



Nobody But You (Love and Trust #1)

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Category: Urban

Description: If anyone knew that life could change instantly, it was Stephon Rockwell. His life goals and career trajectory all changed within the blink of an eye. He'd learned to be content with life no matter what was thrown his way, even if he had to do it alone. He preferred it that way because he couldn't trust what he couldn't control. That was until a chance encounter and proposition from a business associate led him to a beautiful, uncontrollable force.

Moving through life alone and with reckless abandon had been Jourdan Washington's driving force since learning the death of her father was premeditated. No man could be trusted without knowing who committed the act, especially not the ones in her line of work. That was until an encounter while on a job led her to a proposition with a business associate, who thrived on the control she was unwilling to give.

With Stephon and Jourdan caught in a struggle of wills and passion, can love exist without trust?

****This series is a spinoff. Not required, but highly recommended, get familiar with Stephon and Jourdan by reading the Love Secrets Series:**

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Stephon Rockwell

Past

We'd been driving for an hour before we took the exit off the interstate. A few left turns later, we were heading down a dark, winding road with no streetlights in sight. North Carolina was 'country' as hell. I don't think I would ever get used to seeing all the damn trees.

Driving in complete darkness and not being able to see shit fucked with me, so I sat up in my seat.

"Yo, you good, bro?" Devin asked.

"Where in the hell are we, D?"

"Fields Boro. Your city boy ass needs to relax," he said, chuckling before he turned the car down a gravel road. At the end, a run-down club or bar sat. I didn't know what in the hell the small building was by looking at it from the outside. The name that was placed over the door said Trap Room .

Around fifty cars were crowding inside the tiny dirt lot. Devin found a spot to park and then exited, going straight towards the trunk, with me following. He retrieved a book bag, closed it, and threw it over his shoulder. I followed slightly behind while we proceeded to head inside. As we walked, I glanced around, noting that there were no security cameras on the outside premises, nor was there any security at the door.

This place is on some bullshit, I see!

No security meant everyone in this motherfucker was strapped, and if you thought otherwise, you'd be a fool. We entered the dark, smoke-filled room lit only by a few fluorescent lights. Devin tapped me on the arm, pointing to the corner in the back, where we made our way and sat.

“What time is he supposed to be here? His ass better not be late,” I huffed out as I looked down at my watch after only a few minutes. I wasn't looking for an answer, and Devin didn't give one. He knew when I was getting pissed. It was almost midnight. I had no business being out, knowing I had a game tomorrow. I was supposed to be in bed, resting my mind and body for the beating it would surely take. Yet here I was in a dingy hole-in-the-wall club bar deep in some small ass city called Fields Boro.

Devin trusted me to have his back and gave me the same. My trust was a privilege that not many had. So, I didn't hesitate to ride out when he called. No questions asked. Besides, we were both cutthroat and ruthless. We'd been doing this together since we were eighteen. Devin Haven and his two brothers, Dorian or Ren, his blood brother, and Demitri Cain or Demi, his chosen brother, had been in the streets longer than that. They would usually be with us, but were at a different location tonight. They were off doing the same thing we were here to do. We were distributing, picking up, and dropping off. At the end of the month, the money would come up short for this location. So, Devin split us up because he wanted to handle it personally.

My game schedule didn't usually interfere with my extracurricular activities. Which meant I was risking it all. I was out way past the deemed team curfew of ten o'clock. The usual time was eleven, but we'd fucked up at practice this week, so our coach was on a rampage. I played football for Carolina University as the starting wide receiver. This was my third year playing. Coach knew I wasn't staying another year.

Fuck that; I was going to the league. It was time. The last thing I needed was to end up getting injured off some bullshit trick play coach had drawn up.

For as long as I could remember, I dreamed of making it pro regardless of the money. I'd told my roommate and teammate, Nick, to cover for me when Coach called for check-ins. I wasn't sure he could pull it off, but my money and loyalty were more important. For looking out, I would slide him a few bills if he didn't fuck it up. Coach Peterson didn't play that shit. It didn't matter if I was the star of the team. If I missed curfew, my ass would be riding the bench. I couldn't afford to do that, not with league recruiters set to be at today's game. After rechecking my watch, I saw it was indeed the next day, a little after twelve.

"You got somewhere you need to be, Steph? This is the second time your ass looked at that damn watch." Devin said, leaning into me to speak over the music's bass. I gave him a deadpan expression before I responded.

"Nigga you know my ass has a game this afternoon, so don't start with all that bossman shit."

"Damn, I forgot all about that! Why didn't you say anything?" He asked.

"Because we're family, and it's family over everything."

"Facts," he said, holding my gaze before dapping me up. I wouldn't leave him out here alone, even though I knew he could handle himself without any of us. So, here we were... wherever the fuck we were, sitting in the darkest corner of the already dark, dimly lit room. We'd been here for thirty minutes.

I hated walking into a place that I hadn't vetted. I liked to be the first in the room, waiting in situations like these, hence my irritation. I'd usually come in to ensure everything was solid before the three of them. However, when we arrived, it was

already jumping. My personality wouldn't allow me to relax, so I'd been coaching myself that I was good.

The smoke wafting around us thickened the air. It made seeing even more difficult, which added to my annoyance. We were facing the door, wearing all black and ski masks rolled into beanies on top of our heads. The music was bumping, and with the crowd of drunk bodies filling the makeshift dance floor, we faded to black. The others were scattered throughout, unknowing that we were even there. That was the way we wanted it. At least the music selection was on point, enough for me to catch the beat. Kirko Bangz's Drink in My Cup was playing .

Devin was heavy in the game and was distro to several East Coast states. He was known in the underworld as One; his brothers were Dorian, Two, and Demitri, Three. I went by Rock and stood in as their proxy. I acted as One, Two, or Three, depending on who couldn't be with the trio. We were on a mission to take over every fucking thing. We wanted to control it all.

On any typical day, I was simply Stephon or Steph. If we were going by Devin's appearance, you would never be able to tell he was deep in this shit. His ass was extra intelligent, and he wore these glasses that would fool you. He looked nerdy, to be honest. I chuckled at the thought.

He wasn't wearing his glasses tonight, though he'd replaced them with contacts. Either way, Devin's unassuming appearance was his ace of spades. He was merciless and had to be to have made it this far. The crazy part was that he and his brothers were incognito, like ghosts in the game. No one knew they were the men behind the curtain because they always wore masks. Even when they were corner boys. At the time, they didn't want their fathers to know they'd followed in their footsteps running the drug game. We all wore masks anytime business was conducted. No one had any idea who we were. We were doing it the right way.

If only there were a right in this world of wrong.

Devin tapping me on my shoulders brought me out of my thoughts.

“Yo, there they go right there,” he said as he pointed toward the door where two men had walked in. This man didn’t miss a fucking thing. I was better, though, especially when I knew I needed to be on my shit. I’d let him have it tonight.

“How you know that’s him? I can barely see shit. I forgot your ass got them damn telescopes in.”

“Fuck you, Steph,” he said, laughing. From what I understood, the owner’s son was the one we were meeting.

“Look at his ass walking in here parting bodies like he’s King Kong. But King Kong ain’t got shit on me!” Devin loudly spoke in a singsong voice.

“Yo, you deadass right now?” I laughed because he was referencing Denzel’s character from Training Day.

“Nah Yeah, ain’t that what y’all New York niggas say? Because this shit is about to be mine if he doesn’t have my money!” Devin said, holding his arms out and motioning around him. I laughed again.

“Chill, Yo. You don’t want this dirty old-ass shit. It smells like someone died in this motherfucker.” I said as I flicked a piece of wood off the table end that was sticking up.

“Not yet,” Devin said and laughed.

“We on that type of time tonight?”

“Facts,” he returned. We watched as they pushed through the club patrons, heading toward where we sat. They didn’t know we were there. We watched them pass before swiftly standing and heading down the dark hallway toward the back, where the offices were held. We didn’t have to worry about their surveillance. I didn’t expect to see any inside since there were none outside. I discreetly located only two cameras when we came in, and they weren’t positioned to see shit. As we stood outside the door, Devin nodded in my direction to be sure I was ready. I nodded in return, then we dropped our masks and barged into the small office.

Behind the desk, one of the guys who parted through the crowd jumped out of his seat at the loud thud from the door. Seeing that it was us, he immediately threw his hands up in defense. The other promptly sat on the sofa to my right of the desk with his hands also thrown up. We’d caught them off guard; their surprised expressions covered their faces. I stalled, then entered slightly behind One, gently closing the door. I immediately faded into the darkness after all their attention rested on him. Once there, I began to scan the room. I don’t think they realized that I had entered behind him.

“Shit,” I heard the guy behind the desk say as panic and worry set into his facial features. I was very observant, often taking inventory of everything in a room. That’s just how I was. If someone moved an inch, I would notice. He sat contemplating what bullshit he would let spew out of his mouth. For that reason alone, there was a possibility that we might not get what we came here for.

One stood before the desk, but he wasn’t saying a word. He didn’t need to because they knew why we were here. As One began to speak, I caught a noise. I looked down to see it was coming from the doorknob; it could barely be heard over the music. It slowly turned and opened. Then came the nose of the gun, and lastly, the toe of a boot. It was some stupid nigga; he had to be.

I quietly and quickly whipped out my weapons as he entered. I always carried two

under each arm in a holster under my jacket. When he came through the door, I cracked him on the back of the head with the left one, dropping him to his knees, letting off two to his back and one to the head. I hadn't even seen his face. It was also the moment that my presence in the room was revealed. On instinct, One drew his weapon on the man sitting at the desk; he otherwise hadn't flinched. As the man I'd just dropped descended backward, I jumped to miss him, falling back onto a set of filing cabinets in the corner. It rattled loudly, causing some of its contents to fall to the floor. For a second, his lifeless eyes transfixed on mine, startling me because they looked like mine. Then I saw myself there, dead on the floor. I quickly swiped my eyes with the back of my hand.

You're tripping, Rock!

"Fuck!" I yelled as dust particles filled the air around me.

"You good?" One asked.

"Yeah, man. That motherfucker almost fell into my damn knee. You know I can't have that shit. That would've made me knock all this dirty ass shit over," I said as I fanned the thick air with my left hand and finger still primed on the trigger. One chuckled, then returned to his questioning. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the man who sat in the chair shift in his seat. He thought the distraction gave him a chance, but my right hand was still pointed in his direction.

"Aye, I wouldn't do that if I were you," I calmly told him as I trained the weapon in my right hand directly between his eyes from where I stood. He immediately threw his hands up again so I could see them.

"Do you think I'm stupid, motherfucker? I knew when you walked through the front door of this shitty ass establishment that you were going to tell me you didn't have my money. I'm also guessing that you sent this dumb motherfucker in here to stage a

robbery so that you can lie to me and tell me that you didn't have my shit," One said, gesturing towards the man lying dead on the floor. Without being told. I approached the man sitting on the couch, motioning for him to stand by tapping my gun on the back of his head. He leaned forward to stand, and I walked him over to the safe behind the desk, urging him to empty it.

