my payoff.”

“You said I didn’t owe you anything,” I countered.

“I don’t want your money, and you don’t owe me anything. I just want some of your time, beautiful.” The way he spoke had me placing my hand in his massive one as he led me and Journei upstairs to his VIP area where he would be for the rest of the night. Once we got to the top of the stairs, I was taken aback by how beautiful the area was decorated. Tan couches and chairs adorned the space, while different shades of brown and splashes of gold brought out the ambience of the area. There was a separate bar area and off toward the back, an area that looked like it was a private elevator or something. Journei and I have been here a few times but never up here. I was thoroughly impressed. Hassan led us to the area where the couches were and I almost fainted when I saw my bosses sitting there. I know I looked like a deer caught in headlights because I felt like one.

“Wassup, Rudy Rue?” Knight smirked at me as Hassan led me to an empty seat.

“Uhm, hey, Knight,” I spoke back.

Hassan looked between the two of us before he took a seat next to a guy that had similar features as him.

“Y’all know each other?” he eyed the two of us.

“What you going to do if we do?” Knight challenged as he passed Kyan the blunt.

“Man, I’m not doing this with you. I already let Knas know I wasn’t dealing with yo’ crazy ass,” Hassan countered with a stoic look on his face.

“Nigga, loosen up. Rue works for us. She’s good people, so you better not fuck her over or I got a brand new incinerator to test out on your ass.” The look on his face let me know he was serious, and I appreciated it. Ignoring Knight, Hassan looked at me and introduced me to the guy that was sitting opposite him.

“Rue, this is my brother, Rakeem. Bro, this is Rue and her friend, Journei.”

“Nice to meet you ladies,” he greeted, letting his eyes linger on Journei a little longer.

“Likewise,” I countered.

After all introductions were made, we actually had a good time with the fellas. Hassan seemed pretty cool, and I eventually loosened up around him.

“So, when you going to let me take you out?” He leaned in and whispered in my ear.

Before I could answer, our conversation was cut short by the last person I expected to see.

“Really Haze? You’re up here with the next bitch like you weren’t just in my pussy a few nights ago?”

Kari stood in front of us with her arms folded under her breasts like she was ready to pounce on somebody. What she didn’t know was that I’ve been waiting to beat her

ass again, so she better tread fucking lightly.

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

Hassan

Seeing Kari stand in front of me like she was checking some shit pissed me off more than I wanted it to. She was standing here acting like she just caught me cheating or some shit, when I was as single as a nigga that lived with his baby mama. I put my head down in an attempt to calm my nerves before I threw this damn girl over the railing of the section we were in.

“And you,” I heard her say. When I looked up, she was staring at JaRue. “Where is my niece while you’re out here being a hoe?” I looked between the two of them and tried to check the temperature. While Kari wore a smirk on her face, JaRue was everything but calm. The way her leg was bouncing up and down at a rapid pace was a dead giveaway. Shorty looked like she was a millisecond from scalping Kari.

“Girl, if you’on get your Juwanna Man looking ass away from my friend with that bullshit. She won’t beat your ass again but I will. I ain’t got shit to lose.” I looked over at her friend as she was already pulling her hair up in a bun. As bad as I wanted her to knock Kari on her ass, I wouldn’t let them fight in Murda’s club. This was supposed to be a business meeting, even though the meeting was rescheduled. I was still going to act accordingly.

“Chill, shorty. She ain’t worth the headache,” I warned.

“Really Haze? You’re going to act like that over a bitch that’s a poor excuse for a mother who won’t let my brother see his baby?” she spewed.

I looked at JaRue, and her expression never wavered.

“Journei, let’s go before I say the fuck the police and drag this long-toothed bitch every way but loose.”

I didn’t stop her as she gathered her belongings and stalked out of the area with her friend in tow. While I watched her leave, I regretted not getting her number. Now that I knew where she worked, I would be seeing her sooner than later.

“Damn, you do kind of look like a Saber-tooth tiger,” Knight’s stupid ass said, causing everyone in the section to roar in laughter except for Kari.

“Nigga, you stupid as fuck,” Murda mentioned through his laughter.

“Haze, are you going to let him talk to me like that?” she questioned.

“Aye, shorty. I’m a grown fucking man and no other grown ass man can let me do shit. The only person who has that kind of control over me is my wife, and she’s at home waiting on a nigga to come fuck her to sleep.” That nigga got serious fast as fuck. You can count on him to tell a joke, but you can also count on him to keep it real.

“Aye, why you still standing there like you got cement in your shoes?” I frowned, looking up at her.

“I asked you could we talk?”

“And I said no. The fuck didn’t you understand?”

She stood there looking dumb in the face a few more seconds before she stomped her mad ass off. I knew I would not be getting any pussy from her tonight. Don’t get it twisted. If I wanted it, I could. I rather not deal with the headache, so I’ll just hit up her homegirl. She’s always waiting and willing.

After Kari took her mad ass home, we had one more round of drinks before we left. Knight had a wife and kids to get home to and Murda had kids. I knew Rock would let Peace stay with our parents since it was late, so that just left my single ass to find something wet and warm to fall into before I took my ass home and called it a night.

???

It was finally the day of the meeting with Knasim, and I was going to get there early so I could have time to talk to JaRue. I told Rock to meet me there because I wanted to stop by a florist and got her a dozen of red roses along with a dozen of sunflowers. That combination was dope as hell, and I hope she appreciated my gesture.

When I pulled up to the funeral home, I saw Rock's truck parked out front. I had about thirty minutes to spare before the actual meeting started. That was enough time for me to talk to JaRue and apologize for the bullshit the other night. When I got out of my truck and he saw the bouquet in my hand, I knew he was about to talk shit.

"Damn, nigga. Say you like the damn girl without saying you like the damn girl." He joked.

"Man, watch out. I'm just trying to make up for the bullshit Kari pulled the other night."

"Yeah, aight," was all he said as we walked inside. I was glad to see no one was inside of the lobby. I didn't see JaRue sitting behind the receptionist desk, so I took a seat and waited on her. Five minutes later, she came from the back. Her face looked flushed, like she was crying, and I immediately got in kill mode. I don't know who did it, but I was ready to fix it. She didn't even notice me until I walked up to her desk.

"You need to be more aware of your surroundings, shorty. Anybody can walk up on

you, and you wouldn't know a thing or have time to react." I knew I startled her by the way she jumped back when she heard my voice. When she realized it was me, she rolled her pretty ass eyes hard as fuck.

"What do you want?" she sassed.

"I got a meeting with Knas, and I wanted to give you these." I extended the bouquet toward her, and she just stared at them. "It's a peace offering. I want to apologize about the other night." I admitted.

"No need."

"Come on, ma. You can't charge that shit to me. Besides, it looked as if y'all already had some kind of beef before I came into the equation. Even with all that, I'm extending a peace offering, and an invitation to take you to dinner."

She gave me a side-eyed glance before taking the flowers from out of my outstretched hand.

"Thank you for the flowers and the apology, but I have to decline the date. I have too much going on right now to be trying to date anybody. Plus, I know you heard that bitch say that I had a daughter. I would never just go out and leave her so I could get a free meal," she recited.

Squinting my eyes at her, I didn't know if I should be offended or not, but I get it. She was a mother before anything, and that minor revelation made me want her pretty ass even more.

"Look, shorty. It's just a friendly dinner. You can even bring little mama if you want. I love kids. I have a niece that I spend a lot of time with. Maybe we can hook up for a playdate or some shit." I offered.

Snickering, she said, “How often do you use your niece to get dates?”

“Never. My brother doesn’t play about his daughter and neither do I. I don’t take my niece around anybody, and nobody can ever say that they have been around her. If I’m being honest, I don’t even entertain women who have kids because a nigga like me would make her kid fatherless, and I wouldn’t want that shit on my conscience,” I stated honestly.

“He ain’t lying, shorty. I’ on even play about my baby like that.” She looked over at my brother before putting her eyes back on me.

“Then why me?” she asked.

“Why not you?” I countered.

Before she could respond, Knas walked out his office and headed in our direction.

“Aye, I watched you harass my receptionist for the past fifteen minutes. She got your little flowers. Now come on so we can get this shit over with.” He looked between me and JaRue before he spoke again. “Rue you good?”

“I’m fine,” she responded.

I smirked at that nigga before following him into his office with Rock following suit. Before disappearing down the hall, I left Ms. Rue with some parting words.

“Don’t count me out because of that nigga, shorty. You might be missing out on your happily ever after.” I winked my eye at her and left her there to ponder over my words. Once we got inside of the office, Knight along with their twin cousins were already seated. It was also another nigga with dreads that I didn’t see the last time I was here.

“You done harassing our damn receptionist?” Knight asked.

“That’s not RCF or ACF business, so stay out of that,” I countered.

“Aight, y’all done?” Knas interrupted.

No one said anything as we waited for him to say whatever he needed to say.

“So, let’s get straight to business. I went over the books that were kept between our fathers and I don’t see the need to switch too much shit up. The percentages will stay the same. The only thing that will change is access to your freights that you have in Africa. We could get some heavy artillery from out there, and for a cheaper price. You good with that?”

I looked at my brother and he nodded, signifying that he was okay with that. I didn’t see a problem with it either, especially since I didn’t have to come off of any more money than I already was.

“That’s straight. When would all of this take effect?”

“Soon as your next load comes in. I won’t hold up your business. I know y’all have families and shit.” When he said that, I remained quiet because I didn’t have a soul to be responsible for but myself.

“Speaking of families. Haze, since you’re now the head of your family, I’m going to put in place the same stipulations that my pops gave me,” he stated.

“And what’s that? Didn’t your pops pick your wife for you?” I quizzed.

“Something like that.”

“Yeah, you can cancel that shit. I’ on need no nigga picking who I’m going to marry. The fuck y’all think this shit is?” I was about to say fuck all this shit because this nigga had me fucked up if he thought I was going to let him tell me who I had to marry.

“You’re absolutely right. I’m not going to tell you who to marry. I’ll leave that solely to you, but you will find a wife and you got ninety days to do it,” he demanded.

“And if I don’t?” I challenged.

“Then you can tell your pops that you fucked up his business that he successfully ran for over thirty years into the ground. I could give a fuck what you do after that.” He stared at me stone-faced like that shit was supposed to bother me.

Fuck this shit. I got up to leave, and I heard Rock’s voice behind me.

“We’ll be in touch,” he said before joining me.

“Ninety days,” was all Knas said before we closed the door behind us.

When we walked back upfront, JaRue wasn’t there. I was relieved because that nigga had put me in a nasty ass mood, and I didn’t want to take it out on her. Once we were outside and to our vehicles, Rock spoke up.

“So, how we playing this shit?”

Rubbing my hand over my braids, I looked at my brother and said, “the fuck if I know,” before getting in my truck and leaving. I will go holla at my pops later. Right now, I needed to clear my head.

???

I went straight to the freight yard after my meeting with Knas and I was just now leaving. It was already eight at night, but I was still going to holla at my pops about the shit that Knas laid on me. Pulling through my parents gate, I parked in the circular driveway and let myself in. I found my mother in her usual spot in the family room, being entertained by one of her shows. When she saw me, her face lit up.

“Hey baby,” she greeted as I bent down to her level, placing a kiss on her temple.

“Wassup, Ma? What you in here watching?”

“These crazy fools on The Oval. I don’t know who’s crazier. The President and First Lady or those bad ass kids,” she laughed.

“You and your drama shows. I won’t bother you. Where’s Peace?”

“She’s finally asleep. She’s teething and has been fussy most of the day,” she informed me.

“You told Rock?”

“Yes, and he wanted to take her to the hospital. I told him to leave me alone and get on somewhere like I don’t know how to take care of my grandbaby.” I laughed because I knew she cursed him out real good for playing on her top like that.

“You know he’s going to be here soon, right?”

“As long as he leaves her alone and lets her rest, then that’s fine. Disrupting her rest will only make her crankier.”

“Where’s Pops?”

“In his office.”

Nodding, I headed down the hall toward the other end of the house. When I got to the door, it was already cracked, but I still knocked out of respect before walking completely in.

“Hello, son. I didn’t expect you to drop by so late.” He lit his cigar and leaned back in his office chair.

“Yeah, I had some work to get done down at the yard. I had that meeting with Knas today and I wanted to fill you in on how that went.”

“And how did that go?” he inquired.

“For the most part, it was straight. Everything that you and his pops had in place will remain the same, in addition to them using our ports in Africa,” I stated.

“That’s not bad. That’s more money our way.”

I nodded.

“That’s not all, though.”

“Oh?” He sat up to his full height. “What are you not telling me?”

Taking a deep breath and leaning forward as my elbows rested on my knees, I told my father Knasim’s stipulation in the new contract. It was silent for a few minutes before he spoke again.

“Do you have anyone in mind?” he asked.

I couldn't help the scowl that graced my face.

"What you mean, do I have anyone in mind? I'm not doing that shit," I sneered.

"Listen, it can't be that bad. What about Kari?"

"I'd rather give all this shit up than to marry that damn girl." I meant that shit, too. If I couldn't do this shit without being married, I wouldn't do it at all. Especially not with Kari's ass.

"So, you're going to throw everything that I worked for away because of your foolish pride?"

I looked at my father like he had crack in that damn cigar he was smoking. Ain't no way he thought this was a pride thing. Instead of rendering him a response, I simply left before shit got out of hand and I disrespected my pops. For the second time today, a muthafucka has tried to play in my face like I was just supposed to take that shit. It was best that I leave before shit got ugly.

When I walked back up front, I didn't see my mother, and that was a good thing. I wasn't in the mood to explain shit to her, either. I'm pretty sure my pops would do all of that for me.

Getting in my truck, I wasn't even in the mood anymore for the pussy I had waiting for me. I took my ass straight home and showered. When I laid down for the night, all I could think about was who the fuck could I get to marry me on such short notice, and they not make me want to kill them?

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Rakeem

The shit that was thrown on my brother in the meeting took us both by surprise. I know how the shit goes in our circle, but our pops never mentioned or forced the shit on us. To have somebody else do it was crazy as hell, but what could he really do when the order was coming from the Head? Hopefully, he would figure the shit out so we wouldn't lose the partnership that we already built to be solid.

I watched as my brother sped off, heading in one direction while I went in another. While I'm pretty sure he was headed to the freight yard. I was going to stop by one of our clients and pay him a personal visit. Alongside the other illegal shit we had going on, we dealt with a little banking. That means that when muthafuckas needed to get a few thousands and couldn't get approved by the bank, they came to us, and we made the shit happen. When the payments don't come in time, we don't file fucking charges to get our money back. Nah, that wasn't even an option. If I had to come and collect our money, then you could almost guarantee that I'm going to leave with either my fucking money or your fucking soul. Didn't matter to me.

As I pulled up to Lander's Laundry, I stepped out of my vehicle before stepping onto the sidewalk and inside the establishment. Joseph Lander owned a small dry cleaners that the bank was threatening to take from him last year. Of course, he couldn't go to them or any other bank for a loan, because he already owed one and his house was mortgaged through another one that he was delinquent on. When I walked inside, the small bell over the door sounded to let them know they had company. I didn't even bother to wait for his ass. I swaggered straight to the back but not before locking the door behind me. When I got to the back, I didn't knock before entering. The sight before me would have been entertaining had it not been for the fact that this nigga

was balls deep in some pussy like he didn't have a fucking care in the world.

“So, this is why I can't get my money? You tricking it off on hoes?” When my voice boomed throughout the office, Lander froze mid-stroke. The hoe that he had bent over his desk started screaming loud as fuck.

“Bitch, shut all that up. You weren't that damn loud while he was fucking you.” I glared at her, disgusted. I'm pretty sure she knew this nigga was married. There was no way she couldn't when she worked here.

“R-Rock,” he stuttered. “Wh-what can I do for you?”

“You can start by putting ya dick up before talking to me.”

What grown ass man is going to look another grown ass man in the face while his dick is out? He quickly stuffed himself back into his slacks while the woman stood to her full attention, with her pussy still on full display. This was the hoe shit that pissed me off because this nigga's dick was just invading your walls, and you got the nerve to be trying to show it to me.

“Bitch, cover up that pick me ass pussy. Don't nobody want that shit but this nigga,” I snarled.

Shamefully, she pushed her skirt back down over her hips and stood off to the side. She knew not to come this way because of the gun that I had resting at my side.

Taking my eyes off of her, they landed back on Lander, and he had all but five seconds to get my money.

“I didn't come here for your games, Lander. Where the fuck is my money?” I growled.

One would think that the sweat perspiring from his forehead would be from the sexcapade that I interrupted. It wasn't, though. This nigga was terrified, and he had every right to be.

"I don't have it all," he lied.

Cocking my head to the side, I looked at him, then his bitch. Her wig looked fresh. Nails didn't need a fill-in, and her dress looked a little too good to have come from SHEIN. Her wrists and neck were iced out, too. Lander caught my observation, and I saw the lump in his throat form. That made me smirk at the thought of him fearing for his life.

"You don't have it, but this bitch wearing a nice chunk of it. Didn't y'all just get back from Antigua?"

He knew he was caught, so it was no need to lie about the shit.

"Okay, I know what it looks like, but I can get it to you in a few days. You got my word," he pleaded.

"Nigga, your word don't mean shit! You didn't have a problem accepting my money, but now it's an issue when it's time to pay the fuck up. So, since you seem to have a problem getting my shit to me, let me help you out." I lifted my hand and let off a shot right in the middle of ol' girl's forehead. When I heard her body drop to the floor, I spoke again. "That should speed up the process. You probably could still get face value for that jewelry if it's still in good condition. You got forty-eight hours. I'm feeling generous since you're in mourning and shit." With a smirk, I left his office and let myself out the same way that I came in. I wasn't sending cleanup, either. Let him figure that shit out and explain what happened. I wasn't worried about him snitching either because, for one, nobody was going to do shit. Most importantly, he knew he'd be joining that bitch.

As I headed toward the middle of town to check in with my brother, my dash lit up with Teresa's name. I immediately accepted the call, since she was at the house with Lucretia.

"Everything good?" I answered.

I heard her sigh heavily and my heart immediately sank to the floor.

"She refusing to take her medicines and refusing to eat. She said she's ready to die, Rakeem. She's giving up, but she's asking to see Peace." I listened to Teresa and closed my eyes to take all of it in. The doctor warned us that most people got like this in the end. I knew it was coming, but that doesn't mean that I wanted to face the shit.

"Aight. I'll swing by my parents and get Peace. We'll be there shortly." I hung up the phone and drove the rest of the ride to my parents' house on auto-pilot. The time was coming where I needed to mentally prepare for Lucretia's death. I knew it was coming, but how can you really prepare yourself for that? How you can prepare yourself to lose the love of your life? How do you prepare to have conversations with your daughter about how beautiful and smart her mother was because not old enough to have any memories?

When I pulled up to my parents' house, I parked in my usual spot and let myself in. When I got inside, I heard Peace's little loud ass mouth before I could see her. That caused a smile to spread across my face because my baby was my peace for real. That's why I chose that name for her. I walked inside of the kitchen, and she was sitting in her booster chair eating chicken nuggets and dancing to Gracie's Corner on her tablet.

"You forever eating and dancing," I joked as I made my way over to her. She really turned up then and reached her small arms out for me to pick her up.

“She is definitely going to be in some kind of dance classes when she gets older,” my mother said. When she looked at my face, she knew something was wrong.

“What’s wrong, Rakeem? Is it Lu?” she asked sincerely.

Sighing dejectedly, I responded. “Yeah, but it’s not what you think, but we’re getting there. She’s refusing to take her meds or eat. Her mama called and said that she wants to see Peace,” I revealed.