"All of it. I don't even want to see a smidgen of dust left. Mr. Clean that shit, you hear me," I said.

"A smidgen? I see you using your big words today. You know his dumb ass don't know what that means, right," One said, chuckling.

"Oh, he knows what the fuck it means because he doesn't wanna meet Smith. His boy over there already met Wesson."

He started unloading the safe that, in fact, had the money his boss claimed he didn't. I didn't understand why niggas always tried us. Once I was content with what he'd collected, I ushered the man back to his seat and then nodded to One. Then he put one in the head of the man behind the desk, causing his body to slump forward.

On the way out, One walked straight past the man I was still holding at gunpoint. Then he swiftly turned around and shot him in the knee. The man quickly grabbed it, writhing in pain. One squatted down, speaking directly in his face .

"You sure you want this shit? Because if you don't, decisions can be made."

"Ye...yeah. I'm gonna be sure I have your money on time." The nameless man stuttered through the pain I knew he was in.

"Smart man," Devin said as he removed the bookbag and threw it on his lap.

“Clean this shit up! Every smidgen! Let’s be out,” One said as I laughed. We exited the office and, eventually, the club. Once in the car, I asked the question plaguing my mind since I’d seen it happen.

“Yo D, why in the hell did you shoot that man in his knee like that?” I asked as I rubbed mine, shuddering at the thought of a knee injury.

“Oh, that,” he said casually.

“Those dumbass niggas almost messed up your damn knee. The shit pissed me off so...” He shrugged as if what he’d just said made perfect sense.

“Man, what?” I asked with a perplexed expression as we looked at each other. Then we both burst out laughing. I laid the seat back and tried to get some sleep on the hour-long ride back to campus. I could only hope this game went well.

The Game

“Fuck!” I yelled as I threw my helmet on the side of the locker and sat in my designated cubby. I grabbed my head in my hands, took a deep breath, and tried to push out my frustration. It was halftime, and we were in the locker room. The coach was lighting into our ass because we were down by two touchdowns. I couldn’t even be mad at his lashing because I had dropped two passes before the half. I was fucking up. I knew the NFL recruiters in attendance were side-eyeing my subpar performance.

“You ready, Steph?” My quarterback, Fisher, asked.

“Yeah, you know I stay ready,” I calmly answered, even though I could’ve ripped a cubby from the walls minutes ago. I’d always been overly confident, and that wasn’t about to change because of a few dropped passes. I knew I wouldn’t go back out

there on the same shit as before.

“Well, you’re not acting like it. Get your fucking head in the damn game. Don’t let that weak-ass corner get the step on you. Get the fuck open! It’s coming right to you.”

“I got you,” I said as I nodded to my QB. It wasn’t my head that wasn’t in the game...it was my body. I was tired as hell and playing sluggishly. I was slow off the play call, which caused me to be late getting to my spot on the field when running my routes.

I stood, picked up my discarded helmet, and joined the team as we chanted our mantra. Then, we left the locker room to return to the field. They were loud and amped, but I wasn’t because I wanted to center myself. Before I touched the green grass, I stopped, closed my eyes, and took a deep breath. I wanted to erase the first half from my memory.

You got this, Steph. Just do what you’ve been doing your whole life. Go out there and kill this shit. You’re pro-bound, baby; act like it !

I ran onto the field renewed, running right into the huddle. I listened to my QB call the play, and then we clapped hands to break. I lined up in front of the cornerback, who had my number all afternoon. I scanned the field to determine if any other player would try to step over and interfere with my route. I determined that no one out there could fuck with me. The whistle blew, and I flew out of my start, leaving him in the dust. I turned just in time to see the ball flying in the air right towards me. It dropped right over my shoulder perfectly. There was no one around me. I ran it straight into the end zone, getting my team one score closer to tying the game.

“Yeah, Steph, that’s how you do that shit!” I heard my QB yell my way. I didn’t even celebrate. I ran straight off the field and sat at the end of the bench, away from my teammate’s premature celebration. I hadn’t even removed my helmet. Some of them

walked by, tapping me on the head. They knew not to say shit to me because once I was in the zone, I didn't want any outside noise in my head. Even though the crowd was screaming as loudly as they could, I blocked them out, too.

After the defense effectively held them scoreless on their last set of downs. It was the offense's time to retake the field. Once again, I entered the huddle with my 'I run this shit' swagger. I listened as our QB called out the play call, and then I lined up. It was another play that would come directly to me.

"Yeah nigga, I bet your ass won't catch shit on me again. I guarantee that! "

"Your ass can't see me," I said to the same cornerback I'd caught fifty yards on. He was talking and trying to get in my head. It wasn't going to work. I knew I was better than him. He didn't stand a chance once I broke. He was too small and slow, so I avoided saying more. I stood taller than the average receiver at six feet four inches and weighed two hundred and twenty-four pounds. I would let my game do all the talking.

His coach shouldn't have put him on me, dumbass!

I broke out for the play and hit a juke move. He went down hard with grass flying from underneath his cleats. I'd lost his ass just like I knew I would. I was wide open once again. I looked back, realizing I had to slow up to catch the ball, so I did. As soon as it fell into my hands, I headed toward the end zone, holding the ball out as I jogged in. This time, I let the noise from the crowd filter in. I was hyped up, so I celebrated this time, spiking the ball and screaming at the top of my lungs.

"Let's. Fucking. Go!" I yelled. I'd caught two back-to-back touchdowns, redeeming myself from my first-half drops.

With my adrenaline pumping, the coach noticed and decided not to kick the field goal

for the extra point. He called a two-point conversion, leaving us on the field. I was winded, but I lined back up in the slot. I hated plays like this because the end zone would be packed with bodies, and there wouldn't be enough room to move around quickly.

We broke the play-call huddle, and I scrambled past all the defensive players, finding myself open in the center of the end zone. My QB saw me and threw the ball, but it was too high. So, I jumped to catch it. As I lifted into the air, I secured the ball in my grasp, but I didn't see the two linemen who had appeared underneath me.

"Ahhhhhhhh Shit!" I screamed out. I felt the moment my knee was crushed between the two shoulder pads of the linemen as they sandwiched me. Then, I felt the crack. Next, the burning pain of flesh ripping away from my body. The pain was so intense I blacked out.

CHAPTER 1

Jourdan Washington

Present

I glanced up to see the downtown skyline appear as I sat in the back of my ride-share. The driver was avidly trying to catch my attention by glancing over his shoulder, but I was too focused on my phone to care. I wanted to be sure of where it was taking me. I closely studied the dot as it moved on the tracking software. That dot represented a local councilman named Marcus Burks. I'd caught wind that he had some information I'd been searching for. I smiled because tonight, I would finally have him in my grasp.

Against the advice of my brother Brice and best friend Tayla Young, I continued my pursuit. Tayla had convinced my brother that I was on a dummy mission somewhere along the line. Brice wanted to move on from what brought me to this state of mind, but I couldn't. They'd since thought they were both my handlers. She'd started meddling in my personal life instead of the job she was supposed to be "handling." Nothing would or could stop me from carrying out this one. I no longer cared because this was personal. So, I'd spent the week prior following Burks, gathering intel and watching his every move. He never even realized I was there, as I had followed closely behind him for the last few days. I loved a good challenge, but he'd been an easy target because Burks was a creature of habit.

Every weekday, he left his downtown condo at six-thirty AM and jogged to the local coffee shop, Cypress Brew. He always ordered a large black coffee before going to

the Hard Rock Gym. Once there, he spent an hour working out, and I did the same alongside him. After I'd gotten enough information on his whereabouts, it had taken me only one day of mirroring his movements to place the tiny untraceable bug and tracking device on his belongings. A coat that I'd seen him wear every day since it'd gotten cold.

The downtown gym location had been full of patrons, but it made it much easier for me to complete the task. I blended in with the crowd seamlessly, completing two tasks: working out and planting that device. Staying in optimal shape was also a part of my job. He hadn't even realized I'd been beside him as he ran his two miles on the treadmill. His routine was unchanging, and the next day, when he headed to the gym, I bugged his apartment. I spent the following days listening to him from when he woke up in the morning until he went to bed at night.

Longest two days of my damn life !

The man oozed overconfidence. He was entertaining women when he wasn't posing as a councilman. Yeah, I said posing because he for sure didn't know how to do his damn job. It appeared the only thing he had going for himself was his dick, and he'd used it for each of those two days. They'd seemed pleased with his bedroom performance or were damn good at acting, but hey, so was he. The truth was that he was fine, and he knew it. He didn't entice me because he was a snake in the grass; I was about to mow. However, I would use his sexual appetite to my advantage.

After quickly realizing that he wouldn't say any pertinent information at his residence or on the phone, I decided I needed to see him in person. Earlier this week, he'd spoken of a business dinner he needed to attend tonight. So, I was headed to him and his location.

I glanced up to see that we were getting off the downtown exit. Since I'd been in North Carolina, I'd often worked downtown when I wasn't doing my other job. I was

a freelance graphic and digital designer. I specialized in web design and illustration, frequently acting as a one-stop shop for new businesses and established ones that needed rebranding. How I still managed to get my degree in graphic design from SoCal University was a testament because, at the time, my life had changed drastically. Nonetheless, it was easy work, and downtown was bustling with work opportunities.

In my attempt to visually verify that we were getting closer, I unintentionally caught the eye of my driver. Then his ass rounded the curve too fast, skirting off the exit. My phone went flying under the seat. As I leaned down to get it, I was jolted forward with my face hitting the back of the leather headrest. He'd hit a pothole while looking at me instead of the road. I finally sat back to see my damn face looking back at me because the little makeup I had on was on the back of the leather seat. I wasn't wearing the usual heavy makeup and contouring I wore when I handled things like this, but I'll be damned if his ass didn't mess up my light beat.

"Look here, Baby. You are hitting them corners too got damn fast; you need to slow this motherfucker down." I sternly spoke.

This man cannot drive. He got me in here acting like Pinky from Next Friday.

"Damn, my bad, sweetheart. Are you from around here? You don't look like you're from around here because you're fine as hell," the driver stated. If I had to guess, he was in his early twenties. I met his eyes in the rearview mirror again. He smiled, and I gave him a hardened stare and an endearing eye roll.

The gall! He is cute, though!

He was flirting, and I couldn't resist playing the game of cat and mouse. It was a force of habit that had grown into entertainment for me. However, the fact remained that he was a cute puppy, and I was a Pitbull in a skirt. As I was about to spew the

lies, I would tell him my phone pinged, alerting me that I was three blocks from the councilman's location. His movement had finally stopped.

Damn, maybe next time!

"I'm sorry. I just realized that I entered the wrong address." I spoke. The location I'd entered when I requested the ride was for a random downtown location. Just like that, I was back to business without getting the chance to play.

"I need you to let me out when you stop at the corner. I'll leave a nice tip for your inconvenience." He nodded, and I gave my award-winning smile as he pulled to the red light to let me out.

"Thank you!" I said, winking.

"Damn, well, let me get your number then." I chuckled.

"I am not going to jail for you."