The look on my mother’s face was one of sorrow and pain. She didn’t like the fact that I was going through this. She also hated to lose Lucretia. She loved her. Hell, my whole family did. She’s been a part of this family for years and to know that we’re losing her is a hard pill for everyone to swallow.

“I’m going with you,” she insisted. I didn’t even argue with her about it. I didn’t know what I was walking into, and I probably need her in some form or another.

It took my mother all of ten minutes to go grab her purse and we were headed back out. I offered to drive her, but she wanted to drive herself. We got to my house in a little over twenty minutes and Teresa was sitting in the room beside Lucretia’s bed. Her eyes were closed, but I knew she wasn’t asleep.

“Hey, Reese,” my mother spoke, giving Teresa a hug.

Teresa rose from the chair and returned the embrace that my mother gave her. I watch the two of them comfort each other while I walked around the bed to where the other chair was and sat down in it with Peace clinging to me. Usually my baby would be happy to see her mother, but I guess she sensed something was wrong.

“Mommy schleep?” she asked in her tiny voice.

When Lu heard her voice, she weakly pried her eyes open and gave a faint, very weak smile.

“Hey baby.” Her voice graveled.

Peace looked from me to her mother and laid her head on my shoulder. The shit before me broke my damn heart, and I didn’t know how much longer I could keep this facade up that I was strong because I wasn’t.

“Thank you f-for bringing h-her,” she responded before going into a coughing fit. My mother sprang right into action and grabbed her some ice chips and placed them in her mouth so that she could suck on them. That’s been better for her than trying to suck out of a straw.

“I told you not to thank me for doing what needs to be done, Lu. She’s your daughter, so of course I’m going to bring her to see you.” I was holding back my own tears as I watched the ones in Lucretia’s eyes to swell before they cascaded down her now ashen skin.

While our mothers did everything to make her comfortable, I watched as she silently cried. That shit tore my muthafucking soul into pieces. I literally had to watch the love of my life deteriorate right before my eyes. I wouldn’t wish this shit on my worst enemy. Some days, I thought this was my karma for taking so many lives, but then again, I never killed a muthafucka just for the hell of it. Every life I took could be accounted for. I never cheated on her, so I looked at it as if I was meant to be by myself because even though she made me promise, I didn’t see myself allowing myself to love another woman. The day that Lucretia takes her last breath would be the day that she takes my heart with her.

“Son, did you hear me?” My mother’s voice brought me back to the present. I often found myself getting caught up in my thoughts.

“No, I didn’t,” I responded.

“I said, I’ll take Peace back home with me. She’s teething, and I know she’ll be fussy later. You stay here with Lu and let me take care of her,” she offered. As bad as I wanted to decline, I didn’t. I needed to be able to decompress and come to terms with this and not break down in front of my child. She may not know what’s going on, but like now, she can sense that something isn’t right.

“Thanks, Ma. I’ll be by in the morning to check on her, if not tonight.” She nodded.

I knew Teresa was staying, so if I needed to leave, it would be no problem. My mother stayed a little longer until Peace started to get fussy. That was her cue to take her back to the house and lie her down. As I walked them back outside, I hugged my daughter tighter than I ever had before. My heart broke for her. She’ll never have the luxury of having two parents that she could remember. Who knew if she would even remember her mother at all?

“Everything will be fine, baby. We’re all hurting, so we’ll all get through this together. Lu will always be our family.” She assured me.

After kissing my daughter, then my mother, I headed back inside and asked Teresa to give us some privacy. The way she was breathing, I could tell that she had fallen back to sleep. That didn’t stop me from sitting in the chair beside the bed and grabbing her small, frail hand. Gently rubbing my thumb across it, I held it up to my mouth and placed a soft kiss on it.

“You know, I still think about the first time that we met,” I said softly. “You wanted to beat my ass.” I laughed.

The day that Lucretia and I crossed paths, I was in the mall with my brother, getting ready for our birthday. It was my twenty-first and his twenty-second. We were

looking for outfits and I had to pick up the grill that I ordered for today. I already had one, but this one was platinum and filled with diamonds. I was too busy smiling to notice her and her sister, and I bumped right into her small frame, knocking her and her bags to the ground. Immediately, I felt bad and reached down to help her up, but she snatched her hand back from me.

“Move!” She shoved my hand out of the way before scrambling to her feet with the prettiest frown on her face that I have ever seen. Her caramel colored skin seemed to glisten as the sun beamed through the skylight of the mall. Her blonde dyed hair was cut in a layered bob with one side swept behind her ear. She had eyes the color of honey and couldn’t be any taller than five feet even. That didn’t stop the giant personality that she carried around.

“I apologize, shorty. I didn’t see your pretty ass.” My compliment caused her to blush. As a peace offering, I invited her to our party, and we’ve been together ever since.

“If I could go back to that day, I would go the other way. I would be better off not knowing you than knowing and loving you, only for you to leave me, Lu. I don’t know how you expect me to live, let alone love, without you in my life, baby. I just don’t see it.”

For the first time, I cried out in the open and not in the shower. This shit was unbearable, but I know I had to get through it. Not only for me, but for Peace. I can’t neglect her of a father, too.

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JaRue

a few weeks later...

Things have been quiet since the incident at the club that night. I expected Kari to run and tell her brother that she saw me out with another man, but he had said nothing to me, nor has he called to check on our daughter. That wasn't unusual and if I'm being honest, I preferred it that way. I was off today, so Journei decided to have a girl's day while Infiniti was in daycare. I used to feel guilty about doing stuff like this, but my mother assured me that every mother needed time to themselves. We just got finished with our manicures, pedicures, and facials. Now we were headed to Charme to do a little shopping. With the bonus that I received from Knasim and Knight. I was able to do nice things for myself and not feel guilty or worrying about not being able to pay a bill or get gas. We were currently browsing through the racks while Journei sparked up a new conversation.

"So, have you heard from Hassan?" she asked.

Briefly cutting my eyes at her, I went back to looking through the racks before I entertained her ass.

"No, I haven't. Why would I?"

Shrugging, she replied, "I was just checking. I've been talking to his brother, and he asked me about you, is all. And I kind of gave him your number the last time I talked to Rakeem, and he was around," she confessed.

“What? Why would you do that?”

“Because you need somebody to tap ya damn cervix, that’s why. I know that damn rose can’t get the damn job done like you want. Fuck Keith and his old gray hairy balls having ass.” That caused me to cackle loud as hell in these people’s establishment.

“I can’t stand you,” I said through my laughter. “But uhm, what have you and Rakeem been talking about, Miss Ma’am?”

“Nothing much. Just friendly conversation if I’m being honest. He has a lot going on and he seemed like he needed a friend. Don’t get me wrong, he’s fine as hell, but since I’m not a thirsty bitch, I can settle for the friendship.”

“What does he have going on? Baby mama drama?” I asked.

“Not necessarily drama, but she is dying,” she revealed.

“Oh, my God! That’s so sad. How old is their daughter?” I remember Hassan mentioning his niece when he came to my job with those apology flowers.

“She’s two, and so adorable. My ovaries contract every time I see her,” she gushed.

“Uh oh. Your ass in trouble then.”

“I doubt it. The way he expresses how he doesn’t see himself getting into another relationship, I’m not getting my hopes up. Besides, he’s the homie. I genuinely enjoy his conversation. He’s like the female version of you,” she confided.

“No ma’am. It’s only one me, so don’t get it twisted.” I faked frowned.

“Here’s my bestie calling now.” She showed me her phone, and I saw Rakeem’s picture displayed on her screen and a silly grin displayed on her face. When she answered, I realized it was a FaceTime call.

“Wassup, shorty? Where you at?” he asked. I couldn’t see him, but it sounded like he was smoking the way his voice was strained.

“Hey. I’m out with Rue. We’re having a girls’ day. I was just talking about you,” she confessed.

“Yeah? You over there tryna play me shorty?” I could hear the smile in his voice. With what he had going on, maybe I could share Journey to give him some sort of distraction.

“Never. I told her you were my bestie in male form.” She grinned.

“Bestie? Nah, find something else to call me because bestie sounds real feminine, shorty.”

I laughed at their banter as I walked to where the shoes were. I didn’t want to be all up in their business, even though she said they were just friends. While I was trying on a pair of cute black and gold heels, I felt someone towering over me. When I looked up, Cheryl, Keith’s bad body, having a wife, was standing over me with a scowl on her face like she was disgusted. Hell, I should be the one disgusted by her and her sorry ass husband.

“Can I help you?” I asked.

“No, you can’t, but I’m pretty sure my husband would love to see that you’re out here spending money on yourself buying frivolous bullshit and not spending it on his daughter.” She smirked.

“Girl, fuck you and your husband. Whatever money I spend and what I spend it on damn sure doesn’t come from him, so what I do with it doesn’t concern him or you.” I snapped.

“Oh, it must come from the drug dealer that you were seen with?” There was that stupid ass smirk again. “It was bad enough that you seduced my husband. Now you’re going after my sister-in-law’s man. I wouldn’t expect anything less from a gutter whore like yourself.”

Before I had time to use my common sense, I was up in this bitch’s face ready to redecorate this boutique with her big Amazon looking ass.

“Friend, do we have a problem?” Journei asked as she approached us. One thing about my friend, she wouldn’t let me fight because I had Infiniti, but that didn’t stop her. My bitch was TTG for real.

“Excuse you?” Cheryl had the nerve to say.

“No, excuse yo’ crunchy ass wig, bitch. Step back from my friend before I send you back to Keith’s triffin’ ass like a jigsaw puzzle. It’s been a minute since I had to cut a bitch and today I’m feeling real Freddy Krueger-ish.” The look on Cheryl’s face was priceless. I wanted to laugh but wanting to beat her ass outweighed the humor in the situation.

“You just wait until I tell Keith about this.” She stomped her mad ass off like a bratty ass kid. I was so over Keith and his uppity ass wife. She came bothering me but now wants to run and tell like a little bitch when things didn’t turn out like she wanted them to.

“You good?” Journei asked.

“Yeah. Let’s just go. That bitch just ruined my mood.”

I was no longer in the mood to shop and have fun. All I wanted to do was go home and sulk in a bottle of wine or tequila and find the easiest way to get rid of Keith for fucking good.

“No ma’am. You will not let them ruin your day. Those old muthafuckas just miserable. He’s mad because you don’t want to play with his ass, and Cheryl’s ass is mad because her husband went and got him a young tender that he’s still sniffing behind. Fuck them.”

She looped her arm into mine, and we continued to shop before going to lunch at Roasters. By the time we were done, it would be time to pick up. Infiniti and I could go home and decompress from today’s bullshit.

We were now back at my house. Journei decided to stay awhile just in case Keith tried to pop up on his bullshit. I wasn’t scared of his ass, but I didn’t have the energy to be arguing with his stupid ass either.

“You want me to have Rock beat his ass?” Journei asked as we worked on our bottle of wine. Infiniti was worn out from daycare and was now knocked out.

“As good as it sounds, I can’t let you put him in my bullshit. Knowing Keith’s bitch ass, he wouldn’t hesitate to press charges. I couldn’t have that on my conscience, knowing he has a daughter.” As a parent, I knew all about the sacrifices that we made for our children. I couldn’t have Rakeem risk his freedom for me and then end up leaving his daughter with no parents. I wouldn’t even be able to live with myself if that happened.

“Well, just say the word and we can hire a hitman or some shit. I’m tired of him messing with my friend.”

This was why she had been my best friend for as long as I can remember. She was always by my side. It didn't matter what the situation was; she was there.

"I really appreciate you, Journei. Half of the time I wouldn't know if I was coming or going, but you're always there to steer me in the right direction."

"Your ass 'bout drunk because you getting all sentimental and shit, but I love your crybaby ass, too." We laughed, but our mini laugh fest was interrupted by my ringing phone. When I looked at the screen, it was Keith's bitch ass. I let it ring and go to voice mail only for him to call right back.

"Answer it, and put it on speaker."

Doing as she suggested, I answered the phone, and he didn't let me get one word out before he started with his rant.

"You think I won't fucking ruin you, JaRue? You're out fucking drug dealers and having them around my child like I won't take your incompetent ass to court and have your rights revoked. Cheryl told me you threw in her face the fact that you're fucking that nigga from the club, and now you're spending his money. Is that how you got your car fixed? He's giving you money for my kid, Rue?" he seethed.

"Nigga, are you giving her money for your kid? The fuck? I swear niggas be worried about the wrong shit," Journei snapped before I could even open my mouth.

"Journei, you need to mind your business. My wife told me about the threat you made on her life."

"Ain't no threat. I meant every fucking syllable. You keep fucking with Rue and y'all going to be twinning around this muthafucka."

I spoke up because those two would go back and forth all day.

“Keith, I don’t know what Cheryl told you, but I didn’t throw shit in her face, even though I wish I had one of Finny’s shitty diapers so that I could. I didn’t even see her ass until she came in my face, running her out about shit she knows nothing about. I don’t bother y’all, so I deserve the same respect in return, or I’ll have to go another route since y’all don’t understand English.” I was over this shit.

“Oh, that nigga got you out of body like that? You think you can talk to me any kind of way now? Bet. I’ll be seeing you soon, Rue, and I hope you have that same fucking attitude.” The line went silent, and I knew he hung up. It was nothing for Keith to threaten me, but it was something in his tone this time that didn’t sit right with me. I don’t know what he had up his sleeve, but if he thought he was going to run my life, he was sucking dog dick if he thought I was going to let that happen.

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Journei

While JaRue was on the phone arguing with her baby daddy, I was texting Rock, letting him know what was going on. I told Rue that he offered to beat his ass, but she didn't want to involve him because of his daughter. What she didn't know was that these Ashby niggas were just as much of a big deal as the Richmonds. Wasn't shit nobody could do with them but deal with the consequences that they gave out. I let her do her thing, though, but I was letting this nigga know just in case. We were besties, and we looked out for each other.

"I'm staying here tonight. I don't trust that, nigga. If he brings his big ass over here, we can throw bleach in his eyes and bet his ass." I shrugged.

"You play too much, but we can definitely beat his ass if he pops up over here. I'm tired of playing with him. All he does is threaten me so that he can have some kind of control over me. I'm over playing these mind games with him. He can eat my ass, because he's dying to, anyway." I gave my friend a high five because I was proud of her for sticking her chest out. She could be lying for all I cared. She never talked this much shit about Keith's sorry ass, and I was here for it.

"Fuck him. He tries to use his age to manipulate you, but that nigga is a whole bum ass nigga. What grown ass man that has the ability to take care of his daughter would rather see her struggle because the mama doesn't want to play his stupid ass games. A fuck nigga is what. I should get my new step daddy to shoot his ass. You know Roy about that life."

"Girl, leave Roy out this. Now, once he gets the boot, we can recruit him." We both

laughed because it wasn't a secret that my mama switched men more than she switched wigs. It wouldn't be so bad if she didn't marry every damn body. She was a damn serial divorcee.

"Change the subject. Let's not let Keith and his hunchback ruin our night. I want to get drunk off my ass and pass out until I have to get up for work in the morning."

Hopping up off of the chair, I headed to the back to use the bathroom. That damn wine was running straight through me. After relieving my bladder, I washed my hands. As I walked down the hall, I heard Rue's doorbell ring. I bet that was Keith's ass. I made a detour to the laundry room and grabbed the bottle of bleach. I was serious about blinding his ass before beating it. When I made my way back around the corner, I stopped in my tracks when I saw Rakeem and his brother standing in Rue's living room with scowls on their faces.

"What are y'all doing here?" I asked.

"That's what I would like to know," Rue countered, glowering at me.

"Don't look at me like that. I didn't tell them to come here. I thought that was your bitch ass baby daddy, hence the bleach in my hand." Her eyes went to the bleach bottle the back at the brothers.

"She didn't invite us shorty. My brother told me what she was saying about your baby daddy, and I wanted to make sure that you were good." I saw the way my friend was looking at Hassan and he just might get that date he wants sooner than he thinks.

"I appreciate that, but I'm not worried about Keith. He's all talk," she said.

"Well, we don't do too much talking," Rakeem input as he swaggered over to the sofa. I followed him and he mushed the side of my head before ducking at my

attempt to swing on him.

“Wait. How did y’all know where I lived if Journei didn’t tell you?” Rue quizzed. Hell, I wanted to know the answer to that as well.

“I have my ways of finding things that interest me,” Hassan said, making my friend blush.

“Rue, you got a place I can smoke?” Rakeem asked. I liked the fact that he asked first before lighting up in my friend’s house. He was my boy and all, but Rue was my sister, so I would always side with her.

“Sure. Uhm, you can go on the back patio,” she informed.

“Come smoke with me, bestie.” I howled in laughter at him, calling me his bestie. He swore he hated that word.

“You wake my baby up, your ass will be the one that puts her back to sleep,” Rue warned.

“My bad, shorty. I didn’t know your baby was here. If she gets up, I’ll help Journei with her. You can chill out,” he insisted.

I smiled at my best friend before walking through the kitchen and out the patio door. She looked so nervous, but I knew she was in good hands. Hassan really liked her, and I could tell she was smitten with him too, but Keith really did a number on her, so she wasn’t so inviting to date anyone else.

Rakeem and I took a seat on the patio furniture that Rue had set out here and he pulled out a pre-rolled blunt and lit the opposite end. After taking a deep pull, he leaned his back and let it rest on the back of the chair.

“Rough day?” I asked.

I had one of my legs tucked under me, ready to hear all about his day. My heart hurt for him. I knew it was a lot for him to deal with. Honestly, I don’t think I would be able to do it.

“Shit, it was about the same. Lu still refusing to eat or take her meds. The doctor came and administered an IV drip so she could get some sort of nutrients, but that’s about all they can do right now.”

“And there’s absolutely nothing that they can do?” I felt so bad for my new bestie.

“Nah. She’s at the end of the line. All we’re doing is trying to keep her comfortable until she takes her last breath.” He passed me the blunt, and I took a deep pull like it was my loved one that I was waiting to die.

“Don’t do that, shorty,” he said, breaking me from my thoughts.

“Do what?”

“Feel sorry for me. I do that enough. I need my bestie to make things bearable for me.” He looked at me and smirked.

Shoving him, I said, “I can do that.”

I may have been attracted to Rakeem, but I wasn’t about to be a thirsty bitch, and I was going to respect his wishes to just be friends.

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Hassan

I was with Rock at the freight yard when Journei was on the phone with him. He heard everything she said about her baby daddy and so did I. That shit made me hot. He was being such a fuck nigga, and he had a whole fucking wife. His bitch ass only needed to be concerned with his daughter and not what JaRue had going on, especially if that something was me. When I told him let's pull up over there, he didn't hesitate. We wrapped the business up that we were tending to there and headed across town to her apartment in The Heights. That was another thing. Why did you have your daughter living in the fucking hood? Granted, it wasn't shit wrong with the hood, but I'll be damned if my kid would live there while I lived somewhere else. While Rock and her friend Journei were outside smoking, JaRue and I sat on her sofa in an awkward silence. After about five or so minutes, the silence was killing me, so I decided to speak up.

"So, how was your day, shorty?" That was the first thing that came to my mind and the easiest route to take to get her to open up to me.

"It was okay. While Infiniti was in daycare, Journei and I had a girls' day. It was going great until Cheryl's ashy foot ass came and ruined it." The way she downed the last of the wine that was in her glass, I could tell that she didn't care for whoever this Cheryl woman was.

"Who's Cheryl?" I asked.

"Keith's wife." She scoffed.

“Keith ya baby daddy?” I quizzed.

She gave me this look like I should’ve known the answer to that question.

“Don’t act like you don’t know who that nigga is.”

It was my turn to give her a crazy ass look.

“One thing I don’t do is play games, shorty. I’on know not one nigga named Keith other than Keith Sweat. So unless you got a kid by that drunk ass nigga, then I don’t know who the fuck you’re talking about.”

She looked at me with an expression that I couldn’t quite read, but for a slight second, I saw she was confused by my declaration.

“So you mean to tell me you have a whole girlfriend, and you don’t know her family?”

“The other thing you should know about me is that I don’t lie. I don’t have a girlfriend. I don’t care what Kari said. I’m single. If I had a woman, I would make it my business to know her people, and I wouldn’t be over here trying to get to know your pretty ass.” She blushed at my statement.

“She may not be your girlfriend, but you’ve fucked her.” She poured herself another glass of wine, leaving the bottle empty. She took a generous sip before placing her eyes back on me.

“Like I said, I’m single and I’m not a virgin, so I’m fucking.” I shrugged.

“Typical.” She rolled her eyes before taking another sip from her glass.

“What’s typical about it?” I asked.

“It’s typical that you niggas use women for sex and whatever else, leading them on and as soon as they don’t comply to your demands, you start the fuck shit,” she spat as she downed the last of her wine.

I took a minute for me to get myself together because I really liked this girl, but I didn’t appreciate her putting the shit that her baby daddy put her through off on me. I don’t know that nigga and I ain’t him, so she had me all the way fucked up. I didn’t care how fine she was.

“Aye, listen.” I sat up, elbows resting on my knees, as I looked her dead in the eyes. “I ain’t ya baby daddy, so don’t project that shit on me. Do I fuck Kari? Yeah, I do, but that doesn’t mean we’re together. That damn girl doesn’t even know where I lay my head at night. Granted, I brought her to a few functions because I needed someone on my arm, but that’s where it ended. She couldn’t even tell you my favorite color or what I’m allergic to. The damn girl doesn’t even know if my glasses are prescription or not. I like you, baby, but I’m not about to let you make me pay for some shit that a nigga I don’t even know did to you.” I hope she heard me, so I won’t have to repeat the shit again.

She looked at me for a moment before she sighed like she just lost the battle.

“I’m sorry,” she mumbled.

Moving closer to her, I lifted her chin so that she could look me in the eye. “You don’t have shit to be sorry about. I get it. That nigga did a number on you, and it’ll take a real nigga to correct his mistakes,” I stated confidently.

She smirked.

“So, let me guess. That real nigga is you?”

“Who the fuck else would it be? All I ask is for one chance to prove to you I’m at least worth a morsel of your time. Nothing more...nothing less.” I watched her intently as she mulled over the words that I just spoke to her. Who knows? This may work out for the both of us.

“Okay,” she simpered. “One date. One shot.”

“Baby, that’s all I need.” I assured.

She started to relax, and I was glad that she did. I didn’t want to make her uncomfortable in her own home. I asked her about her bitch ass baby daddy and to say that I was appalled was an understatement.

“Wait, so you mean to tell me this nigga lied about his age to fuck you?” I asked for clarity? She shrugged. “Then on top of all of that, the nigga is married and a fucking surgeon, yet you and baby girl live in the hood, and he doesn’t support either of y’all financially?” I didn’t know this nigga, but I already had a fucking box picked out for his ass because ain’t no way in hell he thought this shit was okay.

“That pretty much sums it up. I get a lot of help from my parents and Journei and her mom. I recently got a bonus from my job and that gave me a nice cushion to be able to breathe a little easier.” She looked off, then started laughing out of nowhere. “Do you know he popped up here on the day that I got my bonus and I had just had groceries delivered? He was so mad because he thought another man brought them. Like, dude, are you for real right now?” She shook her head to keep from spazzing out, and I wouldn’t even blame her if she did.

“Damn, shorty. I hate you’re going through that shit, but fuck that nigga.”

“That’s not all. Your little boo told him and his wife that I was messing with her man, and he accused me of dealing with a drug dealer and he would definitely make me pay for it if he found out if it were true.” I knew she only told me that bit of information so she could see if I would tell her what I did for a living, but if she stuck around, I wouldn’t hesitate to fill her in. Besides, she worked for The RCF, and if we were associates, we had to be in the same line of business some kind of way.

“Listen, I’ll never tell you how to handle your business when it comes to your baby daddy, but I will tell you that you don’t have to worry about that shit with me. I’ve been classified as a lot of shit, but a fuck nigga has never been one of those things. Just give me a chance to prove that to you.” I knew I sounded like a begging ass nigga, but shit, it was something about this girl that I couldn’t shake. It’s been on me since the first day that I laid eyes on her and if I’m being honest, I don’t want to shake it.

“I think I can do that.”

“Bet. Now, when I text or call you, it won’t seem weird and shit.” I laughed.

Now that we had all the irrelevant bullshit out of the way, she filled me in on things between her and Keith. She let me know that his fuck ass took her virginity and that he scarred her from dealing with any other man. That shit pissed me off, but I was relieved that she’d only been with one man. If I had things my way, she wouldn’t be with anyone else as long as we both graced this Earth. She also told me some things about Kari that I didn’t know, nor did I really care. I knew she came from a family that was well off. She played the part of a spoiled bougie princess very well. By the time she was comfortable with me, Rock and her friend Journei were coming back inside.

“You good in here, friend?” Journei asked as she took a seat on the opposite chair since I was occupying the space by Rue.

“I’m good. Why wouldn’t I be?”

“I’m just checking on you, boo. Y’all cute, though,” she observed, causing me to smirk while Rue tried to hide the fact that she was blushing.

“Aye, Haze. You ready?” My brother came from where I figured was the bathroom, since I noticed he walked in the back when they first came in.

“Yeah, we can bounce.” I stood up, but after I was on my feet, I bent down so that I was hovering over Rue’s small frame. My action made her lean back and rear her head up to look me in the face. “You’re going to answer when I call?” I asked, extremely close to her face. I could see her breathing hitch in anticipation of me kissing her. As bad as I wanted to, I refrained.

“We’ll see.” She played tough. Chuckling at her response, I pressed my lips against her forehead before I stood to my full height. When I looked over at my brother and Journei, he was saying something to her and her expression was void. I’ll ask him about that shit later. The girls got up to walk us outside, but I turned around and stopped Rue at the door.

“Nah. Don’t come out here. It’s late. Just make sure you lock up good. As a matter of fact, go ahead and lock the door so I can hear you lock them. I’ll tap on the door when I know you’ve done it.” She looked like she wanted to protest, but I wasn’t bulging until I knew she was locked in. After hearing the locks turn, I tapped on the door and headed to my car.

“You headed home?” I asked him as I unlocked my doors.

“Yeah, I’m about to let Teresa go home. She said Lu was resting, so I’ll be in unless some shit pops up,” he explained.

Nodding my response, I got in my car and drove in the direction of my house. I had a few meetings tomorrow, and I needed my rest in order not to snap on these muthafuckas.

???

I just wrapped up a meeting with a man who wanted to get the rest of their family here from Ghana. He already had his son with him and now he was sending back for his wife and two daughters. The trip will take about two months, but he's been over here almost two years and finally able to get them here so that they can be together. Shit, may be illegal, but I love bringing families together and giving them a second chance or a better one at life. Twenty minutes after Mr. Bediako, or Mr. Robinson since that's his new given name, Rock came into my office looking stressed as fuck.

"Wassup, bro? You look like you going through it."

Sighing as he took his seat, he swiped his hand over his head before letting it fall.

"Man, the doctor came to the house today to check on Lu, and he said that she has about two or three weeks left, if that long."

Damn. I felt bad for my brother. He loved Lu more than he loved himself, and I can't imagine what he was going through. Hell, we all loved Lu. We were all hurting, but I know not as much as my brother.

"I hate this shit for you, for real. You know I got y'all with anything. Just say the word. As a matter of fact, take some time off. I'll get Ced 'nem to step in and handle things with me. Don't worry about this shit. I got you." I knew this was a lot on my brother and in the upcoming weeks, he had to mentally prepare to lay Lucretia to rest. We've known for a while that this day was coming, but you can never be fully prepared for it.

“I appreciate that, bro. I’ll still do what I can. I don’t want to keep idle because then I’ll run myself crazy. Outside of the issue we had with Lander, everything else is on the up and up, so we should be good for a while. You good, though? What are you going to do about the arrangement and shit? Have you even thought about?”

Leaning back in my office chair, I let my head rest on the back of it before I sat up and faced my brother.

“I thought about, and I get pissed off every time I think about the shit. I know how shit can be with most of these families, but Pops never pressured us to do that shit. I feel like if he didn’t push the issue, who the fuck is this nigga to do so?”

“The head of the fucking families. I mean, I get it, but what can you really lose my getting married. We will lose a lot more if you don’t,” he expressed.

“This shit is crazy, bro. The only female that I deal with like that on a regular basis is Kari, and I’ll be damned if I give her that fucking option. I’d give all this shit up and go flip a fucking burger before I do that shit.” I was deadass too. If I had to do this shit for the sake of the family, I would, but it for sure wouldn’t be with Kari’s annoying ass.

“Why not hire somebody then? That way you won’t have to deal with Kari, and you can put a prenup in place and y’all can agree on an amount. As long as it’s not an outrageous number, I say do it that way.” He shrugged.

“I’ll see. Right now, I’m about to get my ass out of here. I might pop up on Rue’s ass.”

“How’s that going?” he asked.

“It’s going. I hit her up earlier to check on her and shit.”

“Shit, I say see if she’s down. You already like her.”

He had said nothing I haven’t thought about, but she has too much shit going on with her baby daddy and I’d have to kill that nigga for fucking with her if we ever got to that level.

“I’on know. Shorty got a lot of shit going on. I don’t want to add to that. Right now, we’re just two people getting to know each other. No strings attached. No expectations,” I countered.

He nodded, and we went our separate ways. I hopped in my truck, and he got into his and left the freight yard at the same time. As I drove through the city, my phone rung. Like clockwork, Kari was blowing my line down. I’ve been ignoring her ass all damn day. You would think she would get the picture. Instead of ignoring her like I wanted to, I answered because had I not she would keep calling, then I would have to go over to her house and choke the spit out of her ass.

“Wassup?” I answered.

“Wassup?” she asked incredulously. “I’ve been calling you all day and all you can say is ‘wassup’?”

See, this is why I would never be serious with her ass, because she didn’t know her place.

“You lucky I did that shit because the last time I checked, Eliza Ashby was the only woman I answered too, so let’s try this again. Wassup?”

The line was silent, indicating that she had an attitude, and I gave not one fuck.

“Either start talking or get the fuck off my line,” I snapped.

“I missed you,” she purred. “Can you come over?” she asked.

“Nah,” I simply replied.

“Well, I can come to you,” she countered.

Instead of responding, I hung up. She knew she wasn’t about to bring her ass to my house. The more I thought about it, I knew I couldn’t do this shit with Kari, but how the fuck would I be able to ask JaRue without coming off as some kind of creep?

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

JaRue

Tonight was my date with Hassan, and I was a nervous wreck. I haven't been on a date since Keith. Even though Hassan hasn't given me any reason to make me think he would switch up like Keith did, I was still apprehensive about the whole thing.

"Girl, get out of your head. You will be fine. Hassan is nothing like Keith's faded hairline having ass. You finally came across a real nigga, and I love that for you. I would love it even more if you finally got some dick out of the deal," Journei blurted.

I stopped doing my edges to cut my eyes at her. She had lost her mind if she thought I was about to sleep with this man on our first date. I mean, I didn't plan on it, but still.

"Don't look at me like that. You ain't had some dick since dick had you, and I don't even want to count Keith's geriatric ass. You need some young, strong back dick. The kind that makes you wanna go thank his mama for not swallowing him for the way he slutted you out type of dick. That's the kind of dick you need, sis."

I could only shake my head at her because she was dead ass serious.

"And what kind of dick do you need? The one that's attached to Rock?" I gave her a smirk because I didn't buy that bestie shit for one minute. I knew he was going through something with his baby mama, but I also knew my friend. She liked him but respected what he had going on.

"Girl, that's definitely the type of dick I need, but I'm going to chill out and not seem so thirsty. I can't imagine going through what he's going through," she admitted.

“Has he been celibate?” I asked with my nosy ass.

“He has. He hasn’t had sex in about a year. That was right around the time that Lucretia got bad off. I commend him for not stepping out, but sometimes I wonder if he’s telling the truth or not.”

“Has he tried anything with you?”

“Not hardly. I may get a kiss on the forehead here and there or a hug, but that’s about it.” My friend looked so sad, but I knew they would be fine. It was clear that they liked each other, they just needed time to get through all of this.

We continued to have small talk while I finished getting dressed. I opted on wearing a black mesh dress with a purple underlay that had a deep plunging neckline and stopped right above my knees. I paired it with a pair of black strappy sandal that had a thick buckle across the ankle. When I was done getting dressed, Journei gave me a light makeup beat, even though I didn’t think I needed it. Let her tell it. It enhanced my beauty and who was I to argue with that face. It was seven-thirty, and I heard a knock on my door.

“That must be your boo. I’ll let him in while you give yourself a once over.”

Journei left the room, and I gave myself a quick pep talk before I walked out of my room and went into Infiniti’s room to check on her. She was fast asleep, so I let her be. If I attempted to kiss her, she would rise like Lazarus and the date would be over before it started. When I walked inside of the living room, Hassan was sitting on the couch talking to Journei. When they heard my heels clicking against the hardwood floor, both of their heads turned in my direction. The look on Hassan’s face let me know he appreciated my look. He stood and greeted me by pulling my body into his for a hug.

“Damn, you look good, baby,” he complimented, causing my cheeks to flush.

“Thank you. You don’t look too bad yourself.” I took in his attire and to the naked eye, it looked as if he had on a simple black and gray button up, and a pair of gray jeans, but I’m pretty sure his entire outfit including his shoes costed more than my car insurance and rent alone. Going back toward the couch, he reach over and grabbed a bouquet that he had resting on the seat. He handed me the prettiest arrangement of purple roses that I have ever seen in my life.

“I remember you saying your favorite color was purple,” he mentioned, handing the roses over to me.

“Thank you,” I simpered.

“Y’all cute, but don’t you have reservations to catch?” Journei took the roses from me and started ushering us toward the door like she was the one going on the date. “Have fun, and Haze, you can keep her as long as you want. Don’t bring her ass home until you break her back in!” She yelled the last part because we were already out of the door. When she said that shit, I stalled in my tracks while Hassan was laughing like the shit was funny.

“Please, don’t pay her no mind or encourage her,” I insisted.

“Shit, she might be on to something.” His voice was a low rumble as he spoke, causing my kitty to wake up.

After he helped me into the passenger seat of his black Aston Martin DB12. I loved this car, but I would never own one. For one, it wasn’t kid friendly and most importantly, I couldn’t afford it.

The first couple of minutes were quiet until his deep timbre penetrated the silence.

“So, how was your day?” He glanced over at me through the lens of his glasses, and I discreetly clenched my thighs together because this man was finer than any man I had ever seen.

“It was okay. I only worked a half a day, so I was glad about that.”

“That’s wassup. You like working for them niggas?” I could hear the possessiveness in his voice, even if he didn’t purposely do it.

“I do. They have been good to me since I’ve started working. They’re very understanding, especially when it comes to me being a mother.” He nodded.

“How was your day?” I countered.

“It was straight. I had a few meetings, but other than that, I can’t complain.” Every time I asked him anything pertaining to work, he would ignore it or overlook it, but not tonight he wasn’t.

“What is it you do? And before you try to sugarcoat it...don’t. Remember, I work for the Richmonds and sometimes after hours, so I know about their other work ventures. If you’re doing business with them, then you can’t be too far behind.” I folded my arms under my breasts, making them sit up more. I caught his eyes dart to my chest before he put them back on the road, then back to me. He studied my face for a second before he spoke.

“My family owns a freight yard. We have a few ports in a few countries where we bring illegal immigrants over and help them start a new life without all the legal shit in the way. We set them up with everything that they need to have the life that they always dreamed of. We also own a finance company, if that’s what you want to call it, along with a few other ventures that tie into those businesses,” he explained. I figured his family had to be into something but to hear that they were actually helping

people was amazing.

“That’s different,” I expressed. “That’s so sweet that you all care that much about people to make sure that they get a fair chance.”

“It’s a means to an end, shorty.”

We pulled up to this restaurant called Aurora. I knew it was upscale because I would hear people talking about it, but I never had the luxury of coming until now.

Hassan pulled up to the valet and got out. He made it to my side before the attendant could open the door for me and did it himself. Once he helped me out, he left the attendant with specific instructions about how he would decorate the concrete with his insides if he scratched his car. If I was him, I’d leave it right there and say fuck him and his car. When we got inside, he gave the hostess his name and we followed her to the back of the restaurant in a more private, secluded area. She informed us that our waiter would be with us shortly and left us alone.

“This place is so nice.” I beamed.

“I had to pull out the big cards tonight.” he smirked.

“I appreciate the effort.”

The waiter came and Hassan ordered us a bottle of Dom Perignon and an order of grilled shrimp as an appetizer.

“That’s a lot of shrimp just for an appetizer,” I stated.

“I smoked a whole blunt to the face before I picked you up. Trust me, I’m going to eat one of those orders by myself.” He laughed.

“Big eater, huh?”

“You have no idea.” I caught the underlying message, and I wanted so badly to find out if that statement was true. Clearing my throat, I struck up a conversation to cut through the sexual tension in the room.

“So, it’s just you and Rakeem?” I asked.

“Yeah. Me and that nigga are exactly a year apart. Our birthday is June third. I was born in ‘97 and he was born in ‘98. It’s safe to say that our pops made sure our mama enjoyed her birthdays those two years.” We shared a laugh at his revelation. I thought that was cute that they were close in age and so close.

“I envy that. I’m an only child, and the way it’s looking, so will Infiniti unless Keith has more children,” I confessed.

“You want more kids?” he asked.

“I would like to have them, but like I said, my chances are slim.”

“You act like you’re old or something. You still have plenty of time. Don’t count yourself out.”

The waiter came back with our champagne and appetizer. Hassan was a man’s man because he ordered my food effortlessly after asking me did I have any allergies. After jotting our order down, the waiter left, and our conversation picked back up.

“Do you want kids one day?” I asked as I sipped the champagne that Hassan poured into my flute.

“Yeah, I’ll have some one day. I never planned on kids before I got married because I

didn't want the headache of having a baby mama, or the idea of my kid living apart from me. I plan on being present from the day she pisses on the stick." I nodded because I can't say that I wouldn't mind that. I mean, Keith was present during my pregnancy, but that's when the change started. It wasn't drastic, but it was noticeable.

We continued talking while we waited on our food, and I learned Hassan was hilarious and unfiltered. It was a breath of fresh air. He wasn't trying to put up this fake facade of who he was. With him, it was literally you get what you see.

When the food arrived, I appreciated the aroma of it all. The salmon looked delectable, and I couldn't wait to sink my teeth into it. Taking the first bite, I moaned as the flavors danced around on my tongue.

"Mmmm." It was so good that I had my eyes closed the whole time, but when I opened them, Hassan was glaring right at me.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I tend to get a little extra when good food is involved."

"No need to apologize, but I am taking note." He winked and I swear I felt it in my clit.