"How old do you think I am? Because I'm definitely old enough," he said as he scanned what he could of my body. His answer alone told me he was not old enough and younger than I'd initially thought.

There's not a chance in hell. I am not a cougar. You kinda are, though, JoJo. Tsk.

"If you ever see me again, sure," I said, finally closing the door. Part of the game was keeping their hope alive. I knew I would never see him again, so I returned to my task. As I began the walk to my destination, I tightened the sash on my pea coat. The buzz of downtown always surprised me because it was busy. So many people were out that I bumped several shoulders as I walked through.

I didn't expect NC to be so populated because Cypress was small. At least it was small to me because I was born and raised in LA. I wasn't even supposed to be here. It had been two years, and I still hadn't returned home except to visit Brice. He was all I had there, so I wasn't rushing to return. I'd come in for a job commissioned by a former business partner and never left. Something deep inside was telling me to stay here. So I did. It seemed like that hunch was finally paying off.

It was late Friday afternoon, and I'm guessing that most people had just left work and gone directly to happy hour. I didn't mind because blending in as much as possible was easier, considering I was taller than the average woman. As I continued to navigate through, I couldn't help the fumbling I was doing with this damn coat. I hated it. I never wore coats. They were bulky and restricted my movement. I barely wore jackets, opting for long sleeves when necessary.

I didn't mind the cold weather; I preferred it. There was something about the chill of the air that comforted me. I loved the feeling I got when goosebumps pricked my skin. Maybe it was the coldness of my heart that made me embrace it. However, today, it was necessary to help me blend in. So, I made sure it was secure. My phone alerted me one last time as I approached Burks' location. I'd arrived. Excitement filled my psyche as I approached where the doorman held the door open for me to enter. In all my darkness, I'd grown to love this part of the job.

"Hi, welcome to Porter's," the hostess greeted me as I walked into the steakhouse. Just as outside, the atmosphere inside was just as busy, and a hum filled the air from the patrons' evening conversations. I glanced around to see that nearly every table was occupied. I also estimated fifteen wait staff members as I glanced around.

Fucking perfect !

"Will you be dining alone? Or are you waiting for the rest of your party to arrive?"
The hostess asked.

“Alone. If seating is available, I prefer to sit at the bar.” I smiled, and she nodded, motioning for me to follow her. Walking through the restaurant, I noticed the ambiance was meant to be calm, accentuated by the dim lighting. It was everything but that tonight because the loud buzz of conversation filled the room. I strutted through the tables and kept my head and eyes low. I wasn’t here to be seen. I also didn’t want to be picked up by security cameras on the premises. I didn’t have time to cut them and barely had time to prepare.

“Thank you,” I said to the hostess as she returned to her post at the front door. As soon as she was out of sight, I looked for the bartender. The bar was large and rounded. It could hold about twenty patrons, and it was almost fully occupied. My eyes found him attending to a guest at the other end of the bar. Once I was sure he hadn’t seen me, I slipped towards the back of the restaurant where my tracker told me Burks was. I assumed he was in one of the private dining rooms.

I crept down the hallway confidently as if I were dining in this area. I stopped only when my tracker told me I’d arrived. He was in the room one door down from where I was standing. Being sure no one was near, I slowly opened the door I stood before. It was a supply closet. I stepped inside quickly, finding a light and shedding that bulky ass coat. Relief washed over me as it left my body. I took out the two syringes and Rohypnol pills I’d placed in the pockets, moving them to my skirt’s hidden waist pocket. Then threw the coat to the nearest corner. Now, all I needed to do was find a uniform. As I searched, I twisted my ponytail into a knot that rested in the middle of my head.

Shit, I need to find a server.

I heard faint talking at the door down from where I was hidden. I promptly slipped out and quietly closed the door before the other opened. I quickly slipped behind it, hiding myself from view. A young girl walked out with a look of contempt on her face.

Everything is going your way tonight, JoJo!

As the door slowly closed, I could see through the crack. I quickly confirmed that Burks was dining inside with four other men. At a glance, I noted the mayor and police chief. There were also two men whom I'd never seen before. I needed to find out who they were, but it would have to wait.

Good, there's no security, which is strange, given that the mayor is here. I'll have to be quick.

"Assholes," the waitress blew out. I quickly grabbed her from behind, muffling her mouth. She struggled against me before I restrained her enough to tilt her head to the side. I promptly grabbed and stuck one of the syringes into her neck. It was filled with ketamine and would knock her out for at least three hours. The other would be for Burks.

As she slumped, I dragged her dead weight to the same closet where I'd thrown my coat, propping her in the corner with it. I took off her uniform top, quickly putting it on and tucking it inside my skirt. Before fully opening the door, I peeped outside, ensuring the coast was clear, then headed back towards the private dining room.

Well, that was too damn easy!

Before entering, I removed one of the pills and the unused syringe and placed them in the sleeve opening of the cuff. It would be easier and less conspicuous to access them there. Then, I took one last look at the waitstaff uniform. I unbuttoned the first few buttons of the shirt and pushed the girls up for good measure. I usually work for hire, but this I would do for fucking free.

I want information. No, I need that information! Tonight, I will get it from him, dead or alive.

CHAPTER 2

Stephon

I was working tonight because I was short a man. One of my private security guards, Brody, called out due to a family emergency. He was supposed to be here, but I was taking his place. I'd been at Porter's Steakhouse for about thirty minutes, handling all the security aspects of the job my company had been hired to do.

After conducting a thorough inspection and sweep of the room, I placed a chair in the room's darkened corner. I wanted to be unseen and unheard. I refused to stand up for hours listening to five dumb motherfuckers talk business. I also couldn't sit long because I had a bum knee. So, I'd have to move around at some point, but until then, I wanted to be comfortable. I wasn't in the headspace tonight, so I hoped this meeting wouldn't be long.

The mayor, police chief, one of the councilmen, and some old nigga from NY named Julius Miller and his lackey were to be in attendance. I'd run checks on Miller, and nothing came up outside of him pushing weight back in the day. He'd moved from LA and settled in NY; he wasn't making any noise, nor was he a threat. His name barely popped up in my background check. The other three I was familiar with.

I glanced at my watch and checked the time. It was approaching seven o'clock, and I would need to meet the mayor outside to escort him in. One of my drivers had picked him up and alerted me that they were approaching. As I left, I did one last scan, locking the door behind me. I'd retrieved the key from the owner, who assured me it was the only one. I couldn't have anyone accessing that room before I returned.

The mayor hired my firm, Rockwell Security, tonight, and I was thorough. Before standing in for Brody, I'd also had my analyst run background checks on Porter's staff. I didn't trust a soul who would be in or out of this establishment. Not even the mayor. He was the worst of them all. Which is precisely why I didn't vote for that grimy motherfucker. I was more of a watch and guard from a distance kind of person, so this shit was vexing me.

As I walked back through Porter's Steakhouse, I saw it was packed. There weren't this many people here when I first arrived. I also took a mental inventory of the present waitstaff as I walked through. I'd requested a photo file of every employee working tonight when the background checks were run. Everything appeared to be in typical operation and secure.

Exiting to stand on the curb, I breathed deeply and exhaled, placing my hands in my pockets.

It's about to be a long fucking night !

Out of boredom, I started to people-watch. About a block away, I spotted a woman. What made her stand out was the fact that she was looking down at her body, aggressively tying the sash on her coat. It was strange because it was cold, but not as cold as she was making it seem. If she tied that shit any tighter, I was sure she'd cut off her circulation. She was tall for a woman and stood out over the crowd of people she was pushing through. I watched a little longer to see if she would raise her head because she was now looking down at her phone. There was also this long-ass ponytail billowing in the wind behind her.

More than enough to wrap around my fist .

How my mind had gone there, I couldn't tell you. Finally, I was graced with her face.

Damn!

She was beautiful. I didn't want to take my eyes off her, but before I could stare too long, the mayor's car had arrived at the curb. I waited for my driver to let him out and greeted him. Clearing my now parched throat to speak.

"Mr. Mayor," I acknowledged with a head nod.

"Rockwell?" He addressed me questioningly.

"Yes, Sir, Brody had a family emergency he needed to handle." He knew I didn't usually take jobs like these because I hated the shit. I'd told his ass so every time he requested me. He knew I was the best, so he'd always shoot his shot.

"Very well. Please give him my regards," he said as I escorted him to the hostess's booth, where she greeted him .

"Good evening, Mr. Mayor. Welcome to Porter's. Your party hasn't arrived. Would you like to wait for them?"

"No. Once they all arrive, send them back."

"As you wish, right this way, sir."

From what I've observed, the few times I've taken this job, the mayor had this thing about arriving early. He didn't like being the last person to enter a room. I agreed with him because I didn't like that shit either. I wanted to get there so early that you'd forget I was there, especially if we were going to be in a room full of people. This is why as soon as I unlocked the door to the private dining room, I took off my suit jacket and perched my big ass in the heavily shaded corner of the room in the chair I placed there. I probably should have stayed by the door, but I was quick on the draw.

A few moments later, the door opened, and the hostess brought in the rest of the mayor's dinner party. Once seated, a young waitress came in to take their drink orders. She was a cute little thing. She probably shouldn't have been chosen to wait in this room full of predators. She bounced around to each man, clenching her jaw to hold back her retorts as they made their advances and inappropriate comments. She seemed to be handling herself well. I'll admit she had some bite and hid her annoyance well.

I hated this part of the job, which required me to be idle for hours. This was busy work for me. It kept me occupied without actually doing anything. After only ten minutes, I was bored and didn't know how long I could sit, listening to them talk business. They were terrible at it. Neither of them had said one single thing that made fucking sense, legal or illegal. The mayor had forgotten I was even here, and his guests had no idea I ever was. I'm assuming that's why the conversation steered toward their illegal dealings.

I guess they're going to get right to it then.

"Have you heard anything about who has taken over for One, Two, and Three? Do we know if they're confirmed dead?" Miller asked the police chief. I quietly sat up from my slouch to give this conversation my undivided attention. One, Two, and Three were mythical in the streets and underworld drug realm. Hearsay was that they supposedly distributed drugs for the cartel throughout the entire US. Rumor has it that they'd been killed by The Cartel and replaced with new leadership. At least, that's what the streets were saying. Working in this line of work with a bunch of slimy ass snakes like these meant I'd heard it all.

"No, it's been two years, and I haven't heard a fucking thing." The chief answered.

That checks out. Police never know shit but what they fabricate.

“I may have heard something about that. Let me get in touch with my guy.” The councilman said. His name was Burks.

“Why in the hell haven’t you said anything before now?” Miller said.

“I didn't know you needed any information on them. However, it’s going to cost you,” Burks responded.

“Well, I need for you and your men to put your ears to the damn streets and figure it the hell out. I need some fucking answers. It’s...” Before he could continue his conversation, the door opened again. It was her. The beautiful woman I’d seen walking towards Porter’s. She was now in here acting like a damn server. She’d donned a waitstaff uniform. Her hair, which was previously hanging, had been pinned up. She looked as if her beautiful ass really worked here.

“I’m sorry, gentlemen, the last waitress had something come up. I’ll be taking over for her for the night,” she said with her sultry voice. It was alluring and commanding. So much so that it made my dick jump. I heard the groans and damns under the breaths of every man at that table. That shit unexpectedly pissed me off. Hell, I was letting off a few under my breath my damn self. I knew where their minds had gone because mine was, too. I immediately had murder on my mind. She wasn’t mine, though, even if I wanted her to be. Shorty was a bad motherfucker, even with the smudged makeup she was wearing.

Why in the hell is her makeup smudged?

As she took out a notepad and scribbled each man’s request, I had three thoughts. The first was the same as earlier.

Damn!

Not only was she beautiful, with flawless sepia-toned brown skin, but she was also sexy as hell. That damn coat she had on earlier was hiding a slim, thick Coke bottle body out of this world. Starting at her feet, I scanned her body. She was standing tall in sky-high stilettos. I knew no server would ever come to work a shift with them because she wasn't...a waitress. I'd be damned if they weren't giving me erotic thoughts on top of my first three. The second was...

Who in the hell is she?

I needed to know for more reasons than the obvious. Something in the back of my mind told me that I knew her or had seen her somewhere. I was immensely attracted to her. As I stared, I was committing everything about her to memory. Her long, natural hair had been pinned up since I saw her outside. Her smooth skin. The pout in her lips, the definition in her cheekbones, and deep-set brown eyes. Eyes that held me captive. Her presence was awakening both the sleeping beasts in me. My last thought was that...

I don't give a fuck how beautiful and sexy she is, she better not be on no bullshit, or she would meet my twins, Smith and Wesson. Maybe?

Who was I kidding? I didn't harm women or children. I was, however, intrigued. With that curiosity, I decided to make my presence known. With my jacket off, she would see the two guns under each of my arms in my shoulder holster. I stood to head over to the bar. Once I fully entered the light, her eyes widened and were fixed on me. My fucking heart stopped. I wanted to fuck with her, so I did.

"Beautiful, I think you have a...what in the hell is that...is that a spider?" I said, squinting and leaning in to get a better look.

"Oh shit, I think it's your eyelash." Her hand immediately went to her eye, nearly smacking it and pulling off the lash. Then her hand traveled to rest on her chest as she

looked at me. It was rising and falling in rapid succession. I had startled her. Her expression morphed into a scowl, but she quickly schooled it. I chuckled at her current state. I continued studying her as I found a bottle of whiskey and a glass, then poured myself two fingers before leaning over the bar. As she kept meeting my gaze, I noticed that she wasn't scared that I was there. She was pissed.

Interesting!

She continued with her act, and after taking their orders, she told them a server would bring their meals shortly. I waited for her return, but another waitress had come in, one I was sure was employed by Porter's.

What was she here for, or who?

Those thoughts plagued my mind. My expression now mirrored the pissed one she wore because once my presence was established in the room by the mayor, their conversation about One, Two, and Three ceased. I wasn't a nosey nigga by any means; I just liked to know shit. That conversation seemed like some shit I needed to know. The questions that needed answers were quickly piling up. I sat, once again, idle because the excitement had passed. I had this fucked up feeling that my life was about to change.

I don't know if this is going to be good or bad.

CHAPTER 3

Stephon

I was sitting in my office, twirling a pen between my fingers. I sat there staring at a picture of myself in a University of Carolina football uniform. I'd just gone up to catch a ball over a defensive player. Sighing, I finally dropped the pen and reached my hands up to cradle my head, running them through my curls. My life has gone through many changes. The most recent started with a simple conversation that filled my mind.

“You sure you want this shit, Rock? Because once we’re out, we’re out. Everything we had that’s connected to this shit, we’re done with it,” One said as he waited for my response.

“Aye, man, we’re serious. You won't be able to call us for shit because we are not answering any calls that aren’t about HCS. You feel me?” That was Three speaking. HCS was Haven Computer Sciences. It was their powerhouse tech company that they’d started once they had taken over drug distribution for the entire US.

“That’s fucking facts,” One spoke again .

“I got it. One, you should know, with how long we've been rocking. The game is the game, and this shit is a well-oiled machine. I don't plan to make any noise. My presence will be felt but never seen or heard.” I answered confidently.

I often thought about the day and remembered everything that was said word for

word. It had been two years since Devin passed the reins to Brice Washington and me. Devin and his brothers had begun to start families and wanted out of this lifestyle. I didn't blame them because this was a dangerous game. To appease The Cartel, One, Two, and Three had to die. At least the namesakes and legend did, but they were alive and well.

I handled the East Coast, while Brice, who went by Ice, dealt with the West. No one knew the extent of Devin and my friendship. He'd purposely kept it close to the chest. Because of that, I'd had some trying times and doubts from his brothers. However, we were now the new mythical masked beings who ran everything. Ultimately, it all went through me, and Devin had put me there. I was number one, and the transition had been easy.

I met Devin Haven at our first-year orientation. I want to say that we were best friends if niggas even called each other that. Our circumstances had evolved us into more of a brotherly role. He was family, so he hadn't hesitated to hand over his empire to me. The fact that we'd even held a conversation back then still baffled me because we were both two intimidating motherfuckers who didn't talk much. We had many of the same quiet, introspective qualities that were off-putting to most, but for some reason, we clicked .

After a few minutes of conversation, I found out that they lived not too far from my mother, Adriana, and me in Cypress in a neighborhood called The Grove. We'd moved down from Brooklyn when I got my football scholarship at CU. There was no way I was leaving her there alone. She had no rebuttal or fight in the game either, considering the way she hurried up and started packing all our shit the day I told her I was committing to their football program.

We were pretty well off then, considering it was just my mother. My father, Sean Rockwell, passed when I was fifteen. I was Puerto Rican and Black, even though a lot of people thought I could pass for Mexican. Although I was an only child, my mother

made sure I never wanted anything, and we lived nicely. So, I always assumed we were living off the life insurance policy my father left behind. That was until we came to NC, and suddenly, she struggled to make ends meet in a cheaper locale. We were no strangers to living in the hood. My mother had started from humble beginnings in NY, too. She'd moved from Puerto Rico, holding her own until she met my father.

I guess insurance checks and her selling the house can only last so long.

Although my mother never asked me for help, she often tried to hide what she needed. I took notice and started to move differently to help her. I started selling. Devin saw the change in my demeanor. That's just how he was. He didn't miss shit. At least, he thought he didn't. I was surprised I was able to get it past him that long. After some time, he finally trusted me enough to let me in on his lifestyle. That shocked me because he didn't trust anyone outside his family then. I told my mother it was a work-study program the team had hooked me up with that worked around my football schedule. At the time, that was the only way. I lied because she was adamant about never selling drugs and how she hated people who did. She spoke so strongly about it, almost as if she had firsthand experience. Because of that, I would take how I truly amassed my riches to the grave when it came to her.

As I thought, I unconsciously rubbed my hand back and forth over my left knee before I caught myself.

"You sure you want this shit?" was the same question Devin had asked that motherfucker in that dingy-ass office that day. That scenario should have forewarned me because that game didn't go well. It was the day my football career ended. Ironically, it was the same knee that he'd almost injured. After blacking out on the field, I woke up in the hospital. I was surrounded by team doctors and medical staff telling me that I had suffered a torn meniscus, an ACL tear, a shattered knee that was also dislocated, and, to top it all off, a broken tibia.

Shit hadn't been the same since, and I damn sure wasn't running like I had in college. I knew when I woke up to that sterile hospital smell and bright fluorescent lights that it was all over. I wouldn't say it was all bad because I finished college and immersed myself in this lifestyle. It was a very dark time for me, though. Instead of putting my all back into rehab to get my dreams back on track, I funneled all my dread, despair, grief, and disappointment into my alter-ego .

I became a menace and was even more merciless than before. In my eyes, everyone I encountered in the streets was the sole reason I couldn't play football anymore. My wrath was despicable. I came off as quiet, but I was the deadliest man in the room. I'd spent most of my adult life encompassing as proxy the identities of three of the most notorious men in North America. That made me the worst of them because I was all three, although Devin would try and shoot my ass if he heard me say that shit.

Over the years, I started several businesses, including my security firm, Rockwell Security, and Hard Rock Gym. Only a few knew, but I also owned Cypress Brew. I had many gym and coffee shop locations throughout Cypress. All of which were highly lucrative. I for damn sure didn't want for a thing, and neither did my mother. She was living nicely up in a high-end neighborhood called Cypress Crest now. Once Devin moved his family, I moved her near them as well. I wasn't going to leave her there without her friends. I'd never told her about my alternative lifestyle, and I wouldn't. She also had no idea what Devin's father did. At least she never brought it up to me. Like I said, my involvement in all this shit, I would die with.

Light taps on my door brought me out of my musings. It was Brody. I'd known Brody Triggs since I moved to NC to attend college.

"Good looking out on that meeting the other night," Brody said.

"It ain't nothing, man; I wasn't doing shit anyway. It's not like I got a lil' link to go home to. "

“Aww, man, there you go with that New York shit.” I laughed because I’d lived in North Carolina longer than New York, but sometimes the accent and slang came out of nowhere.

“Did you get everything taken care of on the home front?”

“Oh yeah, yeah, you know I got that taken care of.” I sat quietly, studying him because he was being cryptic. Brody was a man who told all his business all the time. On many occasions, I’d stopped him from coming off with too much information. Some shit was left better unsaid. He’d also been on the other side of business since I’d taken over. He wasn’t new to the game and was my second on the East Coast, without Brice being closer. We called him Trigger, or Trig for short, when business was being handled. Bringing him on as a top was a no-brainer. I had a small circle, and they both worked in this office with masks ready. After he didn’t follow up with anything more, I figured I’d reach for it.

“Well, let me know if I can do anything to help,” I said.

“Actually, there is...” Before Brody could finish his statement, another knock was on my open door. It was Pierre, my cybersecurity analyst. He monitored the home security systems we offered exclusively to high-end clientele for this business. For the other business, he was a hacker. He was also what I liked to call a street manager. He was hyper-focused on his phone and hadn’t realized that he’d interrupted our conversation until he looked up.

“My bad, Steph, I, um, just sent over the footage from Porter’s that you asked for earlier. I also deleted it from Porter’s servers,” he said .

“Thanks, man,” I said, pulling up my email to confirm it was there.

“If you need help looking through it, just let me know what you’re looking for, and I

can help.”

“I got it, P. Good looking out.” He nodded and then turned to leave. Because I had started queueing up the video, Brody assumed that was also his dismissal.

“Steph, I’m gonna let you get to it. I gotta check on Jade.” I looked up from my computer and saw him standing to head out. So, I tipped my head to his exit.

What in the hell is going on? I really need to work on my trust issues.

These guys had been working for me for years, and now I was looking at everyone sideways. Brody was not telling me why he missed work, and this nigga P wanted to know what I was looking for. I could have retrieved the footage myself, but that’s what I was paying him for. Now, I was wondering if I should have just done it myself. My mind was trying to spiral.