The food was good and so was the conversation. I hated the fact that I knew it was coming to an end. Hassan paid the check and left a hefty tip for the waiter. Once he helped me out of my seat, we headed toward the front. I felt eyes on me, so I turned in the direction it was coming from. There stood Keith, glaring a hole into me with some unknown woman on his arm. The look he gave me was icy and sinister, but I didn't let it show. He may not have known he affected my mood, but Hassan did.

"You know that nigga?" he asked, stepping around me.

"That's Keith."

Turning his head in the direction Keith was still sitting in, he started to head in his direction.

“Hassan, no. Don’t let him ruin our night. That’s exactly what he wants.” I pleaded with him with my eyes and eventually he gave in. He turned to look at me and dropped a kiss softly on my lips.

“You got it, mama,” he insisted.

Placing his hand on the small of my back, he escorted me out of the restaurant. The valet brought his vehicle out, and he helped me inside and took off.

“You ready for the night to end?” he asked, gripping my exposed thigh.

“Uhm, no.”

“Good.” He flashed his half pearly, and half iced out smile my way and continued to cruise the downtown Wood Haven. I took my phone out to text Journei to let her know I would be out later than expected.

Me: Hey...I’ll be out a little longer. Is Finny still okay?

She responded almost instantly.

Best Fren (fingers crossed emoji): Girl, bye! Go let that man slurp you up like an icee on a hot day in hell. We’re fine. Don’t text us back. Love you .

I didn’t even bother with telling her about Keith’s ass because, knowing her; she blocked me to keep me from texting or calling. Reluctantly, I put my phone back in my purse and sat back in seat and listened to the music flowing through the speakers.

“I hope you weren’t crazy enough to be texting that nigga while you were with me. Baby daddy or not, I’on play that disrespectful shit.” He gripped my thigh as he spoke, and I let my eyes trail to where his hand was and then back to his face.

“I don’t even talk to Keith about his daughter, so I have no desire to talk to him about anything else. That was Journei. I was letting her know I would be a little late,” I explained.

He nodded and continued his drive to his house. When we pulled up to a massive house out in The Hills, I was floored. The Hills were just as exquisite as The Estates. It just had more of a country feel. He pulled through the gates and parked in the enormous garage next to a blacked out Denali. I noticed a matte black G-Wagon parked on the other side of the truck. After shutting the car off, he swaggered around the front of the car and helped me out. We entered through a side door that looked as if it led to a sitting area. It was decorated with cream and gold. There was a bookshelf on one wall that was filled with books. I guess you really can’t judge a book by its cover because he definitely doesn’t strike me for the reading type.

“This is nice,” I complimented.

“Thanks. You want a drink?” He asked, leading the way into what I knew was the kitchen. He had a bar area set off to the side where it housed a variety of liquors. “I have wine in the cooler if you want something lighter.”

“No, whatever you have here is fine. Tequila would be perfect.” Nodding, he took down two shot glasses and two bottles of tequila. One silver and one gold.

“You got a preference?” he asked.

“Silver is fine.”

While he poured my shot, he poured himself one, but of the gold one. Taking my shot to the head, I placed the glass back on the counter and took the liberty of pouring another one.

“Damn, shorty. Slow down. I don’t want or need you to be drunk off your ass. Why you taking ’em down like that anyway?” he asked, tossing his own shot back. I stared at him nervously, thinking about if I should tell him the truth or not.

“Talk to me, baby. Wassup?”

Fighting the urge to take another shot, I looked him in the eyes and said, “I’m nervous as hell,” I simpered.

Not taking his eyes off of me, he walked around the counter and pressed his body against mine, lodging me between him and the counter.

“Why you nervous, love?” He traced his index finger along my jawline, down to my neck, where he cuffed it. “Hmm?”

“I-I uh, I haven’t been intimate with anyone in over a year.” I admitted bashfully.

I noticed his hooded eyes dance over my face through his lens before he spoke again.

“Do you want me to change that for you?” he asked.

I nodded my head up and down slowly, never taking my eyes off of his.

With a slight squeeze, he gave me his command. “Use your words with me, baby. I don’t interpret gestures. Now, again. Do you want me to help you with that?”

“Yes,” I breathed out.

Instead of a verbal response, I was granted a kiss that only deepened once he picked me up. I talked all that shit about not sleeping with this man on the first date and I was well on my way to having my ass in the air.

Without breaking the kiss, he carried me out of the kitchen and trekked up a set of stairs that were off to the side. I savored the taste of the shots we had previously taken and the weed he smoked prior to coming inside of the house. When we got to the top, he headed straight to what I would find out to be his bedroom and led me straight to the bed. He finally broke the kiss to strip me of my dress and he disrobed down to his boxers. It was insane how sexy this man was, and when he took his glasses off, I was completely done for.

“You good?” he asked, hovering over me, peppering kisses along my collarbone.

“Mmm, yes,” I breathed out.

“Good.”

I relished at the feel of his facial hair tickling my skin as he kissed, bit, and sucked his way down my body. Reaching behind me, he unfastened my bra and slipped my straps down my arms. He wasted no time sucking my nipple into his mouth while he gently massaged the other with his huge, yet delicate, hands. My hands instinctly found the back of his while the other trailed down his arm and over his back.

“Mmm,” I moaned in pleasure as he fed from my breasts like he was a newborn baby. The way he made me feel just by sucking on my nipples, I could only imagine the kind of damage he could do with his mouth anywhere else. I was so lost in his touch that I didn’t even realize that he was face to face with my anxious kitty. That was until he pulled the fabric of my panties to the side and swirled his tongue around in my essence before slurping my hardened clit into his mouth and sucking the life out of me.

“Oh shit,” I whimpered, gripping his braids as best as I could.

The way he was feasting on me like we didn’t just have a full course meal should be punishable by law. I’ve only been with Keith, but Hassan is hands down the best eater I’ve ever had. Now, if his dick was just as good, then he might have another stalker on his hands. I felt my stomach quake and my legs started shaking. That was my signal that my first and hopefully not my last orgasm was brewing. Hassan must’ve known it too, because he slipped two fingers inside of me and started massaging my walls as he continued to pay special attention to my pearl. The feel of his thick tongue with the combination of his fingers invading my middle made my orgasm creep up on me sooner than I expected.

“Oh, shit!” I yelped, grabbing ahold of his head and grinding my pussy all over his face. I sure hope he knew how to hold his breath because I just knew that I was suffocating his ass.

He didn’t ease up until he felt like I was done. Once he detached himself from my lower lips, he gave my pussy one last kiss before hovering over me, shoving his tongue down my throat. I loved that he was a kisser, because so was I. I let him have control over the kiss while I let my hands roam over his hard body. When my hands reached the band of his boxers, I slipped my hand inside and a groan escaped his lips and rumbled in his chest.

Leaning up, he looked down at me before getting off of the bed and going over to his dresser. I saw him reach into the drawer and pull out a box of condoms. I appreciated him being responsible because, at the moment, my fast ass wasn’t thinking about none of that shit. I had tunnel vision and the only thing I was worried about being at the end was dick. I watched as he slid his boxers down and cover his thick tool. There was no way I could handle all of that, but I was damn sure going to try. He came back to the bed and started kissing my neck. Seconds later, I felt the head of his dick poking at my entrance, and I sucked in a breath to prepare for the intrusion.

“Breathe, baby. I got you,” he assured.

Doing as I was told, I let go of the breath I was holding as he pushed inside of me.

“Ughn.” I heard him grunt, resting his head on my shoulder.

He slowly stroked me with so much precision that my eyes involuntarily rolled to the back of my head as I enjoyed the feeling of him stretching me out. I felt his lips along my jawline and stop right at my ear.

“Good ass pussy. Open your eyes, baby. Let me see how much you love this dick,” he ordered.

Like a trained puppy, I followed his command and opened my eyes. When I did, his brown ones were piercing mine. I watched his muscles flex with each stroke and that feeling in my stomach returned.

“Oh, Gawd, I’m about to cum again,” I whined.

“I know. I feel you, love. Wet this dick up for daddy.”

The hell did he say that for?

No sooner than the words left his mouth, my body obeyed like a humble servant.

“Oh my...shit, Hassan!” I moaned as my body went through the different levels of ecstasy that he was providing.

“Damn girl. Look at this shit.”

I don’t know how he thought I was going to look at anything and he wasn’t letting up.

I lost count of the times he made me cum. It was a bittersweet moment when he finally announced that he was about to cum. I didn't know whether to cheer or cry. He definitely felt good working me over, but I know my poor kitty was crying, and I didn't blame her. Hell, I shed a tear a time or two myself.

“Fuck!” he grunted as his body jerked as he released inside of the condom.

We both lied, panting, trying to catch our breath after that tumultuous round. When he finally lifted himself off of me, he smirked before kissing my lips again.

“I hope you not tapping out on a nigga because I ain't done with your ass yet.”

What did I get myself into?

Whatever it was, I damn sure was about to enjoy it.

Journei

I was still at JaRue's house with my neicy pooh until her mama got home. I was in no way rushing her. Hell, she could stay all damn day if she wanted to. She needed to let Hassan erase every memory that she had left of Keith's tired ass from her body, mind and spirit. Infiniti has been up since about eight-thirty, like she had somebody's job to go to. It was cool though because I knew she would be back asleep after I bathed and fed her. That's exactly where she was now. I sat on the sofa watching Living Single when I heard the locks turning on the door. I knew it was Rue finally bringing her hot ass home, and I loved that for her. When the door came open, I saw Hassan first, before I saw her. He walked in ahead of her and she trailed in closely behind him.

"Not you done gave up a key already. Damn Haze, I see you, bro." I joked.

"Nah, it's nothing like that. I knew she said you were inside, but I needed to make sure things were straight before she walked in," he countered. I looked at my friend and she was blushing and glowing like crazy.

"Okay then. I love it."

I sat back and watched them interact with each other like they were already in love. I loved the way Haze looked at my friend, and she was just as smitten as him. He finally kissed her, and I heard him say that he would see her later. Once he was gone, I jumped right into my line of questioning.

"Alright, bitch. Spill it. You over there walking like Shamar and glowing brighter than a glow stick." I was cheesing so hard my damn cheeks were hurting.

“Damn, can I come in and get myself together first?” she asked.

“No, bitch. You should’ve done that already. I need the tea now. Hurry up and spill it.”

I wasn’t playing with her ass. She finally got a taste of some new dick, and she wants to keep the deets. I think the fuck not.

“Well, nosy. He took me to dinner at Aurora. It was so nice and upscale. I almost felt out of place. We got to know each other a little better. He asked did I want more kids, and I said I did, but I doubt if it’ll happen. He told me he wanted kids but not just a baby mama,” she revealed.

“Okay, y’all worked on that last night,” I interrupted.

She pinned me with a glare.

“My bad. Go ahead.” I threw my hands up in mock surrender while still smirking.

“Girl, why did we see Keith and he was out with another woman. He wanted to say something to me so bad, but he didn’t. Hassan asked who he was, and I told him. I had to stop him from going over there and beating his ass.”

“You should’ve let him.” I shrugged.

“And what would that have solved?” she asked.

“Hell, it would’ve made me feel better.”

Shaking her head, she started back to our previous conversation. “When we got back to his house, we had a few shots before he kissed me and carried me up the stairs to

his bedroom.” She blushed.

“Look at you blushing and shit. It was good?”

“Bitch, it was more than good. I mean, I can only compare him to Keith, but now I’m like Keith, who?”

“Yaasss! I love that for you, friend. Good dick from a fine ass man will do it every time.”

“Girl, he has the type of dick that you want to take with you when you leave. The kind that makes you want to hold it while he pees and shakes it when he’s done.” She started fanning herself and I fell over, laughing. She never talked about Keith like this.

“So, are y’all together now?” I inquired.

Shrugging, she said, “I don’t know. I don’t think we are. It was one date and sex. That doesn’t constitute a relationship.”

“Did he take you to a hotel or his house?”

“His house,” she replied.

“His actual house?”

“I’m going to assume because it was more than one vehicle in the garage, and it was all the way out in The Estates.”

“Well, bitch. It looks like you have a whole fine ass, thug ass boyfriend and I love that for you.”

“You’re moving too fast. That man is not thinking about making me his girlfriend. You heard him say he didn’t even date women with kids.”

“Yet, he took you on a whole ass date to a nice ass restaurant and slurped your ass up afterwards. Girl bye. That’s your nigga. I bet you won’t tell him different.” I gave her a look, and she gave me one back like she wanted to protest, but she didn’t. Instead, she went upstairs to take another shower, since she said Hassan ruined her last one. While she did that, I would order brunch from Roasters and get the mimosas started. It was Saturday, and we had all day to do nothing. By the time she came back down, she looked refreshed but still had that glow. I was thrilled for my friend, and prayed that Hassan was the man to come in and love her properly since Keith didn’t know how.

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By the time JaRue returned downstairs, I was on my second mimosa.

“Damn, bitch. I thought I had to come and get you,” I spat.

“My bad. Hassan called as soon as I stepped out of the shower.” She blushed.

“But that’s not your man? Yeah okay.”

“He’s not. A phone call doesn’t solidify that,” she insisted.

“Did he say that he missed you already?” I asked, and she blushed again.

“See, bitch. Case closed.” I took a sip of my mimosa before handing her one. “Here, catch up.” She took the glass from me, and we sparked a conversation while we waited for the food to arrive.

“So, do you think things will progress with you and Hassan?” I asked.

“I mean, it’s too early to tell. I thought he was fine before we went out but after talking to him and baby that dick.” She stopped to fan herself. “I would love to stake a claim on that man, but I don’t want to get in over my head and end up in the same situation I found myself in with Keith. I’d probably kill the next nigga that plays with me,” she voiced.

“Hell, why wait? I say we practice on Keith and get his ass out the way.” I shrugged, taking down the last of the mimosa that was left.

There was a knock on the door, and I went to open it, since I was closer. When I got there, it was the food being delivered. It was right on time, too. After thanking the driver and giving them a cash tip, I took the food and went back into the kitchen, where I left JaRue. She was already taking plates out and grabbing utensils.

“This smells good. What did you get?”

“I got an order of shrimp and grits, with salmon croquettes, scrambles cheese eggs, and fruit bowls.” I took the containers out of the bags while I told her what we were having. We each got a little of everything and ate in silence for the first few minutes.

“How do things look between you and Rakeem?” she asked.

“They’re looking about the same. Like I’ve said, we’re just friends who just happen to have you and Hassan in common. He has a lot going on and I respect that. I actually find the shit sexy as hell that he’s so dedicated to a woman that he knows is dying. Shit like that will automatically grant him a trip to the throat lodge, but I respect our friendship too much to ruin it. So right now, I’ll take what I can get.” Everything I said was true. I like Rakeem’s company, but until he can focus on anything other than his sick baby mama, I’ll play my part as his new bestie.

“I hate he’s going through that, but you know what?” she intercepted. I gave her a look that let her know to go on and say what she had to say. “By you sticking by him, that’s going to make him fall in love with you. He may not verbally say it, but he likes you, too. He’s just not ready to come to terms with it, in fear that you’ll leave him too,” she stated.

“You read too many of those urban romance books.” I giggled.

“I know you’re not talking, Miss ‘Y’all had sex now that’s your man.’ You literally did the same thing.”

“I was telling the truth, though.” I shrugged.

“Looks like your bestie boo is calling.”

I looked down at my phone and saw Rakeem’s picture illuminate my phone’s screen. Swiping to the right, I answered before it went to the voicemail.

“Hello?” I answered.

“Hey, bestie. You busy right now?” he asked.

“Uhm, I’m chilling with Rue. Why? Wassup?”

“I need a huge favor. My mama is out of town and Lu’s mom is with her sister. I need somebody to come and sit with Lu while I go handle some business,” he informed.

I was quiet because I didn’t know if I could sit around this woman, knowing I was lusting after her man. Yeah, I knew she was dying, but I still felt like it was wrong.

“Please, bestie? You’ll have Peace here to keep you company.” I looked at Rue and

she had a silly smirk on her face.

“Okay. I’ll do it. Just give me about an hour to get myself together.”

“You got it, and thank you.” I could tell that he was relieved that I agreed. I hung up with him and as soon as I placed the phone back down, Rue was firing off question after question.

“What did he want?”

“He wants me to come sit with Peace and Lucretia while he goes out to handle business,” I mentioned.

She smirked.

“What?”

“That man just invited you to his home that he shares with his daughter and where her mother lives.”

“And?”

“Don’t play slow, Journei.” She rolled her eyes before popping a piece of cantaloupe into her mouth. “That man is welcoming you into his home and into his world. He likes you.”

“He just needs a sitter.” I shrugged.

“Stop playing. While that may be true, he trusts you enough to have you around them. Take it for what it is.”

I listened to my friend, and she basically told me the same thing that I told her and using it against me.

“Don’t be using my logic against me. I see what you’re saying, though. I’ll go along with it as long as you promise to do the same.”

“This ain’t about me, but I will.”

We continued to eat our food until Infiniti woke up. I helped Rue clean up the mess before I got dressed to go to meet Rakeem. He had already sent his address, so I had it in my phone. Hopefully, this wasn’t some sort of way of playing me to be his baby mama’s caregiver, because if he’s playing, I won’t hesitate to send him to the afterlife with her

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I pulled up to the address that Rakeem sent me after I agreed to come help him out. He lived in a nice, enormous house out in The Hills. He had a roundabout driveway that led to circular steps that accompanied the front door. When I stepped out, he was already at the door with his daughter clinging to his bare chest. I shouldn’t have been so thirsty for this man, but I couldn’t help it. He was around the same height as Hassan, and they both had that tawny colored skin that was riddled with tattoos and freckles. The only difference between the two was that Hassan kept his hair long as hell while Rakeem kept his shorter with waves. When I approached him at the door, I noticed how his body raked over my frame. I knew I would just be sitting in the house, so I only had on a pair of tights and a t-shirt with some Nike slides. My hair was in its curly naturally curly state and flowing freely.

“I appreciate you coming to do this. I need to be at the ports, and I didn’t want to call a nurse at the last minute. I don’t leave Peace with them anyway,” he clarified.

“It’s no problem. She’s a cutie, so I can see us getting along well.” Peace looked at me and smiled when I called her a cutie.

“Pea, this is my bestie, Journei. Bestie, this is my princess, Peace.” He introduced us and escorted me inside. His foyer was beautifully decorated with a navy chaise lining the wall with a gigantic mirror hanging above it, with a sturdy shelf on the other side with a few trinkets on it. When we got to the living room, I became speechless. It was decorated in navy, cream, and gold. You would’ve never thought that a child lived here because it was so clean. He took a seat on the couch and placed Peace on her feet. I took a seat next to him and watched as he got her together.

“Peace, Journei is going to stay here with you and mommy, okay?” he explained.

“Mommy, schleep!” she squealed in her cute little voice.

“Yes. Mommy is sleeping. You be good for my bestie, okay?”

“Yay, bestie!” She started clapping, causing the both of us to laugh.

“She’s animated as fuck,” he explained.

“It’s okay. You forgot I have a goddaughter?”

“Damn, I really did. You could’ve brought her with you. Peace would’ve loved that.”

“I’m pretty sure Rue wouldn’t mind a play date between the two of them,” I offered. He nodded and continued to pick up toys that Peace had scattered about.

“Uhm, you can come with me so I can show you where Lu is.”

He got up and Peace grabbed my hand while we followed her father toward the back

of the house and down the hall. We came to a closed door and pushed it open, allowing me and Peace to go in first. Peace practically dragged me toward her mother's bed. I was surprised she was so quiet, but I guess she was used to it.