Before reviewing the footage, I accessed Porter’s computer servers to ensure it was deleted. I also accessed the servers here and Pierre’s computer and deleted those as well.

Fucking paranoia.

After years of working with Devin, Dorien, and Demitri, I had picked up several skills. For Devin, that was a requirement. In this instance, I could thank Demitri for what I’d just done because he’d taught me how to hack. I didn’t want anyone else to see what I was looking for, or better yet, who. If she were a problem for me, I would handle it myself. It hadn’t escaped me the conversation that was being had just before she entered. I didn’t believe in coincidences; I just needed more information.

As I sat reviewing the footage from the restaurant. I reveled as she walked down the hallways unnoticed. When she couldn’t avoid being seen, she kept her head down out

of the camera's vision. I studied her as she expertly took down the waitress, dragging her to the storage closet and exiting wearing a waitstaff uniform. She stopped before entering the private dining room to push up her breasts, but she didn't need to do that. She would have gotten the attention of every man in the room, even if she was still wearing that damn coat she had also discarded in the closet. I reviewed the feed until she left Porter's. She hadn't made any mistakes to the naked eye. To me, she'd made two.

One I caught as I was scanning the video for the third time. Standing at the bar to see if she could locate the bartender, she held her head up a little too long. I could freeze frame her side profile enough to plug and scan inside my facial recognition software, Bio Scan. It was an underworld program similar to one used by the government, but better. Few had access, which included the original three tops and me. I'd invested millions into its creation with Devin. It had flaws because it didn't know everything, only what it could find online, and its tracking reach was US-based only. I didn't use it much and didn't feel the need to, but for this scenario, it was perfect. I put the partial face scan in the software and waited for it to return the results .

Her second mistake was that I'd seen her, and I never forgot a face, especially not one that fucking beautiful. Who was she there for? Was she working alone? If not, who sent her? What did she know?

More fucking questions that need answers.

The ding interrupted those questions, letting me know the software had rendered its results. I sat staring at a photo of the beauty I'd committed to memory.

What the fuck?

I knew he had a sister, but I'd never met her in the two years I'd been acquainted with the man. The need for introductions had never come up. She wasn't a part of this side

of the business, even though I knew she helped her brother from time to time. I'd only heard that she did through Demitri. He called her the muscle. Like ours, her identity was to remain anonymous, especially from underworld members. Devin felt I should accept and offer the same trust I gave him. However, this fucked me up. My face immediately balled up in disgust.

Jourdan Nichelle Washington. Code name: The Lioness. Gun for hire. Are Brice and his sister trying to take me out?

CHAPTER 4

Jourdan

I stormed into my office after finally making it home. I ripped the Porter's Steakhouse uniform from my body, watching the buttons fly across the room. As I continued in my fit of rage, the syringe and pills I'd placed there flew out when I'd ripped the sleeve over my wrist, along with that damn eyelash.

You have got to be kidding me!

That further increased my anger. I was pissed. I'd left Porter's without accomplishing a damn thing. I went in there on a mission and failed, and I never failed a mission.

That beautiful fucking bastard!

I knew that calling a man beautiful was unorthodox, but damnit, fine, wasn't strong enough for the feelings he provoked in me. It didn't help that while the sexiest man I'd ever seen stood before me, my faulty false eyelash had become the main character in my act, the irony of it all. I'd forgotten to fix my damn makeup. I wanted to scream and punch the air because I'd let that man see me frazzled. I'd never felt this way about a man; I couldn't trust them aside from my brother. They were all the same in my world. I'd witnessed men spending years weaseling their way into your lives. They'd gain your trust through a false sense of loyalty only to shoot you in the back... literally.

As I plopped down in my office chair, I pulled my hair out of the bun and scrunchie

to let it cascade around my face. It was plush, but not enough to ease the tension I felt. I teased my hair through my hands, grabbing the roots and tugging. I groaned and internally scolded myself. I should have gone with my first thought that security was there. I'd let my eagerness win because I would have been one step closer to my goal. This wasn't me; I was a trained killer, a gun for hire. I would typically have it all planned out and would have anticipated his presence, but tonight, I didn't. I was moving off my emotions.

When he stood, I was taken aback. He was tall, around six feet and four inches. His muscular build was accentuated by smooth, tawny brown skin, which I assumed was covered in deep black ink. I could tell by the tattoos on his neck underneath his white button-down shirt. The top buttons were undone, further teasing my vision of what was underneath. Then there were those kissable lips surrounded by a close-cut but thick beard that led to his slick black hair, which held curly ringlets. I wanted to run my fingers through them.

Ugh!

It was his eyes that made me grab at my chest. I'd never had a man look at me that way. Even though he was teasing, he looked at me like he had all the answers to my questions or would do anything to help me find them. I couldn't control the damn goosebumps that appeared on every inch of my skin and the arousal that his gaze caused. Then he chuckled, and his ass had the nerve to have dimples. It immediately pissed me off. That, and I wouldn't be getting my answers from Burks, at least not tonight. Nonetheless, those eyes holding me captive also held amusement and danger. They told me that he wasn't about any bullshit, and I believed him.

Backing down from anyone, man or woman, would never cross my mind, but this man gave me pause. I didn't know why, but I would figure it out. I finally powered up my laptop, starting my investigation. I began with Porter's by hacking their database and pulling up their security feed. Which only took me a few minutes. Not

that a steakhouse needed top-notch security, but it had been child's play to crack.

What the hell?

There was nothing there. The computer server had been wiped clean; the only explanation was that he had beaten me to it.

Shit! Who in the hell is he? Ok, maybe he'll pull up in a quick internet search.

My fingers moved in rapid succession as I typed in local private security. As I scrolled down the list, one caught my attention: Rockwell Security. I clicked on the link to open the webpage. I'm not even sure how this entity garnered any business because the webpage was shitty.

I wonder if they'd let me fix it. Shit, don't get sidetracked, JoJo.

As I continued to peruse the site, I saw that Rockwell Security wasn't just a local firm; it was nationwide. Before I could click on the "about us" section, my cell phone rang; it was Tayla.

"Hello," I answered dryly.

"Eww, what in the hell has your panties all in a bunch?" I took a deep breath. I swear, Tay and Brice had a knack for calling when I was distressed. I took another deep breath to calm myself. I hadn't planned on telling her my business tonight, if ever.

"What's the deal, Jourdan? You know I will keep asking until you tell me anyway," she goaded. I didn't feel like fighting her on it.

"I failed a mission tonight," I huffed out.

“Ok, I didn’t know you’d taken on any jobs. I didn’t assign you any...” There was a long pause. She was waiting for me to tell her about it. Tayla grew up with me. Her family, much like mine, was into illegal activities. Her family consisted of her mother, Nina, who worked under my father. She’d since retired from the game, but Tayla picked up where she had left off. She didn’t handle the product like her mother had, but coordinated my gun hire contracts and occasionally took a few herself. Her money was made in espionage. I’d never met her father or even seen him. I’m not sure she had either. They didn’t talk about him; they never had. From what I understood, he wasn’t even there to sign her birth certificate. Tay wasn’t as deadly, but she knew the ins and outs of my lifestyle, my family's lifestyle, and what we did. She was the only person who knew everything my brother and I were into .

“It wasn’t a job per se, more like a personal undertaking,” I finally said.

“Jourdan, when will you let that go and come home?”

“I can’t. Something is telling me that I need to stay and that all the answers I’m looking for are here,” I rushed out.

“So, I’ve heard,” she sighed.

“Who is that? JoJo?” I heard my brother ask in the background. Then there was muffling before she came back clear on the line.

“When are you going to tell me about you and my brother? I really don’t give a damn who either of you are fucking even if it’s each other,” I said, exasperated with this conversation. Just as I thought now that the heat was on them, they didn’t have shit to say. So, I finally clicked on the drop-down menu and entered the ‘ about us’ page. There, he was pictured as the owner of Rockwell Security.

Stephon Rockwell.

“Hey, Tay, put my brother on the phone.” Before my brother spoke, I heard rustling.

“What’s the deal, JoJo?” He asked.

“Um, what’s your ‘ business ’ partner’s name again?” I knew his name; I’d heard it a million times. For some reason, I needed to listen to it again to confirm.

“It’s Stephon. You already know that, though, so why are you asking?”

“Brice, let me call you back.”

“Jourdan, think twice before you hang up on me!” He said right before I hung up, effectively ending the conversation. I knew he would call back, but I wouldn’t answer. Then, knowing my brother, he would be dropping in on me in the next few days because of it. Like I thought, my phone began to ring again before it stopped. Then, it rang again before my phone dinged, alerting me to a voicemail. We were all we had left and were as thick as thieves. Because of our lifestyle, my mother’s family had distanced themselves, and my father’s side, we didn’t know. I knew he wanted me back in California and would drag me back if he thought that I was risking my life out of his sight. I sat and let my fingers tap the desk rapidly before I stood and paced.

Of the two years my brother was named one of the tops by One, I’d never been around Stephon or Rock, as he was known in the underworld. I knew just enough information to help my brother out when needed, but never anything that would compromise my position there. I knew names and only a few faces by design.

Damnit, JoJo.

I’d been so consumed with the murder of my father that my inside line to everything Brice and the business hadn’t even been thought about since I left. I was supposed to be his secret right hand. I had taken on that role after my father died. According to

my father, I wasn't supposed to, but we had no one else. I made sure never to show my face because I was still the fucking Lioness.

Shit! I'm about to have a breakdown .

Regardless, I wouldn't have known if I were around him because they were always masked. I'd only met the three brothers unmasked when one of them, Dorien, had gotten shot. The next was when Demitri called me here to handle one of his associates, who was a woman. The only way that I had seen them was because they wanted me to. Otherwise, I would have been just as in the dark about them. Their hidden alters would forever remain hidden; they were just that fucking good. I'd never been introduced to any of the proxies, one of whom was Rock. I stopped pacing and headed to the kitchen; I desperately needed a glass of wine, maybe two.

Standing inside the refrigerator door, I pulled out the chilled bottle of Taylor Port, uncorked it, and turned it up. I stood at the island looking at the marble counters and black stainless-steel appliances that drew me into buying the house, and sighed. Even admiring my pride and joy didn't change how I felt. Finding out that Stephon Rockwell was the man in the private dining room made my stomach recoil. There was no way I could allow the attraction I felt for him to build. He couldn't be trusted. How was I to know that one day, he wouldn't try to take out my brother and me because he wanted sole control of the business? He was dangerous enough to do it, probably the most dangerous man I'd ever encountered. The stories of Rock around the underworld and what my brother had told me before confirmed that.

Those questions mirrored the same questions I needed answered concerning my father. A man like Rock, someone my family had trusted with unquestioned loyalty, had killed him seven years ago. Whoever they were had turned my fucking world upside down again and took him from me. I'd been searching for everyone involved ever since. Brice and Tayla had tried to convince me over the years that it wasn't that type of murder. It was just a part of the game, they said. I knew what a hit looked like

because my father had taught me how to conduct one. Tayla should have known too. My late father, Brian Washington, had taught us everything we knew.

CHAPTER 5

Jourdan

Past

I knew how to shoot a gun, several of them, due to the profession my father had chosen. I'd been shooting since I was a pre-teen. He'd made sure of it. I was also trained in martial arts. My brother and I both were. Because I'd already conquered those skills, my father skipped the basics and refresher course, going straight to his master's class on how to get away with murder.

This was the tenth day we'd followed Ahmad, one of my father's transporters. I was eating up the fact that he was showing me the ropes. My mother hated that he was and that I was spending so much time around my father and Brice. She thought I would spend all my time with her while I was home from college over summer break. However, I was a daddy's girl through and through. As we continued watching, I devoured the burger and fries from our favorite burger joint. We'd stopped because we knew where Ahmad was headed by now, so we had time. Every day I spent with my father, we'd sneak off to eat something greasy, hoping my mother wouldn't find out. Because I loved to see my daddy sweat, I wouldn't tell him about the ketchup he'd dropped on his shirt. I loved to watch their back-and-forth banter. I could only hope to have a relationship like theirs one day, filled with so much love.

In addition to being a loving father and husband, my father was the biggest drug dealer in LA, and Ahmad was skimming off the top. My job would be to eliminate him, but I had to learn how to first. I'd never killed anything before, let alone a

person. I wasn't even sure I could. For my family and father, I'd do it irrefutably.

My father wasn't a loud show of force. He was calculating, wanting to catch you in the act and have unquestioned proof that you'd wronged him. He wanted me to be able to do the same.

"Do you know why we've been following this buster for this long, Baby Girl?" My father asked.

"I'm guessing to catch him in the act," I replied.

"Don't guess, know," he said as his gaze caught my eye. Once he was sure he had my attention, he continued.

"Yes, to catch his ass in the act. Most importantly, I want to study him. See his routine and how he goes about his day. I want to know everything about this man. I want to know the most intricate details of his life. I need to know if he eats his burger with cheese, mustard, ketchup, lettuce, onions, and a few French fries on top."

"Daddy?" I asked as he looked at me with his most serious expression that matched mine. I knew Ahmad didn't eat that because that was how I'd just eaten the burger I'd scarfed down. I laughed hard. My father was never serious with me. We joked around like this all the time. He loved to keep his princess, as he called me, happy and laughing. He'd deemed us all a part of his royal family, labeling us as such. He eventually joined in on my laughing.

"I'm being serious, though, Baby Girl," he said as he sobered his laugh. I hadn't taken my eyes off Ahmad, who had exited his vehicle and entered the convenience store.

"He comes here every Wednesday at the same time. Why?" I spoke.

“Good job. My normal drop-off day is Wednesday at ten a.m. from random locations. Normally I would never have an exact time because it’s too predictable, not only for the fucking cops but for these young niggas that want the crown. I set this time up specifically for him. As you can see, he comes here right after to drop off what he skimmed from me. Then he comes back on Friday to pick up his money. My fucking money!” His voice rose in anger as he explained.

“The person he’s selling my product to works in that store.” I looked to my father to see how he could have gathered that much information.

“How do you know?” I asked as I focused on the store’s door to see when Ahmad would leave. It had been thirty minutes.

“You see, all this shit here is my jungle, and I’m the King. I wear the crown. I like to think of myself as a lion. I have a pride of motherfuckers that I trust to bring me back all the information I need. In essence, I have eyes everywhere. Do you understand? ”

“Yes, I understand.” I was listening, but wanted to know who was inside that store. I undid my seatbelt and reached for the handle to go find out.

“Where are you going?”

“Inside that store,” I returned.

“Not like that, you aren’t.” I gazed down, confused at my simple t-shirt, jeans, and sneakers, to see why I couldn’t go in.

“I just told you that I was the king of this jungle. They’d recognize you as soon as you walked through the door. You’re my lioness. The lioness is the hunter. I will teach you how to strategically stalk and hunt your prey until you have enough information to take them down. You’re beautiful and tall, like your mother. Too

beautiful, you'll stand out. There will come a time when you'll learn to use it to your advantage. I need you to learn to blend in. I don't want them to see you coming unless you want them to. Also, I want you to avoid your brother and his part in the business. Please don't ask questions; never go around when he's conducting it. It will always be our advantage if they don't know who you are, in case I need to send you after them," he said as I nodded in understanding.

"Most of your targets will be easy, but never underestimate anyone I send you after. They'll be bigger, stronger, and faster, but none of that shit will matter once I'm done with you." I nodded again as the door opened, and Ahmad walked out; he'd been inside for forty-two minutes. We watched as he got into his car and pulled away from the curb. Shortly after, my father did the same, following him .

Past- Four Months Later

"You come in here often? I would remember seeing someone as beautiful as you. I come here every night." The gangly white man I was sitting beside asked. His skin was pale, his face sunken in, and his eyes held a yellow jaundice that showed the years of his alcoholic habit. I was sure he'd been handsome at some point in his life. However, I wasn't a therapist, nor did I care what had driven him to the bottle. What I did care about was what that bottle had caused him to do.

"No, this is my first time." I smiled and fluttered my lashes. Lashes that were heavy with mascara and caked with heavy eye shadow. My entire face was exaggerated with a full face of makeup. With the added wig, I was unrecognizable. He took his glass, raising it to take another sip of the whiskey he'd constantly thrown back for the last hour. At twenty-one, I was of drinking age, but tonight, I needed a clear head, so I opted for a Coke to give off the appearance that it was a mixed drink.

"It must be my lucky night, then," he said as he raised his hand to twirl a strand of hair from the wig I was wearing around his thin finger. I cringed at the act, but I

didn't waver; I was there to seduce him. I crossed my legs, drawing his eyes to my exposed thighs in the short, body-hugging mini-dress I was wearing.

I had been following Trip Callahan for three weeks. I was there the night the state of California released him from prison, sitting in the shadows. Which led me to this bar every night to watch him. Trip was an old money trust fund baby who was a world-class fuck-up and took full advantage of his white privilege. After only three months inside, he'd somehow managed to be released after killing my mother by being drunk behind the wheel.

Callahan had found his way onto Ten, traveling one hundred twenty miles per hour before losing control and barreling into my mother's car. She'd lost her life on the way home from the hospital where she was a nurse, while he'd walked away with mere scratches. I sat in the back of the courtroom, hopeful, as the judge told him he would sit in jail until his arraignment. When his court date arrived, his lawyer had found a way to swindle his client out of being charged.

Money buys every fucking thing!

Because of my mother's death, what my father and I worked on never came to fruition. Our world was swiftly flipped upside down, and I found myself swimming in grief. We all did because she was our Queen, our everything. My father had become despondent, and my brother rarely came home at night. He threw himself into school and the streets even more than before. Each day without her felt heavy and dark. I finally let that darkness consume me, embracing the feeling that led me here to avenge her and kill Trip Callahan.

"Hey, do you want to get a room?" I asked seductively as I ran my fingers down his arm. His touch made my hands feel like they were on fire, or maybe my blood was boiling from my anger. I tried to hide the recoil of my face as he haphazardly threw back the remainder of the brown liquid .

“How much?” He asked. I tempered my disdain and curtly smiled.

It figures he’d think I was a damn sex worker.

“How much can you afford?” I spoke his language because guys like him loved throwing their money around. It was how they measured dicks. I’d guessed he was small, considering how much money he had to throw away.

“Well, that depends. We can discuss it upstairs. Get us a room. I’ll wait here.” I said with another smile. He nodded, and my eyes followed his path as he left for the concierge to secure one. He was staggering, barely making it to the desk. Moments later, he returned to retrieve his prize for the night, which was me. I followed his drunken body. He reeked with the stench of all the alcohol he had consumed. I held my breath to stop the bile from coming into my mouth.

I was also getting nervous because I’d never done this before. However, I let my nerves fuel me instead of backing out of what I would do. The elevator opened, and we went inside. His skinny fingers pushed the number three repeatedly as the doors closed. In silence, we ascended, with him giving me his best smile, which I barely returned. The elevator stopped, and the doors opened upon its arrival.

“After you,” he said as I stepped out and waited for him to lead the way. I followed him as he staggered to his assigned door, room three hundred and eight. He fumbled with the key before clumsily dropping it to the floor. He searched for it until I helped him out of his daze .

“Allow me,” I said as I reached down to retrieve the key, using it and pushing the door open. The room was dark, only illuminated by the moonlight peeking through the shade, which had been opened a third of the way. He bumped his way inside, fumbling with his pants. I stood just behind him as he dropped them around his ankles. Then he quickly spun around and grabbed me with all his strength. I was

pinned against his partially naked body as he brought his mouth towards mine.

Shit!

I was finally able to fight him off, pushing and dodging before his mouth could touch me. It was a good thing that he was drunk. I regained my composure, putting on the face that said I could do this.

“Come and get me hard, his voice carried through the room. I sauntered over, still playing the part. By the time I’d reached him, he’d lain back on the bed. I stood before him as his eyes closed. After a moment, his breathing had evened out.

What the fuck? Did he pass out?

I continued to observe him, making sure that he was, in fact, drunk off his ass. I scanned his body, finally landing on what he thought was worth my time.

Just like I thought, his dick is small.

The longer I looked at him, the more enraged I became. I wanted to take a pillow and smother him to death. Instead, I reached into my purse and took out one of its contents. The first was my knife; the second was the silencer. I attached it to the end of my gun, contemplating whether I wanted to do this. Before I could overthink longer, I stood beside him, reaching up to place a pillow over his face. Once it was there, I pulled the trigger. I stood watching the blood saturate the stark white comforter. I couldn’t breathe. I was on the verge of a panic attack. I’d done it. I put my hands to the sides of my head, along with the gun, and my finger still on the trigger. My eyes widened at what I was witnessing.

Before the panic could set in, I heard fumbling at the door. I quickly backed further into the darkness and turned to train my gun directly at the door. I could feel my heart

beating out of my chest. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath because I would have to kill two people tonight.

“JoJo,” Brice called out. He walked in with my father’s steps behind him. He came directly to me and embraced me.

“Princess, let it go,” my father said as he pried the gun from my hands.

“How did you know where I was?” I asked.

“Do you remember what I told you? I’m the king of this jungle, Lioness. I protect the pride, and my pride keeps eyes on my throne,” he said as he took my chin into his fingers and scanned my face.

“Did he touch you?” He asked.

“No,” I shook my head. After ensuring I was ok, he went to stand over Trip’s body, letting off two more quick shots.

“I love you, Journee,” I heard him whisper my late mother’s name.

“Weirdo motherfucker,” he said right after .

“You did good, Baby Girl. I’ll make sure you get better, though. If this is what you still want to do.” I looked into his eyes, swelled with pride, and nodded. The old me was gone. She was with my mother.

CHAPTER 6

Jourdan

Present

I sat on the couch with my laptop perched between my crossed legs. For the past three days, I've worked on a presentation for Hard Rock Gym. I'd gotten a call from one of the managing partners, Justin, that they were looking to rebrand. We'd scheduled a meeting for late this afternoon to go over everything. He'd told me that aside from their downtown location, they'd been having trouble attracting new members. I took a look at the website and understood why. It was basic as hell. Even more so than Stephon's awful ass private security website.