“She's asleep right now. There's really not much that you can do except for watch and make sure that she's still breathing and give her meds or something to drink. She's been refusing her medication, so all we've been doing is keeping her comfortable.”

While he explained everything to me, I heard the hurt and anguish in his tone. He was hurt and had every right to be.

“We'll be fine. Go handle your business,” I assured.

Nodding, he placed a kiss on Lu's forehead before kissing Peace. When he reached me, he looked down into my eyes and I saw a glimmer of attraction there mixed in with the hurt.

“Thank you,” was all he said before he placed his forehead on mine and left the room. I watched him leave and when I turned back around, Lucretia was staring at me with a smile on her face.

What the hell?

Rakeem

I left Journei in the room with Peace and Lucretia while I headed upstairs to my room to finish getting dressed. I had to leave because I was feeling guilty about having Journei come and sit with Lu. I was feeling this girl more than I wanted to accept. I know Lu made me promise I would move on, but how do I go about doing that? I didn't want to get ahead of myself and just let shit be. After I finished dressing, I didn't even bother to go let them know I was leaving. It was a security monitor in every room in the house. She would be able to see me leave if she looked at it. Once I grabbed my keys, I went into the garage and hopped into my Tahoe and headed to the docks. We had a few families due to come in later and Haze and I were always there for that. When I pulled up, I saw Haze was already there. I noticed Ced and Art were here as well. We had other workers, but these two were our top lieutenants and who we considered homeboys. I stepped out of my truck and headed inside the building that was tucked off to the side and found the three of them sitting around passing two blunts around.

“Wassup, wassup?” I spoke.

“Ain't shit.”

“Wassup,” they spoke back.

I took a seat next to my brother, and he passed me the blunt.

“You good, bro?” he questioned.

Taking a deep pull from the blunt, I held it a few seconds before I blew the smoke back out and spoke.

“I asked Journei to come to the house and sit with Lu and Peace,” I informed.

My brother, along with Ced and Art, looked at me like I was crazy.

“You aight?” Ced asked, taking the blunt from Art.

“Yeah, I’m alright. Why wouldn’t I be?” I frowned.

“Because nigga. You’on leave Peace with just anybody. Hell, you’on let too many people around Lu. Now you have this girl that you’re clearly feeling in your house with your kid and baby mama. That’s enough grounds to question your sanity,” Haze spoke.

“I agree. As long as I’ve known you, you’ve never had too many people at your spot. Now you got a random chick there,” Art expressed.

“She ain’t random,” I shot back.

“And you’re defending her? Yeah, it’s that damn deep,” Ced laughed.

“Aye, y’all go check on them niggas. Let me holla at Rock.” Haze dismissed Ced and Art because I knew he was about to go into big brother mode on my ass. No sooner than the door shut behind them, he started up.

“Talk to me,” he insisted.

As I slid down in the chair, I closed my eyes and let my head fall back against the back of the chair.

“Man, I’m liking Journei...a lot and I feel guilty as fuck about the shit,” I revealed.

Saying it out loud made me realize I was really slowing falling for this girl.

“And what’s wrong with that?” Haze asked. I looked at him like he was crazy.

“The fuck you mean, what’s wrong with that? My baby mama is laid up in my house, dying and you think it’s okay for me to be attracted to another one while I’m already mourning her.”

He passed me the blunt and sat back in his seat before he spoke again.

“Didn’t you tell me Lu wanted you to be happy and love again?”

Silence.

“Didn’t you tell me she wanted somebody for you and Pea?”

“What does all that have to do with Journei?” I asked.

“Who’s to say that Journei isn’t the one? Why eliminate the possibility before you give it a fair chance. I mean, that bestie shit y’all got going on is cute, but I know you. I see the way you look at her. You start blushing like a bitch when you’re talking to her. Now, you have her in your home...alone with your daughter and baby mama. If I didn’t know any better, I would say that your ass is in love.”

Was I in love?

“ Nah, I wouldn’t say all that, but I am feeling her. You know when I asked her to come sit with them, she didn’t hesitate? I was expecting her to curse my ass out, but she came through without a second thought,” I revealed.

“I say once we finish here, you go home and talk to her about everything. Let her know how you feel. Who knows? Maybe she feels the same.” He shrugged.

I don’t think I’m ready to discuss any feelings yet, but I will be taking a better look at things from now on.

Five hours and four families later, I was pulling back into my driveway. It was almost eight o’clock at night, so I know Peace would be cranky. After thanking Journei, I would get my baby down for the night and then make sure Lu was straight.

When I walked inside, I didn’t see them, so naturally I went inside of Lucretia’s room, and I was taken aback to see Journei braiding Lu’s hair. I didn’t even know how to take this.

“Hey,” Journei spoke first. Lucretia’s eyes darted to mine and a weak smile graced her face.

“Wassup? How long has she been sleeping?” I noticed Peace was lying in the bed that I had in here and she had on fresh pajamas.

“About thirty minutes now. You have a very independent little lady on your hands. She led me to her room and showed me her clothes and toys. I hope you don’t mind. I fed her too.”

“Ugh, nah. I don’t mind.”

“Lu has been up for about two hours. I saw her hair products, so I did a dry wash and re-braided it. I also washed her up for you.”

I was speechless. I couldn’t believe that she did all of this and not hesitate at all.

“Thank you, shorty. I really appreciate you helping me out today, shorty. I’ll have to repay you real soon to show my appreciation.”

“I like seafood.” She smiled.

“I got you.”

I watched her as she gathered her things, and I walked her out of the room and to the front door. Once I got her to her car, I pulled her into a hug and squeezed her tight.

“Thank you, again. You don’t know how much you showing up today meant to me.”

“It was no problem. That’s what besties are for.” She smiled.

I watched as she got in the car and drove off. When I made it back in the house, I went into Lu’s room, and she was still awake. Walking over to the side of her bed, I took a seat and grabbed her hand.

“Rakeem,” she called out to me weakly.

“Wassup, shorty?”

“That’s her,” she said.

“Huh?”

“Th-that’s her. Journei. She’s the woman for you. Sh-she’s the one fr-from my dreams.”

I was stuck at her words. What did she mean Journei was the woman in her dreams? What was she trying to tell me?

“I had a dream about the woman that would teach you how to love again,” she rasped. “When I opened my eyes and saw her, everything about her was so familiar. I recognized her voice. She’s so good with Peace.” She stopped to catch her breath. “Don’t shy away from her, Rakeem. You like her. I can tell. Otherwise, she would have never stepped foot inside of this house. Don’t fight it. Let it happen. Let Journei love you. You deserve it.” She gave my hand a light squeeze before closing her eyes. The lone tear that dropped from my eye before I even realized it had formed.

Was everything that Lu was saying true? Had she seen Journei in her dreams? Was she sent here to comfort me? I didn’t understand all of this and right now I didn’t want to. I wouldn’t completely ex out the thought, but right now, my primary concern was providing Lu with a peaceful transition.

JaRue

sometime later...

Things between me and Hassan have been going great. We've been on a few more dates, had a lot more sex and even had playdates with the girls. It was refreshing to be dating someone who seems to have a genuine interest in you. We haven't established a relationship yet, and I will not pressure him into one. Hopefully, he will be able to let me know sooner rather than later what we are, and what we're doing.

I left the premises today to get lunch. When I came back, I was surprised to see Hassan's truck parked out front. I knew he had business with The RCF, but he usually calls or texts when he's coming by. Maybe they had an impromptu meeting or something. Grabbing my purse, I walked inside and saw Hassan sitting in the chair closet to my desk with an enormous arrangement of purple roses. As I was nearing my desk, he stood with a smile on his handsome face. Before handing me the flowers, he pulled me into a hug and kissed my neck.

"These are for you, beautiful." He handed me the roses, and I blushed at how thoughtful he was.

"Thank you," I simpered. "What are you doing here, though? Did you have a meeting?" I asked as I sat the roses on the counter behind my desk.

"Nah. I came to lay eyes on my girl because I missed her." He smiled.

His revelation caught me off guard.

“Why you looking like that?” he asked.

“You said I was your girl. When was that established?” I asked for my own knowledge.

“It was established the moment I slurped that pretty little pussy up like a hot pocket, then again when I let my dick get acquainted with it. If you need some reassurance, you can go tell Knas that you’re leaving for the rest of the day,” he asserted.

“Nigga, I told you don’t come in here trying to run shit and I hear you trying to make my receptionist leave work early.” Knasim came from out of his office with a smirk on his face, embarrassing the hell out of me.

“I’m sorry, Knasim. I won’t be leaving early. I can assure you,” I declared.

“Damn, baby. You’re going to choose this nigga over me?” Hassan asked.

Before I could respond, he smiled and leaned down to kiss my lips.

“I’m just playing. I got some shit to handle with this nigga, but I’ll hit you up later, aight?” He kissed my lips again.

“Okay,” I simpered.

“Rue, things might be a little slow. I’ll be out of pocket for the rest of the day. You can leave within the next hour if you want. I’ll still pay you for the whole day,” Knasim offered.

“Thank you, but you don’t have to do that.”

“He got it, baby. Don’t turn that shit down.” Hassan kissed me one last time before he

left with Knasim.

Things were indeed slow, so I took Knasim up on his offer to leave early. I went to the grocery store before going to pick Infiniti up from daycare, so that I could have all that out of the way. By the time I was done, it was only an hour left for her to be there, so I went and picked her up before going on home. When I arrived at the daycare, I went straight to the room that Infiniti was in. I saw her in the corner playing with some blocks with another baby. Stephanie saw me enter and the look on her face put me on high alert.

“What’s wrong?” I asked as soon as we were close.

“I didn’t want to upset you at work, but Keith stopped here today to take Infiniti with him. Of course, I didn’t let him, and he got mad and said that he would report my business. I tried telling him that his name wasn’t on her paperwork, and I couldn’t just release her. He then called the police, but once they got here, they told him the same thing.” I wanted to go find this bastard and peel all his damn skin off. He hadn’t contacted my daughter in over a month but thought it was a good idea to take her from daycare without my permission. He had lost every bit of his gah damn mind.

“I’m sorry Stephanie. I hate he dragged our mess to your place of business. If you want me to find another dayc-” she cut me off.

“I wish you would take my baby anywhere else but here. I’m not worried about Keith. He can make whatever claims he wants. My business is legit and anything that he might say won’t hold a candle in court. By any chance that it goes that far, he’ll find out that I have a husband that doesn’t play about me.” She winked and smirked at me, and I was relieved.

“I’m so sick of him. Thanks for the heads up because I’m pretty sure that he’s just getting started with his bullshit. He saw me on a date about a month ago and I haven’t

heard from him since. I should've known it was too good to be true," I vented.

"Wait a minute, Miss Thang. You went on a date? With whom?" she pried.

"It's a guy that I met at the gas station, but he's associated with my bosses." I blushed.

"Oooh okay. He's one of them?"

I nodded.

"That's where that glow came from. I ain't mad honey. Live your life. I kept telling you that you were too young to be living the life of a senior citizen. It didn't matter that you had a child. Mothers need to learn how to separate the two, and doing so doesn't make you a terrible mother."

She was right. She was another person in my life that kept telling me to get out the house. She's even kept Infiniti occasionally when my parents couldn't or if I didn't want to bother them.

"You're right and I get it now. I guess it took the right man to come along to help me put it into perspective."

"Amongst other things." She smirked.

"Give me my baby so I can go."

We shared a laugh before she went to get Infiniti. When she saw me, she started wiggling to get out of Stephanie's arms and into mine.

"Hey bookie butt," I cooed.

We told Stephanie goodbye and were on our way. When I got home, I put Infiniti in her playpen and got the groceries out of the car and inside. While I put the groceries up, I received a FaceTime call from Hassan. The smile that formed on my face was inevitable. When I answered, he was already staring into the phone.

“Hey,” I simpered.

“Wassup, shorty? You just getting home?” he asked.

“You got a tracker on me or something?” I joked. His only response was a smirk.

“Haze,” I called his name.

“Nah, that name ain’t for you. What you do after you left work?” He avoided my previous question.

Sighing, I decided to just fill him in on the events that happened after I left work.

“You want me to handle it?” he asked.

“Handle it? No. I don’t want you worrying yourself with my problems. I can handle Keith,” I countered.

“But as your man, you don’t have to handle any nigga as long as I’m around. That’s what I’m here for,” he uttered.

That was the second time that he referred to himself as my man.

“That’s the second time you’ve called yourself my man.”

“And it won’t be the last.”

I blushed.

“You said you went shopping. You cooking for your man tonight?” he asked.

“Maybe if he asked nicely, I will.” I smirked.

“Baby, you going to cook for daddy then let me slurp that pretty little pussy up for dessert?” he asked, showing all of his teeth. It was something about that bottom grill that drove me insane.

“I guess, since you asked so nicely.”

He laughed.

“Bet. I see you later.”

“Okay.”

We ended the call, and I finished putting my groceries up. I already took some chicken out before I left the house this morning. I would make some oven baked smothered chicken with some cabbage, rice and honey cornbread. I usually fixed enough for four people since I didn’t cook every day and most days Journei was here with us when she wasn’t home or with Rakeem.

As I prepared dinner, I smiled at the thought of seeing my man later. My man. That sounded weird as hell, but I would take it as long as he gave it. While I was cutting up the cabbage, there was a knock on my door. Quickly drying my hands, I went to the door and opened it. On the other side was a man dressed in a suit. He probably was a Jehovah’s Witness.

“Can I help you?” I asked.

“Are you JaRue Malone?” he responded.

“I am.”

Handing me an envelope, he said, “you’ve been served,” and walked off.

Snatching the envelope open, I saw Keith was suing me for full custody on the grounds that I had no actual income to take care of her properly. It also states that I work for a known cartel, and he fears for his daughter’s life.

I was hyperventilating at this point because I couldn’t believe this muthafucka was trying to take my baby from me. A baby that he gave zero fucks about. I was seeing red. Slamming the door, I went back into the house and searched for my phone. I found it on the counter where I left it and dialed Keith’s number so fast. I don’t even think the phone rang, since he answered so fast.

“What is it, JaRue?” he answered snidely.

“How dare you take me to court for custody when you don’t even take care of your daughter? Have you lost your fucking mind!” I yelled.

“It doesn’t matter if I take care of her. The moment you called yourself fucking the next nigga after I broke that pussy in for me was the day that you sealed your fate. All you had to do was follow the rules, Rue, and we wouldn’t be going through these problems.”

Rearing my head back to stare at the phone because I couldn’t believe the audacity of this nigga had. I didn’t even respond. I hung up in his face. Looking over at my baby playing, my heart shattered at the thought of her being snatched away from me. Without hesitation, I grabbed my baby, my phone, purse, and keys and headed out of my house. After strapping Infiniti in her seat, I got in and headed straight to my

parent's house. When I got there, my father was just getting in. He worked at as a bank manager while my mom was a high school English teacher, so she's been home for a little while.

"Hey baby," my mother greeted when I walked in. She immediately noticed the tears in my eyes and called my father back downstairs.

"Rueben!" she called for my father as she ushered me and Infiniti to the couch to sit down.

"What's wrong?" my father asked as soon as he made it back downstairs.

I ran the whole story down to them. This was the first time that I really let them know everything about Keith. I never told them his actual age. They only saw him a few times in passing. I lied and told them he did the bare minimum when he, in fact, did nothing.

"That nigga got me fucked up if he thinks he's going to take my grandbaby. I owe his perverted ass a beat down anyway for preying on my baby girl. Where does this nigga live?"

One thing about Rueben Malone was he may wear a suit and tie and had a professional job, but my daddy was from the Eastside of The Heights, and he never hesitated to show you, especially when it came to me, my mother and now Infiniti.

"Daddy, I don't need you getting in any trouble behind Keith. He already threatened the daycare provider because she wouldn't release Infiniti to him."

"Well, you're staying here tonight," my mother insisted.

"No, I can't do that. I'm not scared of Keith and he's not about to come around. He

knows I have a boyfriend now, and that's why he's doing this."

"Boyfriend?" my parents said at the same time.

Shit.

"Ugh...I...uhm. I have this guy that I've been seeing for a little over a month," I revealed.

"When were you going to tell us?" my mother asked.

"When we made things official. That literally happened today."

I looked between my mother and father, waiting for them to scold me.

"Is he older than you?" my father asked.

"Yes, but only by a few years. He's still in his twenties," I revealed.

"He works?" my mother asked next.

"Yes. His family owns the freight yards."

"Ashby?" my father said.

I gave him a look, wondering how he knew that.

"Yes. You know of them?"

"I do, and Jay, she's in good hands. Both of those boys are good young men," my father said, shocking the shit out of me.

“I want to have y’all over for dinner soon so I can meet him,” my mother voiced.

I nodded.

Even though I was supposed to cook tonight, I stayed and ate with my parents. By the time I got back home, I washed Infiniti and laid her down. Once I did that and showered myself, I called Journei and grabbed a bottle of wine and vented to my best friend. I might be taking her up on her offer to beat his ass sooner than later.

Hassan

When I left JaRue's job earlier, Knasim and I went to the freight yard so that he could look over the arsenal that they had just gotten in. While he had his workers load up their truck, he followed me inside of my office. Once we were inside, I poured us both a drink and sat down.

"So, have you thought about what I said?" he asked.

Taking a sip from my glass, I sat it down on my desk before I answered his question.

"Not really. I don't even know where to start with the shit. I had a chick I was dealing with before Rue, and she was definitely out of the question. I'm feeling Rue, but I don't want to seem like some weird or desperate nigga by asking her to marry me and we've only been dating a month." I took the rest of my drink down without even blinking. This shit was stressful as hell and I'm already a little over thirty days in.

"Look, I get it." He sat his drink down. "My pops pushed that shit on me, too. I was hell bent against it, but I'd kill any nigga over my wife. That includes the nigga whose nut helped create her. I'm not trying to get too deep in your shit, but Rue is a good girl. I don't know too much about her baby daddy, but I'm pretty sure you're better than that nigga." From what he was saying, he didn't know too much about who JaRue's baby daddy was and that wasn't my place to fill him in. "Plus, she works for us, sometimes after hours, so she knows all about this lifestyle. She even knows how me and my wife came together. I say present the idea to her and if she doesn't bite right away, I'll prolong your shit. Take that shit as a onetime courtesy because you won't get it again, and not with another bitch. I'm doing this shit

because Rue is like family.” He looked me square in the eyes and spoke and I respected it, but I was going to let him know that he still didn’t run shit.

“Yeah, I’ll see what’s up with her.”

“Haze! Why haven’t you been returning my calls?” Kari barged into my office, barking like she ran some shit.

“I know you lost every brain cell you process walking in this muthafucka like you got that kind of right.” I snarled.

She looked between me and Knas and rolled her eyes before she turned her attention back to me. Knas cut whatever she was about to say short, though.

“Aye, roll them muthafuckas again and you gon’ be holding ’em.” He stood. “I’m out. I told my wife I would work on my attitude, but this bitch came in here with her negative energy. Handle that and I’ll holla at you later.” He dapped me up and let his self out. Kari was still standing on the other side of my desk with her arms folded and a scowl on her face.

“Why are you still here?” I asked.

“Where have you been?”

“With my girl,” I said.

“Your girl? Since when? I thought I was your girl?” she pouted.

“Since when?”

Silence.

“Why would you think you’re my girl, Kay?”

“We’ve been messing around for almost three years now,” she explained.

“And that’s all we’ve done. What’s my favorite color?”

“Uhm.”

“My favorite food?”

“Piz-” I cut her off because the shit was wrong.

“Do you even know if my glasses are prescription or not?” I asked.

“I know they’re not prescription. I’ve seen you without them before,” she sassed.

“That’s because I had on contacts. How could you not know none of this stuff and be my girl?” I cocked my head to the side.

“I hope you know your little girlfriend is no more than a gold digging whore and home-wrecker who uses her baby as a pawn against my brother.” She smirked like she just told me some shit that I actually gave a fuck about.

“I’on know about all that, but I know your brother is a pedophilic, manipulative piece of shit who preyed on an innocent girl, got her pregnant and does absolutely nothing for his daughter. It’s alright though. She has a new daddy. So does her mama.” It was my turn to smirk.

Just like I knew she would, she marched her mad ass right on out of my face. If she knew what was good for her, she would stay the fuck away from me. I wasn’t over sealing her ass in one of my containers and shipping her off to the middle of no-

fuckin-where.

After Kari left, I finished looking over the files for the families that needed our help. It was also a few people that were looking to get loans. I'd decide on that shit after looking into their books and shit. If the shit looked legit, I'd let Rock handle that shit. I finished up at the office a few hours later and it was going on seven o'clock. I was hungry as fuck, but Rue said she was going to cook for a nigga so I wouldn't pick shit up. I still had to run by my parents' house before I headed home to shower and then made it back to Rue. She wanted me to limit my time around her daughter, and I respected it. Once I shut my computer down, I grabbed up my phone and keys and headed out. It took almost an hour to get to my parents' house from the yard since they decided they wanted to work on the fucking roads. When I got there, I let myself like I always did and found both of my parents in the living room with my niece.

"Uncle Hazie!" she squealed like she always did when she saw me.

"Wassup, Pea?" I picked her up and kissed her cheek. She had my braids in each of her hands, swinging back and forth.

"Hey, baby," my mother greeted. Leaning down, I kissed her temple before taking a seat in the vacant seat adjacent to them.

"How are things going, son?" my father asked.

"Everything straight." I kept it short because I knew he was trying to figure out where my head was with this whole marriage thing.

"And the proposition? How's that going?"

"I'm handling it," I countered.

He gave me a look that let me know he wasn't pleased with my response, and I didn't give a fuck.

"You need to be making a deci-"

I cut his ass off.

"Aye, I'm out. I didn't come over here for this." I stood to leave, and my father pinned me with an angry glare, and I gave him one right back.

"You're not staying to eat?" my mother asked.

"Nah, I have plans for dinner."

Kissing my mother and niece, I left my parents' house just as fast as I came. When I got in the car, I called Rue. I was about to hang up and just pop up on her ass because she was taking too long to answer.

"Hello?" she answered, somberly. That shit immediately pissed me off because the only reason she could be sounding like that is because of her bitch ass baby daddy.

"I'm on my way," was all I said. There was no need for her protest because I wasn't going for the shit no way. She'd realize sooner than later that she's dealing with a real nigga. I'm not waiting for her to tell me what the problem is. It's my job to sense where there is one and offer to fix it in any way that I can.

Since my parents lived in The Estates too, it took me another hour to get back to The Heights and pull up on Rue. When she opened the door for me, I could tell that she was crying and that immediately had me seeing red.

"Wassup, shorty?" What's wrong? I asked, pulling her into my lap.

“Keith, is what’s wrong,” she started. “He won’t leave well enough alone and leave me and my baby alone.” She cried.

I tried not to snap out because I wanted her to tell me what was wrong, but the shit was hard while looking at her cry.

“Tell me what happened.”

I listened to her run down the events that took place after I left her earlier. This nigga was a piece of shit, and I couldn’t wait to ship his ass off. The part that pissed me off most was he was only doing this because she wasn’t allowing him to fuck on her anymore. From what she told me, she hadn’t had sex with him since baby girl was like four months old. This nigga was a whole bitch, and it showed.

“What am I supposed to do? I can’t afford a lawyer and if he takes this shit to court, I’ll lose my baby. I can’t lose my baby, Hassan.” She buried her face in my chest and cried. I tried my best to soothe her, but I knew this shit was heavy. When her cries faded out, she looked up at me with red eyes and tear-stained cheeks.

“I don’t know what I can do at this point. It’s like my back is against the wall.”

Lifting her chin, I kissed her lips and said, “marry me.”

JaRue

“Marry me.”

I thought I was hearing things when I Hassan said that, but I wasn’t because he repeated it.

“Huh?”

“Marry me,” he repeated.

“Marry you? Are you serious?” I quizzed.

I looked in his face to see if I could see if he was playing, and his expression never wavered.

“Hassan,” I expressed.

“Listen. Hear me out. You’ve been around The RCF long enough to know what they have going on and how things go. My pops never pressured us into the arranged marriage thing, so we never felt the need to get married. Well, all of that changed when my pops handed everything down to me. It’s my birthright to take over my family, the same way it was in place for Knas. Since he’s the head of all the families, he can set certain stipulations in place. Now that I’m in transition to take over my family, he suggested I get married so that I could have a structural foundation. He gave me this rundown about how it helped him and shit, then gave me a timeframe to do so,” he explained, but that didn’t tell me why in the hell he just asked me to marry

him.

“What does that have to do with me?” I asked.

“Right now it doesn’t, but if you agree to it, it’ll help you with the situation with your baby daddy?”

“How?”

My eyes searched his.

“It’ll show that you and Infiniti are in a stable environment. You’ll have the funds to prove and everything else. Having her in a structural two-parent household with a solid support system is always a plus. My family has lawyers at our disposal, so that’s another thing that you wouldn’t have to worry about. They’ll find any and everything on that bitch ass nigga. The gag is, he’s not expecting you to be able to come to court and prove that you are fit, so he will not dig into the shit. What you say?”

I was floored because I knew he was serious as a heart attack, and that’s what terrified me.

“What do you get out of it?”

“I get to say that your fine ass is my wife.” he smirked.

“No, seriously, Hassan. This is huge. I don’t want to cause any problems for you, nor do I want to lose my daughter, because if Keith finds out that this is all a lie, he’ll definitely have a field day with this.” I stressed.

“He won’t find out shit, because it’ll be very much real. We’ll have all the documents to prove it.”

I couldn't believe this. This man was willing to go through the lengths of marrying me just so that I wouldn't lose my daughter. How could I say no to that?

"Can I think about it?" I asked.

"You sure can, but can you do it at my spot? I don't trust y'all here while that nigga on his period and shit." That made me laugh because Keith was surely acting like he was PMS'n.

"What about Infiniti?"

"What about her?" he frowned.

"We're a package deal."

"Let's get this straight right now. I understood you had a kid in the beginning. I don't want to be there just for you but for her as well. So, if I said to get some stuff for y'all, then just do that, okay?"

This man was making it hard for me not to fall for him.

"Okay," I simpered.

Reluctantly, he let me up and I went down the hall to pack a bag for me and Infiniti. I didn't know how long he wanted us to stay at his house, but I would pack for a few days, just in case. Once I was done, I carried the bags back upfront and Hassan quickly got up from his seat on the couch and retrieved them from me. I watched as he took them outside and came back and got the last one. When he came back in, I had Infiniti in my arms.

"Y'all ready?"

I nodded.

“Aight. Come on.”

He escorted us outside and I walked to my car, and he stopped me.

“Nah, hand me the keys and I’ll get her seat. Y’all can get in my truck.”

“Hassan, I need my car,” I protested.

“JaRue, hand me the keys,” he said with authority.

It took a minute, but I gave in and gave him the keys. I stood by his truck as he got Infiniti’s car seat from out the back of my car and placed it in his backseat. Once he took her from me and buckled her in, he helped me inside before getting himself and pulling off. While he drove, I texted Journei.

Me: You busy?

She texted back almost immediately.

Best Fren (fingers crossed emoji): No, not really. I’m at home catching up on my shows. You need me?

Me: Yes, but I’m on my way to Hassan’s. Fill you in tomorrow.

Best Fren (fingers crossed emoji): You better text me first thing in the morning or I’m calling Rock to bring me over there. I’m not playing with you, Rue.

I giggled at her response because I knew she was dead as serious.

Me: I promise.

Best Fren (fingers crossed emoji): You better...I love you (white heart emoji).

Me: I love you too fren (white heart emoji).

“She good with you staying with me?” Hassan’s voice brought me back to the present.

“How do you know who I was talking to?” I challenged.

“You’re not ready to test that side of me yet, shorty.” I heard the warning in his voice loud and clear. I should be ashamed of the way it turned me on.

“She said I better call her first thing in the morning, or she’ll have your brother bring her to me.”

“I’ll tell him to go ahead and do the shit, regardless. I got some shit to handle in the morning and I really don’t want you out right now without me.”

“Why did you make us come stay the night if you would not be there?” I asked.

“I didn’t say I would be gone all day, but I have businesses to run, baby. I brought y’all with me so that you could be safe, and I have a peace of mind,” he revealed. Hearing him say that he cared about our safety made my heart melt. Granted, I was never afraid of my surroundings, but Keith never concerned himself with our well-being.

The rest of the ride was silent while we rode to his house. I appreciated it because I was in my head the entire time about the situation Keith had put me in and the proposition Hassan made me to help me out of it. When he pulled into his gate and

into the garage, Infiniti started stirring and whining.

“Mommy,” she whined.

I twisted around so she could see me. “I’m right here, bookie.” When she saw my face, she calmed down a little, but she was still fussy.

Hassan parked and rounded the front of the truck to help me out before he went to the back to get Infiniti. He’s been around her a few times, so she wasn’t scared to go to him. While I insisted I could carry her into the house, he ignored me and carried her. When we got inside, he kept walking, so naturally I followed him. He stopped at a door that was across from his.

“She can sleep in here,” he informed.

As I looked around, I saw it was his niece’s room. It was decorated in pink and yellow and fit for a little princess.

“If you need to freshen her up, the bathroom is through that door.” He pointed to the other side of the room. “There’s a monitor over the crib. There’s a portable piece on the nightstand, but I have monitors in my bedroom, the living room, and kitchen. I’ll shower while you get her together and you can go after me.” I looked around and took everything in before responding.

“Okay.”

Kissing my forehead, he trekked out of the room and left me and my baby alone. He was back a few minutes later without bags before he left again. While I freshened her up, I couldn’t help but run back the events of today that led to this. To a marriage proposal. Since there was a shower in here, I went ahead and get it out the way instead of waiting for Hassan to finish.

When I was done with me and Infiniti's hygiene, I left her asleep and snatched up the monitor. When I walked across to Hassan's room, he wasn't in there, so I went downstairs. I found him in the kitchen. When he heard me, his eyes darted in my direction. He was shirtless and only wore a pair of boxers, ball shorts, socks and slides. He didn't have on his glasses, so his freckles were more prominent.

"You ate?" he asked.

That's when I remembered I was supposed to cook for him.

"I didn't. I was supposed to cook for you. I'm sorry, but that sh--"

"No need to apologize, love. I understand."

I nodded.

"What are you cooking, anyway?" I asked, peeping over his arm.

"Watch out. You know better than to be in somebody's pots while they're cooking."

We both laughed.

"I'm just making sure you're not trying to kill me," I smirked.

"You got jokes. But nah. It's only some leftover lasagna my mama fixed the other day. It's enough for the both of us." My stomach immediately growled at the thought.

I watched as he plated our food and went to set it on the table. After grabbing two bottles of water, he pulled my chair out to sit before he sat in his own. Once he blessed the food, we dug in.

“Mmm, this is good.” I complimented.

“I know, right?”

We continued to eat in silence until everything was gone. We both had to be starving. I offered to wash the dishes, but he told me he had it. There was nothing left to do because he wouldn't let me do anything, so I picked up the remote and found something to watch on TV. By the time he joined me, I was good and comfortable. He sat next to me, pulling my feet into his lap.

“What you in here watching?”

“227,” I responded.

“Man, get the fuck out of here,” he laughed. “You really watching that old ass shit?”

“I am. I love old black comedies. They're my go-to when I don't feel like watching anything else.” I shrugged.

“You got it.”

He kept massaging my feet in silence. I tried to keep my attention on the TV, but he was making it hard by the way his touch was feeling. I glanced up at him and he was staring at me.

“Thank you.” I blurted.

“For what?”

“For caring enough about my situation to help me. I don't know how I could ever repay you for doing this.”

He licked his lips as his eyes traveled the length of my frame until he got back to my face. The smirk on his face let me know exactly where his head was.

“I got an idea of how you can start repaying me.”

“And how is that?” I asked with a raised brow.

“Come sit on my face.”

His expression was neutral, but I could see the lust dancing around in his eyes. I watched as he gently removed my feet from his lap and slid down to the floor. With his hand outstretched toward mine, he pulled me up from the couch and had me standing directly in front of him. With no words, he slid my shorts and thong off. After he had them off and set to the side, he nestled his head back on the seat of the couch and assisted me in straddling his face, while my knees rested on his shoulders. The moment his tongue swiped from the crack of my ass to my clit, I felt a jolt of electricity surge through my body. When he suctioned my throbbing pearl into his mouth, I sucked in a sharp breath.

“Ummm,” I moaned at the pleasure that he was currently providing.

All you could hear was him slurping and groaning into my pussy along with Lester fussing at Mary for something she had no business doing in the first place.

Slap!

“Oh, shit!” I yelped at the sting he provided with that slap.

“Ride my fucking face and you better not stop,” he demanded.

Doing as I was told; I rode the hell out of his tongue like it was his dick. While I was

bouncing and rolling my hips like a professional, he was rubbing his nose against my clit as his middle finger massaged my asshole.

“Baby,” I whined. “I-I’m about to cum.”

He removed his tongue from my tunnel and clamped down on my clit, sucking my soul and senses out right along with my orgasm.

“Ahhh!” I cried out, trying to get up, but he locked me in place, making it impossible for me to move.

“Hassan, please!” I begged, but that only made him go harder.

There was no way in hell I was about to have another orgasm when the first one was still in effect. At least I didn’t think it was possible until Hassan inserted his finger in my ass as my juices sprang loose.

“Oh, fuck!”

I trembled so much I thought I was having a seizure. I felt Hassan slide from under me as I tried to get myself together. My recovery was short-lived because seconds later I felt the thick head of his dick, sliding inside of me like it was molded just for him and him only.

“Ughn,” I moaned, lying my head on the back of the couch.

“Gah damn, baby,” he groaned behind me. “Throw this fat muthafucka back. Fuck.”

The feeling of him massaging my walls all while hitting my spot was sending me into overdrive. I was becoming delirious and at this point; I didn’t care if I passed out.

“Mhmm. Just. Like. That.” he coached, never missing a beat.

“Oh, you about to cum again? Hmm? You going to wet daddy up again?” he taunted. I wish I could respond, but my words were nowhere to be found.

Smack!

“You’on hear me talking to you?” he asked.

I still couldn’t form a sentence. I wanted to know how he expected me to in the first place. I guess he took my silence for disobedience because the next thing I knew; he had his hand gripping my bun as he pounded into me with so much force, you would think he hated me.

“You’on hear me talking to you, Rue? Hmm? You can’t fucking talk now?” he taunted.

“Yes! Oh shit, yes!” I whimpered loudly as I came all over his dick.

“Next time you answer me when I’m talking to you.” he grit.

“Fuck, here it comes, baby. Shit.”

I felt his strokes become jerky, so I knew he was about to cum. The animalistic growl that emitted my ears and the thumping inside of me let me know I was right. When his movements stopped, he pulled out of me, pulling me with him.

“Shit, girl. Come on, let’s finish this upstairs,” he said as he picked me up.

“Finish?” I inquired.

“Yeah. I’m not done with your ass yet. I need to let you know what you can look forward to being married to a nigga like me.”

He carried me upstairs and did just that. He didn’t let me rest until we heard Infiniti on the monitor whining. I had never been so thankful for my baby in my life. If this was what married life was going to be like, I’m going to need a lot of energy because Hassan seemed to never run out.

???

“Bitch, are you going to say something?”

True to his word, Hassan called his brother to bring Journei over to his house, but he was tied up with his baby mama at the time, so she drove herself. I just finished telling her about everything that went down on yesterday and she has yet to say anything.

“Listen. That was a lot, and I’m trying to process it all,” she responded.

“Well, I need you to say something.”

I watched Infiniti play in the playpen that Hassan had over for his niece. I was glad this house was child friendly because I would’ve been locking her in her car seat had it not been.

“First of all, I saw we go down to the hospital where Keith works and beat his ass all the way down to the morgue. I hate the day that nigga’s daddy wasted the nut on his ass. But bitch, Hassan really offered to marry you so that you wouldn’t lose Finny? Bitch, I hope you said hell yeah, because what kind of man does some random shit like that for a woman that he’s only known for a few months. Baby, if you don’t take him up on your offer, I’ll take my baby and raise her. We might let you visit.” she

smirked.

“It wouldn’t just be benefiting me. He told me about the stipulation Knasim gave him, so I’d be helping him as well,” I countered.

“Either way, you want have to worry about Keith ever again because your fine ass husband will make sure of it. Ooh, I’m so excited.” She cheered, causing Infiniti to join in.

“Yes, baby. Fuck your daddy!” She danced.

“Don’t tell her that,” I chastised.

“Why not? It’s not like she knows the nigga.” She shrugged.

Shaking my head at my best friend, we continued to talk about the current men in our lives. She filled me in on things with her and Rakeem. They haven’t really talked this week because things were looking bad for Lucretia. She said she understood, but I knew she missed him.

“Maybe he’ll come over with Hassan since he knows you’re here,” I suggested.

“We’ll see. Enough of this sad stuff. You really like Hassan, huh?” I blushed.

“I do, and it’s scary.” I admitted.

“Don’t let that shit, Keith, put you through tarnish your image of all men. Hassan seems to be pretty straight up and from what I can see, he likes you, too. Look at the lengths he’s going to help you. He didn’t have to go to that extent, but he did. Take it for the good that it is and make Keith eat his own shit.”

I laughed at her last statement. It wouldn't be Journei if she didn't say some off the wall shit, but she was right. Keith had his own life and apparently another one, yet he was trying to dictate mine. Fuck him. He can kiss my ass. The days of him playing with me are long gone. I was over his bullshit.

Rakeem

When Haze called me this morning to bring Journei to his house, I couldn't move around then. I was the only one with Lu since her mother had a doctor's appointment. When she came back, I met up with my brother at the freight yard to handle some business before I had to go back in. These days, I didn't stay out long because Lucretia was literally in her last days. Like now, I was at the yard with my brother, but I didn't plan on being here long. We just had a few last-minute things to handle and then I'll be taking it back in.

"So, how did you end up with Rue and her baby at your house?" I asked him as we sat in his office.

"I called her after I left from checking in on Ma and Pops. Her tone was off, so I went straight to her, and she told me what her bitch ass baby did. I wanted to go kill that nigga right then, but I knew I couldn't do that without it leading back to her, so I told her to just pack a bag so they could with me. That way, I could keep a better eye on them."

I nodded because I knew all too well about wanting to be able to protect the people you care about.

"What do you plan on doing about her situation?" I asked.

"I asked her to marry me," he blurted.

"You did what?"

“You heard me. I asked her to marry me. I’m supposed to get married anyway, right?” he declared.

“Yeah, but do you really think that’s a good idea? I know I mentioned asking her, but that was before her baby daddy started his bullshit. We don’t need that nigga in the middle of our shit,” I voiced.

“He won’t be. If she marries me, I can help her beat that muthafucka at his own game and she’ll be able to keep her daughter. We can continue business as usual with The RCF and it’s a win-win for everybody,” he explained.

I sat silent for a minute until a smile crept across my face.

“I guess congratulations are in order, then.” I slapped hands with my brother.