The website had simple pictures of their gym equipment pinned on a plain white background. No one was working out or enjoying their time at the gym in any of the photos. I would've never gone if I hadn't already been to one of the locations and enjoyed its amenities. The logo was the typical barbell with the name surrounding it. I groaned at the amount of work that I needed to put in.

Did they put any thought into this? Men!

I didn't mind, though. Anything was better than sitting around thinking about how I could get Burks in my grasp again. He wasn't entirely off my radar. I'd still been listening to the bugs I'd placed enough to know that he would attend the annual Mayoral Ball on Saturday of next week. I needed to be in attendance. However, it was an invitation-only event. That had never stopped me; I'd just have to swindle my

way in.

I could call in a favor from the Havens. Nah, I love a good challenge.

As I sat and ensured my designs were top-notch, my phone rang. I looked down and groaned because it was Brice. I hadn't spoken to him in a week, which was surprising. I was sure he would've popped up on me by now.

"Hey, big head," I spoke into the phone.

"Open the door," he demanded. I looked down at my phone, perplexed because who was he talking to like that?

"If your ass asks me nicely, I might think about it. Why are you not using your door code?"

"Don't play with me, JoJo. Slide your ass to the door. My hands are full." I huffed as I stood to walk to the door. Opening the door, my brother stood on the other side with his locs in his signature man bun on top of his head. I noticed his ends had turned brown, bleached from the Cali sun. A few locs always hung over one side. I jumped into Brice's arms, knocking all his things out of his hands, which he could have easily put on the floor as he embraced me.

"Brice," I whispered as he hugged me into his chest. Being two years older at thirty-seven, Brice swore up and down that he was now my father, but I understood. The distance I'd put between us over my father's death was killing me. I missed my big brother.

"JoJo," he whispered, leaning back to look at me and ensuring I was ok. He always did. Inspecting me to see if anything was scarred. Luckily, he couldn't see my mind and heart; that's where all the damage was. Happy with what he saw, he leaned in and

kissed my forehead. In all my excitement, I hadn't noticed Tayla standing behind him.

So that's why he hadn't used his code.

My door was difficult to hack because I'd installed high-end security, but Brice, like me, has trust issues. He wasn't about to allow Tayla to see my door code, especially not now. It didn't matter who she was to us. Brice still hid many things from her, specifically that he was one of the two. I was sure he felt more for Tay than he let on, but not even that would allow her access. I finally reached around Brice and pushed him to the side to hug Tayla.

"Tay, it's been so long," I said as we rocked from side to side. Although we often spoke on the phone, I hadn't seen her since leaving California.

"That part," she said before we squealed, knocking Brice to the side to run to my living room like two school-aged girls. Tayla plopped down on the couch while I walked through my open- concept lower level to go to the kitchen. I got three water bottles from the fridge and passed them out as I joined Tay on the couch.

"How's your mother?" I asked.

"She's doing good. I think she has a new boyfriend because she has been seeing someone, but keeps the details locked up. I think she's just bored."

"Now you know Ms. Nina doesn't like you all in her business. What is it she always says?" I snapped my fingers as I thought it up.

"My business isn't your business," I said, imitating Tay's mother in my best Ms. Nina voice. We both looked at each other and laughed.

“Hell, more like her business is never mine, and mine is always hers,” she said.

“Oh, foshoh!” I said as I laughed again. It was more than that because we rarely saw Tay’s mother. I thought she spent more time running the streets than actually being there for her daughter. Then, after my father died, that became even less.

“Jourdan, we miss you. When are you coming back? This chasing after the ghost of your father’s past has to stop. I told you I didn’t find any reason to believe it was anyone your father knew. Then, you bought a house over here; why? It’s beautiful, though,” she said as she looked around my home.

“If you came across the US to lecture me, you could leave. If you disagree, fine, but what I’m not going to do is keep talking to you about my reasons, Tay,” I said, exhausted from this conversation. She took my hands into hers and exhaled .

“Look, Jourdan, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you. But I will always call you on your bullshit because I love you. You two are my best friends and family. I should be mad at your ass because you up and left me with Mr. Ice Cold.” He had garnered the name as a play on Brice, but was as icy as the name depicted. Good luck to anyone who tried to melt away the glacier walls he’d built to keep people out. The death of our parents had messed us up.

“I love you, too, Tay,” I said, smiling at my oldest and only friend. I wouldn’t have made it without her, and she knew me better than anyone, so thankfully, she changed the conversation.

“So, what’s the deal with you? Have you found anyone to put some glaze on that dry-ass biscuit so they can sop it up?” She asked. I laughed at her crazy ass comparison.

“Girl, my pussy is not dry. It’s just been out of commission for a while. You know how I feel about men. There is someone. I don’t know, Tay. Have you ever met

someone who makes your world stand still?” I said as I stared off, thinking of the man who had done just that. I was also thinking about how I knew he’d glaze and sop my biscuit.

Damn!

“Jourdan,” she called out, waving her hand in front of my face.

“Where did you go just now? Shit, Jourdan, this man has you really about to change your stance. I thought you were Miss fuck them and leave them. Tell me more; what’s his name, and how did you meet him?”

“Remember the other day when I told you I was on a mission? Well, he was there. ”

“I’m so confused, so he’s on your list?”

“No, he was the...” I said, trailing off before I was interrupted.

“JoJo, I need to slide. I’ll be back.” I nodded in his direction. He walked over and kissed Tay on the forehead before doing the same to me. My forehead creased at what I’d just seen. Then he picked up his phone to make a call before leaving my front door. I needed to switch subjects. I didn’t want to talk about my business, so I would pull one of her mother’s acts and pry into hers.

“What’s the deal with you and Brice?” I said, figuring I could get the information I wanted since he wasn’t around like he’d been all the other times I’d asked recently. Her eyes widened as several different emotions flashed across her face. The one that stood out the most was confusion, but she quickly smiled to remove it.

“What, no girl. Brice is the homie,” she said, tilting her head to the side to confirm. I nodded my head up and down.

“Yeah, ok. You even dyed your locs like his,” I said, giving her one last chance to confess verbally. They couldn’t hide it even though they tried. I felt like they were in love with each other. They were something. I just couldn’t quite put my finger on what. It was the way he looked at her, like she was the anchor keeping his boat from floating out to sea.

“Brice is just like you, JoJo. He doesn’t trust anyone enough to open his heart. Besides, he doesn’t have time for love or even me. His hours are long, and if he’s not at work, he’s, well, you know. We spend a lot of time together, but that’s only because you’re here,” she said. I understood exactly what Brice felt. I wanted a life and love like my parents had. I just didn’t know if that was in the cards for me.

“So, what else is going on here? Have you made any friends?” Tayla asked.

“No, not really. I have a few acquaintances, but I mostly stay to myself,” I said as she sighed.

“JoJo, you and your brother have to learn how to trust people.” I waved her off.

“You know no one can replace you, Tay. That’s why you and Brice should move out here with me.”

“I would be down. I need a change of scenery. It’s not like my mother will miss me,” she said, whispering out the last part and then quickly pasting on a smile that didn’t quite reach her eyes.

“Anyways...” she trailed off and started talking about any and everything while I drifted in and out of the conversation. I couldn’t believe my mind was so caught up in Stephon's enigma that I’d forgotten Brice was there. I almost let his name slip from my lips. I hadn’t planned on ever speaking about him because I knew I’d probably never see him again. That was probably for the best.

CHAPTER 7

Stephon

“Y err,” I said, answering the phone call I’d just received; it was Brice.

“Where are you? I’m trying to slide through. The gym or your office.”

“Neither. I’m headed into my mother’s house right now,” I paused before answering.

“Let me know when you’re heading back to the office. I’ll meet you there.”

“Gone,” I said before hanging up. Why in the fuck was Brice here, and why hadn’t he told me he was coming to the east coast? Last I checked, and I checked in every day, shit was running smoothly. So this pop-up was pissing me off. This led my mind back to the question of what in the hell he and his sister were up to. If it had anything to do with me, I’d handle it accordingly. I didn’t care if Devin had hand-picked his ass or not .

As I always did, I rang the bell a couple of times before using my key to open the door. I wanted to let her know I was there before barging in.

“Ma, where you at, old woman?” I yelled out into the oversized house as I walked further in. I had definitely gone overboard; my mother alone did not need all this damn house.

“Stephon Angel Rockwell, if you call me old one more time, I’m going to whoop

your big ass,” she said as she appeared in the doorway that led from the kitchen.

“Ma, you’re cussing and using my whole government name. What’s gotten into you, old woman?” I laughed. Just as I’d finished my taunting, she took off her house shoe and threw it at me from where she stood in the doorway. I couldn’t help but laugh loudly at her because she’d missed, and I wasn’t a small target. I wasn’t as lean as when I played football. I’d easily packed on another ten pounds since.

“Come on, Ma, I know your aim gotta be better than that,” I teased as the other shoe flew across the room, hitting my shoulder. She finally finished her walk across the room, stopping to embrace me, where I leaned down for her to kiss my cheek. I picked her up when I stood upright because I knew she hated it. She was small in comparison to me, but was of average height.

“Put me down, Lil’ Boy,” she laughed as she popped me on my head. I finally sat her down, and she gestured for me to follow her into the kitchen. As I walked through the house, I saw she had rearranged the furniture again. She had decorated it with this quaint, cozy vibe that made you feel at home. Plants adorned the room, and bright light filtered onto her plush furniture, which was filled with different colored pillows. It wasn’t one of those museum houses you were afraid to sit in. I didn’t know how she moved it all, but I didn’t like it. I was always a phone call away, and she knew that. I sat at the breakfast table while she made a cup of coffee. I gazed at her youthful appearance. She wore jeans and a T-shirt and had her wavy hair in a low ponytail.

“Ma, what did I tell you about moving all this heavy shit...stuff around without calling me? If you want to redecorate, I can call Demitri’s wife, Melanie, to do that for you.”

“Steph, I don’t need an interior designer. Now, to what do I owe the visit? Is everything ok?” She asked and looked in concern. She’d completely ignored me.

“Ma?” I questioned sternly.

“Stephon, you do not run me, Lil’ Boy. Besides, I need something to do since you retired me. I get bored and tired of always looking at the same arrangement, so I change it,” she returned as she finally sat beside me at the table.

“Tsk. You and this Lil’ Boy that you refuse to stop calling me. I am thirty-nine, and all man, everywhere! Why would you think something is wrong? You know I can’t go too many days without seeing you.”

“You’ll always be un Nene to me. You’re right; you’re thirty-nine and didn’t bring me any grandkids to watch. I also don’t see a daughter-in-law by your side. You’re always working and never have any time for yourself,” she said as she waved her hands around the empty room. I took a deep sigh. I’d been hearing this for the last four years. I blamed Devin’s ass because before he settled down, I didn’t have to hear shit like this.