“You remember the day I had Journei go to the house with Lu and Peace?”

He nodded.

“Well, when I got back home, Journei had bathed and fed both Peace and Lu. Of course Lu didn’t eat, but she washed her up for me and wash and braided her hair. I wasn’t expecting her to be so content with doing that shit. But you know what was really crazy?”

“What?”

“Lu told me that Journei was the woman to help me love again. She said she saw her in her dreams and that’s why she was comfortable around her,” I confessed.

“Damn, that’s deep. What you think?” he asked.

Before I could respond, I fished my ringing phone out of my pocket. When I looked at it, I saw it was Lu's sister, Jalissa, calling. My heart rate picked up immediately.

"Wassup, Lissa?" I answered.

Her sobs told me everything I needed to know, so there was nothing to be said.

"I'm on the way." I got up and didn't have to say anything to my brother because he was following suit. It felt like I was floating as I got in my truck and speed out of the parking lot. I don't remember stopping at one traffic light and I don't even know if I stopped for any stop signs. I just had to get to the house before they took her body away from me.

When I pulled up to the house, Haze was right behind me, along with our parents. I went straight inside and into the guest room, where I found Teresa and Jalissa on either side of Lu, each holding her hand and crying. My feet were stuck. I couldn't move. Even though I was prepared for this day, who can really be prepared for the death of a loved one? Watching her mother and sister cry over her lifeless body took a toll on me and I snapped.

"Fuuuck!" I punched the wall repeatedly.

"Rock! Bro, chill!" I heard Haze's voice, but I was in a zone. I was fucking hurt. My heart was shattered and there was no way that I could repair it.

"Daddy!" Hearing my daughter's cries broke me out of my trance. She was sitting in the chair beside her aunt and had tears running down her face. I'm positive she didn't realize what was going on, but because of the way I just acted, she was more than likely scared.

"Get yourself together, son. You still have to be strong for your daughter," my father

said.

“I called the nurse,” my mother informed.

“And Knas ’nem on the way to pick her up,” Haze reported.

I couldn’t respond. What was I supposed to say?

I slowly walked over to her bed and Jalissa got up so that I could sit closer to her. Picking my baby up and sitting her in my lap, I grabbed Lu’s hand and kissed it.

“I know you were leaving us, but damn. I needed you to fight a little longer, Lu. What am I supposed to do without you?” I cried. “What is Peace supposed to do without you? She needs you, baby. I need you,” I cried. I didn’t give a fuck what nobody said. You could put the coldest gangster in a room with a bunch of killers and he won’t break a sweat. Put that same gangster in a room where his loved one lies lifeless and watch how fast he’s broken down to his knees.

I don’t know how long I sat there and cried. Peace eventually fell asleep in my arms, but I couldn’t move myself to lay her down.

“Baby, the men from the funeral home are here,” my mother came in to tell me. She took Peace from my arms and carried her upstairs to her room. I was relieved she was still asleep because I didn’t want her to see them carry her mother out covered in a sheet.

I looked up and saw Knasim and Knight walk through the door, along with two other men.

“Wassup, Rock. You have my condolences, brother. I know you already had her services planned out but don’t worry about the bill. We’ll cover it,” Knas stated.

“I can’t let y’all do that,” I protested.

“It’s already done,” he stated.

“Let us know if your or the family need anything. We got you,” Knight offered.

I only nodded because I was too focused on them unhooking Lu’s tubes to say anything. When they were about to lift her and place her on the gurney, I intervened.

“I got it,” was all I said before going to the bed and lifting her in my arms. I inhaled her scent as I held her tight. This would be the last time that I would be able to do this.

Once I placed her on the gurney, I kissed her lips before covering her body up with the white sheet. I followed closely behind them as they carried her outside. When they started loading into the back of the hearse, realization hit me that this was it. She was gone. I started moving toward the hearse. I had to get her. I wasn’t ready for her to leave me yet.

“Move,” I pushed the worker out of the way.

“Rakeem!” I heard my mother, but I couldn’t address her. I had to get Lu.

“Lu, get up, baby. Get up!” I yelled.

“We need to take her,” the other worker said as I tried to loosen the straps that were holding her down.

“Nigga, back the fuck up!” I barked.

“Bro, come on. Let them take her,” Haze reasoned.

“Nah. I need to take her back inside. She’ll be fine. I’ll get the doctor back over here and he’ll give her the medicine she needs, and she’ll be alright.” I tried convincing myself.

“Son.” That was my pops. “Come on, son. Let them do their job.” He and Haze were holding me back from going back into the truck.

Once I was out of the way, they shut the door and left. I struggled against my father and brother to get to Lu. All she needed was for me to make it better.

“Lu!” I cried out in agony.

“It’s okay, son. It’s okay.” My father soothed me as he embraced me.

This shit couldn’t be real, but I had to face it. This was now my reality. One without Lu in it.

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Lu’s body had been gone for a few hours now and I was still sitting in the room staring at the bed that she once occupied. I didn’t bother with moving until my brother came inside of the room to get me.

“Rock,” he called out. “I called Rue, and she’s about to pull up. She has Journei with her,” he explained.

I hadn’t reached out to her in a few days and, if I’m being honest, I didn’t know if I wanted to be around her now. I simply nodded and remained seated as he left back out of the room. I sat back in the recliner that was by the bed and closed my eyes. I couldn’t help the tears that fell from my eyes if I wanted to. I’ve been with Lu since I was twenty-one and she was nineteen. That’s five years of loving the same person.

How do I get over that so easily? Was that even possible?

I heard the room door open, but I didn't bother to open my eyes. Whoever it was would make their presence known. I felt someone kneel in front of me and my eyes shot open. Journei was kneeling in front of me, wiping the tears from my face.

"I'm sorry, bestie." Her voice croaked.

Just hearing her voice made me break down worse than I already was. I cried like a baby in her arms, and she let me. I have never felt so vulnerable in my life and this woman let me. The only other woman who allowed me to be in such a state besides my mother was Lucretia.

"I'm here with whatever you need, bestie. Just say the word," she offered.

Lifting my head off of her shoulder, I simply said, "Stay with me."

Hassan

It's been a few weeks since Lu's funeral and things are somewhat back to normal. Rock has been out of pocket and that's completely understandable. If I didn't do anything else, I had my brother's back. I stepped in and took care of the delinquent loans that we had out and had Ced and Art overlooking things at the yard. JaRue and Infiniti were still staying at my house, but I also took turns staying at her apartment too. Her bitch ass baby daddy hadn't been seen or heard from since he had those fuck ass papers delivered to her. I still wasn't putting anything past his ass, though. I needed to keep my girls safe. By keeping them safe, I had to make sure things were put in place so that they wouldn't have shit to worry about. I've been on the go all morning making sure that things were in place. I've been to the bank to add JaRue to all of my accounts and I was now at my lawyer's office to get the papers I had him to draft up. When I got home later, I would present her with all of this.

"I have everything that you asked for, Hassan. All you have to do is have her sign the places that are highlighted and I can get everything filed for you as soon as you get them back to me," my lawyer Eric informed.

"I appreciate this on such a short notice. I'll make sure that you're compensated for your time."

He nodded as he placed the paperwork back into the folder that it was in and handed it over to me. After ensuring me that I was set to go, I left his payment plus a little extra and headed by my brother's house. I hadn't seen much of him lately and I needed to put my eyes on him. Peace has been with our parents and even with me and JaRue some nights since he wasn't up to handling her full time yet. I sympathized

with him, but he needed to get it together for his daughter. I pulled up to his house, and I saw his truck parked out front. Letting myself inside, I searched the house until I found him in Lu's room, sitting in the recliner that was by her bed. He had a purple covered phone in his hand, and I knew it was hers.

“Wassup with you?” I asked, taking a seat in the empty chair. Since no one was here but us, I pulled a blunt out and lit it. I took a pull before I handed it to him. I could see the half empty Hennessy bottle on the table beside him and knew he was going through it. He took the blunt from my hand and took a pull of his own.

“Ain't shit. You straight?” he asked, not looking at me.

“Yeah, I'm good. Just left Eric and got the papers I needed Rue to sign and shit. I'll give 'em to her tonight.”

“That's wassup. I'm glad you found her. Make sure you take care of her, bro.” I knew he only said that because of the situation with him and Lu.

“You know it's not your fault, right?”

He looked at me.

“You know she told me not to shut Journei out? She wanted me to be with her?” he revealed.

“Have you talked to her?” I know he hadn't because I heard her talking to Rue about it. She knew how he was doing through me. I just wanted to see what he was going to say.

“Nah. I honestly don't know what to say after not saying shit to her at all. She would text to check on me and I ignored the shit. Now she doesn't call at all. I know she

sees Peace, because Ma told me. She said Peace loves her some bestie.” He chuckled because that’s the name she called Journei after hearing him say it. She called Rue, Rudy, and that shit was hilarious.

“Don’t punish her, bro. It’s not her fault, just like it’s not yours. Besides, when have you ever let Lu down?”

He gave me a look.

“This is different,” he protested.

“How? She asked you to promise her you’d do something, and you did. Doesn’t matter that the promise was to love again. That goes to show you how much she loved you. She wanted you to have that again. She didn’t want you to sit around in here mopping and shit. The fuck you going to tell Peace?” I hated to talk to my brother like that, but I would be a sorry ass brother if I didn’t put it in perspective for him this way.

“You’re right. You think she’ll talk to me?”

“You won’t know unless you ask. Get your ass in there and wash your nuts and call that damn girl. Lu didn’t deserve to leave us so young, but you’re still young and you don’t deserve to be alone. Call her.” I insisted.

He nodded, and I stayed with him a little longer before I left and went to talk to my parents. They found out the day Lu died that me and Rue were in a relationship and naturally assumed that she would be the one that I married. I told them that we would talk about it later, because that wasn’t the right time. I didn’t leave until Rock got his ass up and showered. When I got to my parents’ house, I was surprised to see my pops anywhere other than his office. I guess with him taking a step back; he had more time to do normal shit like sit and play with his granddaughter.

“What’s good, people?” I spoke as I walked in. When Peace saw me, she jumped out of my pops lap and ran full speed toward me.

“Uncle Hazie!” She hugged my neck tight as hell.

“Wassup, Princess Pea. You being good?” I asked.

“I good. Where Finny?”

Since she’s been around me and Rue, she got to spend time with Infiniti, and you couldn’t tell her that wasn’t her bestie too.

“She’s with her grandparents. I’ll come get you so you can play with her, okay?”

“Kay!”

She jumped out of my arms and went back to playing. I went to kiss my mother on the temple before dapping my pops up and taking a seat.

“What brings you by, son? Is everything okay?” my pops asked.

“Yeah. Everything is straight. I just came from checking on Rock,” I informed.

“He’s still in that room?” my mother asked.

“I made him go shower, so hopefully he doesn’t go back in there.”

My parents nodded.

“I came by to let y’all know that I’m moving forward with the marriage arrangement. I already asked Rue, and she accepted. She has some shit going on with her baby

daddy, and our marriage could help her with that, so it's a win-win for the both of us," I mentioned.

"What's going on with her daughter's father?" my mother asked.

"He's being an asshole. He doesn't do anything for Infiniti, but he wants to control Rue. That shit ain't happening on my watch. He's taking her to court for full custody because he found out about us," I revealed.

"That's awful and trifling," my mother input.

"The nigga even nineteen years older than her and lied about his age."

"So not only is the nigga a deadbeat, he's a pedophile?" my pops quizzed.

"Pretty much. She ain't got shit to worry about, though. I let her know I got her and Infiniti and she won't have to worry about that nigga taking her from her. She's been on edge because court is in a few days. That's one of the reasons I came by. I want y'all to come and show her that she has our full support."

"We'll be there, son. I'm proud of you for stepping and taking on this responsibility. Raising a family is a big step."

"I get it, Pops. I think I can handle it, though. I had a good example." I smirked.

After kicking it with my parents and niece a little longer, I decided to take my ass home. When I got there, she was out back with Journei.

"What y'all out here doing?" I asked as I walked toward them. I dropped a kiss on JaRue's lips before she could respond.

“Wassup, Journey?” I spoke once we broke our kiss.

“Hey, Haze. You seen or talked to your brother?” she asked.

“Yeah. I went by there earlier. Be looking for him to hit you up.”

“Mhmm,” she countered.

“Baby, I need to holla at you,” I told Rue.

“Y’all go ahead. I’m about to head home. Rue, call me later. Love you. See you later, Haze.”

While Rue walked Journey to the front door, I went into the living room and sat on the couch to wait for her. When she got back, I pulled her into my lap.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“Nothing’s wrong. I just wanted to run a few things by you.”

I leaned up and grabbed the envelope off of the coffee table and handed it to her.

“Open it.”

She looked at me skeptically.

“Why you looking like that?”

“The last time I opened an envelope, I was being subpoenaed to court,” she jested.

“I promise that’s not what this is. Open it.” I urged.

I watched as she opened the envelope and scan the documents. Inside, I had our marriage certificate that was dated back six months. Her name was added on all of my bank accounts, and I opened one for her and Infiniti. She had seven hundred and fifty thousand in hers, while Infiniti had two hundred and fifty thousand in hers. The documents stated she would get an additional million once she signed the papers and every year that we're married she'll get a deposit of one million dollars and Infiniti will get the same two hundred and fifty thousand as well. There was also a key to a brand new G-Wagon. I was tired of that little ass Altima she was driving.

"Hassan, what is all of this?" she croaked out.

"It's the beginning of our future, baby. It may not be ideal, but we can make it work. Because it's short notice, we won't have a wedding, but we can do that on our one-year anniversary if you want," I explained.

"You think we're going to last a year?" she asked.

"You giving up on me already?"

"No," she simpered.

"Alright then."

I kissed her and assured her everything would be fine. Fuck her baby daddy and his wife if they thought they would keep fucking with my wife and shit be sweet. That shit wasn't happening.

JaRue

It's been a few days since Hassan presented me with our marriage certificate, along with everything else. To say I was beyond taken aback is an understatement. Not only did he go out of his way to make sure that I was good, but Infiniti too, and for that I will always be grateful. I pulled up to my parents' house in my brand new G-Wagon that he gifted me all smiles. I knew they were going to be asking questions, and I had no choice now but to give them, especially since one of the gifts he gave me was rose gold marquise cut engagement ring with a matching band. He intended to give it to me the same day, but it wasn't ready until the next day. I have never seen a ring so beautiful in my life. He even got himself a matching band, but his was set in platinum.

I pulled up to my parents' house and got out and waited for them to come and open the door for me. My mother came to the door with Infiniti in her arms. While I reached for my baby, my mother was too busy looking around me to speak to me when I spoke back.

"JaRue, whose truck are you driving? She asked.

"Mine," I responded as I walked further inside.

"Yours?"

I was now inside and sitting down with Infiniti. She's been with my parents for the weekend, and I missed her little bad butt.

“Yes, mine. It was a gift from Hassan.”

“A gift? That’s an expensive gift from a boyfriend.” She speculated.

“Well, he’s not just my boyfriend. He’s my husband,” I blurted.

“Husband? What the hell, JaRue!”

When she said that, her eyes shot to my hand and she spotting my ring.

“What’s going on in here? Whose truck is that outside?” my father came in and asked.

“It’s your daughter’s,” she told. “A gift from her husband .”

“Her husband? What is your mother talking about, Rue?”

I explained everything that was going on and about how me and Hassan were married. By the time I was finished, both of them had blank expressions on their faces. I hated I told him not to come because I could really use the backup now.

“Look, I don’t like any of this, but I get it,” my father started.

“Rueben,” my mother cut in.

“Let me finish, Jay. I may not like it, and even though I know the type of things that family is into, I also know that he has to care about our daughter to go these lengths that we don’t lose our granddaughter. That alone earns him a fair chance in my book.”

“Thank you, Daddy.” I looked at my mother. “Ma?”

“Bring him to dinner after the hearing. Looks like I need to get to know my new son-in-law.” My mother held a smirk on her face, and I let go of the breath I was unintentionally holding. To say that I was relieved to have my parents back me up on this was a big deal for me. Now all I had to do was convince a judge.

I left my parents’ house and came home and began to finish the sides that I prepared for the pot roast in the crock pot. I left Hassan home, but he wasn’t there when I got back. By the time I was taking the macaroni out of the oven, he was walking through the garage door looking fine as hell. I washed and rebranded his hair last night and he was looking every bit of fine. He swaggered inside with a bouquet of sunflowers and roses in his hand and a smaller one that resembled mine. The way that he thought about Infiniti made my heart melt.

“Wassup, baby?” he greeted as he placed a kiss on my lips.

“Hey. I missed you,” I confessed.

“I missed you, too, love.”

“Me, Daddy!” Infiniti clapped with a huge grin. That caught me and Hassan both by surprise because she never called him daddy before. Granted, she didn’t know Keith, but I didn’t want him to think that I was forcing her on him.

“No, baby. That’s no-”

He cut me off.

“Wassup daddy baby? You want some love too?” Listening to Hassan talk to my baby and hearing her laugh as he kissed her little chubby cheeks had me crying like a baby. When he noticed, he pulled me in with his free arm.

“Stop all that crying. I told you I had the both of y’all and I meant that. If you’re my wife, then she’s my daughter. Ain’t that right, baby?” he asked Infiniti, and she started clapping and dancing, causing us laugh.

“She’s been around Peace’s bad ass too many times,” he joked.

While he played with Infiniti, I finished dinner and when we sat down to eat, he asked me about the visit with my parents.

“How did it go with your parents?” he asked, taking a pinch of collard greens to give Infiniti. She didn’t like vegetables, but for some reason, she would try certain things for him. I was surprised when she ate them.

“Good girl,” he praised, and she started clapping.

“You’re so good with her,” I complimented.

“I had enough practice with Peace, but you’re deflecting. How did things go today?” he asked again.

Taking a deep breath, I told him about the visit with my parents and by the end of my spiel; I expected him to be mad.

“That’s it?”

“Yeah, that’s it.”

“Baby, that’s not nothing. You over there looking like they’re ready to put my head on a chopping block. We’ll get together after the hearing tomorrow.”

“I’m scared,” I confessed.

“You have absolutely no reason to be scared. Everything will be fine. Trust me.” He placed a kiss on my lips and finished eating. Tomorrow would be here before I knew it, and I was dreading it.

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When Keith saw Hassan come into court with me and sit next to me, you could see the fire in his eyes and the heat radiating off of him. Journei stuck her tongue out at him and that made it worse. The icing on the cake, though, was Kari being there to witness Hassan escort me inside with his hand on the small of my back. Both of our parents were here and so was Rakeem. The children were at daycare. I asked Stephanie could Peace come just for the day, and she didn’t hesitate to allow it. The judge finally came inside, and Keith’s lawyer started his drawn out opening statement.

“Your Honor, My client, Mr. Bryers, is suing Ms. Malone for sole custody of their daughter, Infiniti Bryers. My client states that Ms. Malone doesn’t have the means to take care of the minor child. She resides in an unsafe neighborhood and only has a part-time job. Not only does Ms. Malone lack the capability to care for the child, but she is employed by a known cartel and her boyfriend is an associate of such. Mr. Bryers is seeking sole custody of the child, and he wants Ms. Malone to relinquish her rights to him and his wife.” I looked at Hassan when she said that because that wasn’t in the original paperwork.

“He can’t do that,” I whimpered.

“Shhh. Calm down, baby. Let Eric handle it.”

I tried to regulate my breathing as I shot Keith a menacing look. He returned my glare with a wink that made me want to throw up.

“Mr. Levey, do you have anything to say to say about these claims on the behalf of your client?” he asked Eric.

“I do, Your Honor.” He started flipping through his folder before he began speaking. “Your honor, all these claims against my client are false. She is very capable of taking care of her daughter. She’s been doing it without the help of Mr. Bryers since the child was born. I have sign affidavits from her daycare provider that state that Mrs. Ashby is the only parent that pays for daycare expenses. I have receipts and bank statements from both Mrs. Ashby and Mr. Bryers and there are no transactions to back up his statements, but my client has receipts showing purchases for a small child.”

“Mrs. Ashby? She’s not married!” Keith blurted out.

“Order!” The judge banged her gavel. “Continue counsel.”

“Thank you, Your Honor. Like I was saying, Mrs. Ashby has everything that she needs to take care of her child. She also has the help of her husband, his family and hers to continue to support them. Here are her bank statements and receipts.” He handed the bailiff the papers.

“Excuse me, Your Honor, but my client knew nothing of a marriage and lying under oath is punishable by contempt of court,” Keith’s lawyer argued.

“Marriage certificates are public information, but I have their marriage license right here, Your Honor.” He handed the certificate over. “And since they want to bring up lying, why not ask why Mr. Bryers lied about his age to a twenty-two-year-old young woman when he was already forty-one and married?” Eric smirked.

Keith’s lawyer’s face was red as fire.

“Also, since Mr. Bryers is a very well established thoracic surgeon, it should be more than fair that he contributes to the child’s well-being by paying Mrs. Ashby thirty-five percent of his salary monthly, retroactive to her birth.”

By the time Eric was done with Keith, you could see the anguish on his face, and I was eating it up.

“Oh, and I also have text messages between Mr. Bryers and Mrs. Ashby, and it clearly states that he won’t be doing anything for the child until Mrs. Ashby decides to start back sleeping with him. Most of those texts came after she was married to Mr. Ashby.”

I held my breath as the judge looked over all the evidence that was presented to her. It only took a few minutes before she began speaking again.

“Mr. Byers, stand up,” she instructed. “If I must say so myself, you are one of the sorriest excuses of a man that has ever graced my courtroom. Most men that come in here are in fact jealous, but you are jealous and vindictive. You have the means to take care of your child because the mother no longer wants to be manipulated by you? Then you seem to be upset that she has a man that’s willing to be there for her and your daughter since you refuse to.”

“I don’t need him to be there for my daughter,” he interrupted.

“Oh, but you do. That child lives with that man.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“How would you when you’re only concerned about what Mrs. Ashby is doing?”

“Your Honor, I didn’t even know she married this man. How can the court let him

around my child?”

“The same way you expected us to allow her around your wife that Mrs. Ashby didn’t know about.”

She looked through the papers again.

“According to these statements, your annual salary is around nine hundred thousand dollars. Thirty-five percent of that is roughly twenty-four thousand, five hundred dollars. That’s what you will be paying in child support to Mrs. Ashby monthly, along with a lump sum of six hundred thousand for back child support.”

“Are you serious? If she’s married, she doesn’t need that kind of money!” his stupid ass yelled.

“Do you hear yourself, Mr. Bryers? The money is not for the mother, it’s for the child. And just because you have that type of attitude, I’m granting Mrs. Ashby full custody with a later date to discuss visitation. Case dismissed.”

She banged her gavel and all I could do was cry.

“I told you that you had nothing to worry about.” Hassan kissed me.

We were walking out of the courtroom and as soon as we got outside, Kari ran up in our face.

“You really went and married this bitch, Haze? After all we’ve been through? You do me like this?” she screamed, making a fool of herself.

“Girl, stop all that damn yelling out here like you crazy. It’s clear y’all ain’t have no damn home training,” Journei snapped.

Keith came barging toward us, but the sound of Hassan taking his gun off of safety stopped him in his tracks.

“Take another fucking step and you’ll be patching up your own chest,” Hassan seethed.

All Keith did was stare. He knew to back down. Anybody that pulled out a gun outside of a courthouse didn’t care about shit.

We all watched as Keith left with Kari and Cheryl in tow.

“Y’all ready to celebrate?” he asked with a wide smile.

“Thank you,” I simpered.

“You got it.”

Rakeem

Haze took everyone out to dinner after the court hearing to celebrate. After everything was over, I asked Journei to come home with me, and I was honestly surprised she agreed. My parents picked up both of the girls, so we had some time to ourselves. I've been listening to my brother and mother over the past couple of weeks for getting on me about the way I was ignoring Journei and how Lu wouldn't want this. It took for Lu to come to me in a dream and curse my ass out like she always did for me to get my act together. So here we were now, sitting in my living room in an awkward silence. I knew I needed to say something, or she'd walk her ass out of her.

"I'm sorry," I blurted.

She looked up at me.

"I'm sorry for shutting you out. That was fucked up on my part and I can be man enough to admit that. I didn't know how to stay loyal to Lu and handle my feelings for you at the same time. Shutting you out was definitely not the route to take, but it was the only thing I knew how to do," I confessed.

"You know she told me that she saw me in her dreams?" she asked.

"She told you that?"

"She did. She told me to be patient with you, because it would take a minute for you to come to terms with loving someone else. I told her that we were just friends, but she told me she knew better. She said she heard you talking to Haze about me. Y'all

thought she was sleeping. She said she heard you say that you think that you were falling in love with me,” she revealed.

Damn. I didn’t know she heard all of that.

“What did you say to that?” I asked.

“I told her I could give you as much time as you needed because you were my bestie.” She smiled.

Scooting closer to her, I leaned in and kissed her lips for the first time. “What if I want to be more than your bestie?” I asked.

“Then you would have to show me.”

That was all I needed to hear before I carried her upstairs and into my room. I had long ago had the room remodeled and replaced the furniture. I knew I wouldn’t be able to stomach having reminders of Lu in here, and I’m glad I did. When I laid her down on the bed, I took a moment to take in all of her beauty. Taking my time, explored her mouth with my tongue and let my hands run wild over her thick frame. She still had on the button-up shirt that she wore to court, so it was easy to loosen it and slid it off of her shoulders. I reached for the button on her slacks and undid them right before I slipped them over her thick ass hips. The way her pussy was staring at me through the thin fabric of her panties, I couldn’t wait another minute before I tasted it. I wasted no time snatching them off and invading her lower lips with my tongue.

“Ooh shit!” she whimpered, as she grabbed the back of my head.

As I savored the taste of her, she wound her hips into my face, and I enjoyed every minute of it. I haven’t eaten pussy in so long; I wanted to relish in this moment, but I

also wanted to feel the inside of her. It's been a little over a year and now that I was at this point, I couldn't wait another second. To hurry the process along, I inserted two fingers inside of her and went in for the kill. I sucked her so savagely her orgasm ripped through her, so forcefully that her hip levitated off of the bed, but I never let up until I knew she was done. When her hips returned to the bed, I detached myself from her and sat up. I have never seen her look so beautiful as she did at this moment. Her eyes never left mine as I discarded my clothes and hovered over her body. The eye contact was crazy and for some reason, I couldn't take the shit. It was like she was boring into my soul and I don't know if I could handle knowing what she saw just yet. Leaning forward, I kissed her passionately as I guided my dick inside of her.

"Shit, girl," I groaned as I placed my face in the crook of her neck. I couldn't move if I wanted to. I needed to get my bearings together because I wasn't expecting her pussy to be this damn tight and so fucking wet. Once the urge to cum subsided, I started to slow stroke her.

"Rakeem," she whined my name. That prompted me to look at her. She had the sexiest sex face displayed. The shit was sucking me in. Placing her leg in the crook of my arm, I stroked her intently as I peppered kisses anywhere they would land. My mission was to let her know that she wasn't just a fuck to me. I was letting my dick express what I was scared to. With each stroke, she whimpered a little more, and that shit sounded lovely.

"Baby...oh...gawd," she cried.

"Wassup, baby? Hmm?" I countered, never missing a beat.

"Oh, my gawd! I love you," she declared as she rained down on me.

My movements stopped. Did she just say that she loved me? Did she mean it?

“You mean that shit, shorty?” I asked.

Through labored breaths, she responded, “I do.”

It was like that’s what my mind and body needed to hear, because the way I made love to this damn girl before I fucked the absolute shit out of her was insane. I don’t know if it was because I hadn’t had sex in a while or the fact that I loved this girl too but the nut that came from my body damn near paralyzed my ass and had it did, I wouldn’t be mad one bit.

We were now lying in the bed after another round in the shower. Journey was lying on my chest as I stared at the ceiling. This shit felt right, and I didn’t feel guilty like I thought I would.

“Bestie,” I called her name.

She giggled because I swore I didn’t like that name for shit.

“Hmm?”

“I love you too,” I confessed.

She lifted her head and peered into my eyes with her sleepy ones.

“I know it may seem fast, but I feel like it’s right on time. All I ask is that you give me some grace and be patient with me. Let shit happen naturally and in its timing, and we’ll be good.”

She smiled before saying, “I can do that.”

I pulled her on top of me and brought her down to me for a kiss. I didn’t know how I

would handle being in love again, but I was willing to try it, and why not with the woman that saw me in my most vulnerable state and never turned her back on me.

???

It's been a few days since I made things official with Journei and I was headed to the yard with Haze. It was collection day and since I was in a good ass mood, I might let a muthafucka live. When I got there, this nigga was on the phone grinning like a girl. It had to be Rue on the phone. I never seen this nigga that happy before. When he saw me walk in, he chuckled his head at me before going back to his conversation. I took the opportunity to text Journei, even though I just hung up with her before I walked in.

Me: This nigga in here cheeing hard as fuck while he's talking to sis (laughing emoji)

Bestie: You should see her. I think it's cute though (blushing emoji)

Me: I'm happy for my brother. Sis a good one.

Bestie: Yeah, I'm happy my girl finally got rid of Keith's AARP ass.

That caused me to burst out laughing because this damn girl said anything that came to her mind.

"Damn, nigga. What's so funny?" Haze asked. I looked up, and he was finally off of the phone.

"Damn, you nosy. Did I disturb your call when I walked in?" I smirked before texting Journei back.

Me: Baby, let me holla at this nigga. I'll hit you up when I leave here.

Bestie: Okay. I love you (white heart emoji)

Me: I love you too, shorty.

I put my phone back in my lap and looked up at my brother, who still had that stupid look on his face.

"You look good and refreshed," he observed.

"I could say the same thing about you," I countered. "But nah, Journei and I agreed to take things slow."

"Word? That's wassup. She's good for you."

"Yeah, she is. I didn't think I could or would love somebody else so soon, but here we are," I confessed.

"Don't I know it."

That made me give him a look.

"Wait. You love Rue?"

He looked at me with that dumb ass look on his face.

"Nigga, you think I would be doing all of this shit if I wouldn't? I've purchased a damn G-Wagon, a wedding ring, new wardrobe for her and my baby girl on top of lacing her bank account after adding her to all of mine. So, to answer your question, yeah, I love her little ass. Infiniti too." I was proud and happy for my brother. Shit, it

looks like we were both in love at the same time and that's a first. He could barely be around Kari long before he was ready to get rid of her ass.

"I love that for you, nigga." He laughed.

"You been around Journei's ass too long." We laughed.

Let's go get this money so I can go chill with my wife and kid.

It was nothing left to discuss. We had the women in our lives that we wanted, and the shit was great. As we left the office, I looked up toward the sky before getting inside of my truck and said, "thank you."

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

JaRue

We were a little busy at work today, so I had to take a late lunch. I called Journei to join me so that we could catch up. With everything that has been going on, it's like we haven't spent much time together. We decided on our favorite spot, Roasters. I always loved the view out here. I was on the phone with Hassan when she walked up. She had a glow radiating off of her, and I couldn't wait to ask her about it.

"Journei just walked up. Let me go talk to her," I said to Hassan.

"Damn, baby. You just going to brush me off like that?" he feigned hurt.

"Don't be like that. You'll have me all to yourself later." I reasoned.

"I think I like that better. I'll hit you up later."

"Okay."

We hung up, and Journei was staring at me, with a smile covering her entire face.

"What?"

"Love looks good on you, friend. I love that for you," she announced.

"Love? Me? What about you? You came in here glowing and shit. What's that all about?" I pried.

She blushed.

“Spill it, bitch.” I took a sip of my tea. I wish it was something stronger, but I had to go back to work, so this would have to do.

“After we left dinner, I went to Rock’s house, and we had a talk. He apologized for how he brushed me off after Lu died. Even though I understood, I thought we were better than that. We talked about it. We had sex and admitted that we loved each other.” She shrugged.

“Wait. Y’all had sex? Was it good? Didn’t you say he hadn’t had sex in over a year? Was it quick? Hurry up and answer, bitch. Shit.” She was taking too long to respond and while I needed all the details.

“Can you let me answer one question first before you ask another one? Damn.” She playfully rolled her eyes. “But yes, we had sex, and it was off the charts, bitch. That man made love to me so good that the dick had me confessing my love. Then he turned around and fucked me like he hated me. I was in heaven.” She fanned herself.

“Okay, Rock.”

“I think I scared him when I told him that I loved him because he didn’t respond right away, but after our second round, we were lying in the bed and he said it back.”

“So, what? Y’all in a relationship now?” I asked.

“We are. He asked me to be patient with him, though, and I agreed. I agreed that it’s a lot and soon, but you can’t put a time stamp on love.”

“You’re right about that,” I responded.

“You love Haze, don’t you?” she asked me.

Taking a deep breath, I replied, “I do.”

“So, what’s the problem?”

“What if he doesn’t feel the same?” I pondered.

“Bitch, I hate Keith for doing this to you. If you can’t tell that man loves you, then maybe you deserve to be with somebody like Keith who doesn’t give a fuck.” She snapped. “That man married you so that you could keep your daughter,” She explained.

“He also did it for himself, too.” I shrugged.

“Don’t make me slap you, Rue. Does Haze look like the type of man that can be made to do anything that he doesn’t want to do?”

Silence.

“Exactly. Not only did he marry you. He put things in place to make sure you and Finny are good. Granted, it’ll be good if he verbalizes it, but his actions are saying what his words can’t. He loves you, friend, and it’s okay if you love him. You deserve it.”

She was right. I needed to get out of my head, because Hassan hadn’t given me any indication that he didn’t love me. I guess I just needed to hear it. We paid for our food and got ready to leave. On the way out, I was stopped by none of than Kari and I guess the girl with her was her friend.

“You know he doesn’t love you, right? He’ll always be mine. I don’t know why he

married a ghetto bitch like you in the first place when I've been with him for years," she goaded.

"Girl, move." Journei shoved the girl.

"You've been that man's cum rag for years. Meanwhile, I have his last name, access to his money, house, cars and, most importantly, his dick. Don't approach me again because I won't be responsible for what my husband does to you if you do." I made sure to shoulder bump her on the way to my G-Wagon. I hit the locks on purpose and turned around to smirk at her. She would spit fire right now if she could.

"Oh, and tell Keith, don't make my husband pay him a visit. He needs to leave me the fuck alone." With that, I got in my truck and went back to work. I wasn't about to let Kari get under my skin today.

When I got back to work, Knight was coming back up front.

"Wassup, Rudy Rue?"

"Hey, Knight. I'm just coming back in from lunch. You need anything before I clock back in?" I asked.

"Yeah. You don't have to clock back in. As a matter of fact, this is your last day," he informed me. My heart sank to my feet.

"Wait? Are you firing me? Why? What I did I do?" I was on the verge of tears.

"Calm down. I'm not firing you-" I cut him off.

"Then what's going on?"

“Ask that nigga.” He pointed toward the door, and Hassan was walking in.

“Hassan, what’s going on?”

He sauntered over to me and kissed my lips, but I couldn’t reciprocate. I needed to know what was going on.

“Baby, calm down. You’re not being fired, but this is your last day. Look at it as a resignation,” he mentioned.

“What? Resignation?”

“Yeah. What I look like letting my wife be some receptionist?” he explained.

“Aye, watch that shit, nigga.” Knight butted in.

“But I like my job,” I whined.

“But you don’t need it. You have enough money in your account to cover your salary for a few years, so there’s no need for you to be working. You don’t have to worry about bills or anything else for as long as I have breath in my body. All I need is for you to give me all of you and I got you in return. Can you do that?”

I was speechless. This man really did love me, but I needed to actually hear it.

“Why, though?”

“Because I love you, shorty. That’s why.” I couldn’t stop the smile on my face if I wanted to.

“Aight. Y’all can take that shit to your house. Rue, I’ll have a severance package

deposited into your account shortly. And since this nigga acting like we didn't pay you well enough, it'll be well worth it. And we'll shoot you something for little mama's college fund." He smirked at Hassan.

"Shit, we appreciate it." We all laughed at Hassan's statement.

After I gathered my belongings, he loaded them into the back of his truck and followed me home. When we got inside, he pulled me into his arms and kissed me passionately.

"What was that for?" I asked, breathlessly.

"Because I love you, and I wanted you to feel that shit. I love you and Infiniti, and I promise until the day that I take my last breath and even after that, you will never have to worry about a single thing again. As long as it's within my reach, I'll make it happen. Even if I can't, I'll make a way."

I couldn't stop the tears now if I wanted to.

"Thank you," I voiced.

"For what, baby?"

"For loving me properly and accepting my child. For that alone, I'll always love you," I simpered.

"I wouldn't have it any other way."

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

JaRue

a year later...

Things have been beyond perfect since Hassan has entered me and Infiniti's life. He has been the perfect husband and father that we could ever ask for. That could be the reason why I was now six months pregnant with our son. That man couldn't keep his hands off of me and I didn't try to stop him. I missed working with The RCF, but I still got to see them since Hassan works so closely with them. All the women are so nice, and I appreciate them accepting me and Journei. Kim and Journei hit it off immediately because they were the only two that didn't have biological kids, and they had matching non-filters.

Today was supposed to be the day of my baby shower, and it was in full swing. Journei along with my mother, her mother, and Hassan's threw us this elaborate baby shower at The Richmond Royale hotel. I've never been here, but I knew it was the latest hotel and owned by Kyandri. His wife Denver did all the decorations, and she brought my boxing theme to life, and I loved every bit of it. All of our families were in attendance and all the Richmonds. It was like we were all one big, happy family. It was time to for me to open gifts and I was down to the last one when Hassan stood up.

"Wait, you got one more," he said with a smile. "Where's my baby girl?" he asked for Infiniti.

"Here, Daddy!" she squealed with Peace and Knight's daughter following close behind.

“Here, baby. Give this to your mama.” He handed her an envelope, and she happily passed it over to me.

“You and these envelopes. You know they give me PTSD.” I joked.

“Woman, open up the envelope and stop fussing.”

Playfully rolling my eyes, I opened the envelope and pulled out a certificate. When I looked it over, it was a birth certificate with Infiniti’s name on it, but her last name was no longer Bryers. It was now Ashby. Looking up at Hassan with tears in my eyes, I couldn’t believe this man loved me and my daughter that much.

“Why did you do this?” I asked.

“Why wouldn’t I? She’s my daughter, so what did it look like for her to have another nigga’s last name. Fuck him. Now everyone in my home has the last name,” he boasted.

“How did you do it?” I asked.

“It was pretty easy seeing as though he hasn’t seen her or paid child support. All I had to do was to pay him a little visit and have him sign over his rights.” He shrugged.

“And he did it willingly?”

“It was either that or perform his own surgery, love.” He smirked.

Doing the best that I could, I got up and kissed my husband like we were the only ones in the room.

“Thank you,” I said.

“For what, love?”

“For giving me all of you.”

The End.