“Stephon, don’t you think it’s time? I don’t want to be all old and decrepit trying to chase after your babies,” she sighed this time. I didn’t want to talk about this because I had no prospects. My needs were met, and that’s all I was concerned about. At least, it was until a deadly beauty started to cross my mind more and more recently. She was every bit my equal. I couldn’t help but see myself with her. I hadn’t seen her since that day and probably wouldn’t again. From what I gathered, she’d been here two years, but we’d never crossed paths. As quickly as I let that thought enter, I let it leave. It didn’t matter how she’d made me feel just by looking at me. I couldn’t trust that feeling or her. So, I quickly shifted the conversation.

“The same could be said about you, Ma. Why haven’t you moved on from Dad? It’s been twenty-four years. This is a big ass house, Ma. I don’t like the fact that you live in it alone. Like you said, we’re getting older. I want you to have someone like you want me to,” I said with conviction. We both sat in a stare-off. It was so quiet that I

could hear the refrigerator running. We were cut from the same stubborn cloth, so there was no telling how long we'd bore into each other. However, I decided to break eye contact first.

"Hmph," I heard her grunt out.

"Ma, what are you doing next Saturday? My team is securing the Mayor's Ball. I'd like you to be my plus one."

"I'm not going because you'll be working, and I'll be alone."

"Yeah, nah," I said .

"I'm not asking anymore. You're going, and the Havens and Cains, your little crew, will be there. So, you won't be there alone." I took out my phone and went into my banking app.

"I just sent you a few stacks. Go shopping and get all glammed up on me, Ma. I gave you plenty of time, so don't use that as an excuse."

"Tsk, Stephon," I leaned over to kiss her cheek before standing.

"You're leaving?" She asked.

"Yeah, I have an appointment at the firm and another late this afternoon at the Midtown gym. Justin thinks it's a good idea to rebrand to try and bring in more members."

"Well, you be safe out there, son," she said as she stood to walk me out.

"Always, Mamá, I love you."

“I love you, too,” she said as I turned to walk to my car. I took out my phone to text Brice to let him know I was on my way.

Sitting at my desk, I powered up my laptop to review the plans and guest list for the Mayor’s Ball. I needed to make sure everyone understood their assignments for the night. I’d done this several times. Tediously running every name and face through our database. I’d do whatever I needed to ensure the night went smoothly. Brody had also told me that he was good to go this weekend. After some time, I glanced at my watch to see it was near lunch. My stomach was telling me I needed a break.

Where is this nigga?

Just as I stood to leave, there was a knock at my door. It was Brice.

“It’s about time your ass decided to show up.”

“I had to slide to the docks,” he said. I raised my eyebrow in question. Before he could start to talk, I cut him off. I didn’t want him talking here. I had too many outside ears in the office today.

“You hungry? I’m fucking starving. Let’s eat. Follow me, we’re headed to Two in Midtown,” I said. Two’s was Devin’s brother Dorien’s Restaurant. It was also near Hardrock Gym, so I killed two birds with one stone. Brice glared at me like he wanted to say something; I wanted him to; I was goading him. He followed me out of the three-story building that housed my Security firm and into the parking lot. He stopped at a rental parked beside my blacked-out Ford Raptor.

“You not about to be bossing me around and shit Steph. Your ass is lucky that I’m hungry.” He said with his chest all puffed out. I laughed.

“Get your ass in the car.” Now, I was only fucking with him to see how far I could

push him. I knew he was trained to be cutthroat, just as I was, so why was he holding back? I needed the pushback so I wouldn't feel like they were placating me. I wanted to trust him, and something uncontrolled and carnal inside me needed to trust his sister. The hold that she had on my mind bothered me to no end. Whether I could trust either of them was still to be determined. That would start at this lunch with questions. I waited until he got in his car and started it before climbing into mine. I pulled out of the parking lot and watched him follow behind me in my review.

We arrived at Two's about twenty minutes later and quickly found a parking spot. His demeanor was still tight as he exited his car and walked beside me.

Good.

"Good afternoon, and welcome to Two's," the hostess greeted us without looking up. When she finally did, her tone changed.

"Oh, hey, Stephon," she said in a singsong voice meant to seduce me.

"Will you be dining at your usual booth?" she asked. I nodded. Then, we followed her to the booths in the farthest corner of the main dining area. It was later than I usually took lunch, so many of the tables we passed were empty. I knew Two's would be slow at this hour. Besides, I fucked with their chicken marsala heavy, and I had a taste for it today. I always sat at this booth, knowing no one could overhear our conversation. That way, we could freely switch from Brice and Steph to Ice and Rock. She set our menus down, grazing my hand as she did, before returning to the hostess stand.

"You fucking her, Steph?" He said with a grimace.

"Not that my dick is any of your concern, but hell no!" I know that sounded harsh, but my dick was picky. It also wasn't his damn business.

“You’re right; I just thought you had something going on with my sister,” Brice said inquisitively.

“And why in the fuck would you think that?” I questioned as we both glanced over the menu.

“Last week, we spoke, and your name was mentioned.” I didn’t respond but waved my hand for him to continue. I’m guessing she mentioned it after our little run-in.

“Look, Steph, my sister has been hell-bent on finding out who killed our father. She’s under the impression that it was a hit. You know as well as I do that shit like that comes with the territory,” he said and sighed with concern. Before he could continue, the waitress came to take our drink orders. We quickly rattled off the drinks, deciding to go ahead and order off the lunch menu. After she’d left, he began to speak again.

“More recently, she’s been moving recklessly. I was hoping she’d reached out to you for help. Since all that security, private investigating shit is what you do. Because I thought that at least she has you out here; she’s all I have left. I can’t lose her while she’s out here playing vigilante and shit. At this point, I wouldn’t give a damn if you married her stubborn ass, hell I’d want you to because at least I’d know she was safe. Steph, you’re one of the only ones I trust out here.”

Shit, so she was after someone in that dining room. There goes my prior theory.

My mind was working a mile a minute.

“Did you just ask me to fucking marry your sister?” Out of all the information he’d just told me, my mind latched on to that singular statement. There was no way I’d heard that shit right .

“Yeah, I mean, I don’t fucking know, man,” he said as he lifted his hand to scratch

his head. He looked distressed. I couldn't help the loud laugh that rose from my stomach.

"You're seriously laughing right now? When I'm about to lose my damn mind. I thought we could be on some mafia shit. You know, arranging marriages to strengthen the family," he said with a deadpanned expression. It only caused me to laugh louder.

"Bet. Fuck you, Steph," he said but started to join in on my laugh.

"Nigga, one, here in the US, we're higher than the fucking mafia. Two, you're just sitting here casually offering your sister up for marriage. The second deadliest motherfucker we know. She might try and kill us both for even speaking of the shit," I said.

"Sounds like a perfect match," he said with a smirk. I'd thought the same thing, but I wouldn't dare tell his ass that.

"Besides, she already likes you; she talked about you today, too," he continued.

My mother was right: men gossip just as much as women .

"Brice got damn it," I said as I ran my hand down my face. I didn't even have any words because his ass was gone off something.

I would marry his fine-ass sister, but would she even have me for real?

I couldn't tell you why I gravitated toward the possibility, nor did I know what he wanted me to do with that knowledge. I chuckled at how this afternoon had gone. This was the second time my name was brought up in marriage talks. Luckily, the waitress brought out our order stopping the crazy ass conversation we were having.

Once she left, we both said a quick grace, and I shifted the conversation.

“How’s things going at the hospital?”

“I don’t know, man. To be honest, I’m getting burned out there. I love my job, but always being on call and working six on three off is getting old quick. I’m thinking about coming out here if JoJo doesn’t come back.”

“I’ll look out while she’s here. I can’t guarantee anything. Her ass is a wildcard, but at least you know she’s not alone until you get shit figured out. So, what’s up with the Docks?” I asked.

“Last week, one of my guys, Sin, asked for a transfer from our Cali docks. Saying he wanted out of California. Like I said earlier, I don’t trust a fucking soul outside of you and my sister right now. I granted his request because I knew there was a vacancy here. My gut tells me he’s up to something. I went over to check on him. So far, he’s clean.”

“You make sure you keep an eye on that shit. When you return to Cali, I’ll add him to my list of check-ins,” I told him. I let Ice do him, and I did me. I never questioned his ability to do his job because he was fucking good at it, just like I was. We talked it up for an hour before I had to head to my meeting at Hard Rock. I hope this shit went by smoothly because I was tired. I was about to call it a day early for the first time in a long time.

CHAPTER 8

Jourdan

I 'd left Tayla and Brice back at my house. Brice had come in a few minutes ago as I was preparing to leave. I didn't know if they planned on staying with me, but I'd explicitly told them that no sexual relations were to be had in my damn house. They looked at me like I'd grown two heads, but I was serious. I was going through a long, dry spell. The only person who would be fucking there was me.

Very fucking long. Longer than a damn pharmacy store receipt. Ugh! Tsk. The only biscuits getting sopped at thirteen-three-ten are mine.

I lived in a two-story modern home on the outskirts of Cypress Crest. Sitting at just under two thousand square feet, it was modest. It was painted tan with oversized black windows, black trim, and stonework. After wasting so much money on home rentals, I decided to buy a house while I was here, and fell in love with a home near Cypress Crest. Cypress Crest was where all the wealthy black people lived. There was another neighborhood called Cypress Heights. However, that one had a mixed population, and the houses there were more traditional, whereas Cypress Crest held more modern-style homes. I constantly asked myself why I was laying down roots in a place I didn't plan to stay. Yet here I was with no plans of leaving.

Brice is going to love hearing that, JoJo.

Then there was him, Stephon Rockwell. The man who was so close to me, yet so far. The man whom I didn't know if I could trust.

Could you fully trust any man, though? Why did he have to be in the fucking drug game? Could I even date someone who wasn't?

I was so lost in my thoughts that I hadn't even realized I was pulling into the Hard Rock Gym parking lot. That twenty-minute drive had flown by. After finding a place to park, I quickly skimmed through my work bag to ensure I had everything I needed to conduct a successful presentation. After confirming, I got out of the car and headed inside.

When I entered, I heard metal clanking and the hums of several treadmills. I could count the number of bodies in the room, which wasn't good. I was confident I could help change that. Approaching the desk, the young woman gleefully greeted me.

"Hi, welcome to Hard Rock. You must be Mrs. Washington," she said.

"Oh, it's Miss, but yes, that's me. I guess I don't quite look like I'm here to work out, huh?" She looked over me and my attire .

"You definitely look like you work out because your body is tea. It's because you're very punctual, it's four on the dot, and Justin told me to be expecting you at that time. Let me let him know you're here." Her fingers moved deftly over the numbers as she called back to his office. While I waited, I took one more look around the gym. It was just blah. No colors, no flow, no anything. I wasn't an interior designer, but I knew this wasn't what it should be. It was just gym equipment sitting in a boring ass white and gray room. I continued exploring before a man I assumed was Justin came from behind to retrieve me.

Justin Evans called me last week asking for my help. I can honestly say that his voice matched the man. He was fine. Tall, bearded, and with a muscular frame covered in smooth, milk chocolate brown skin. As he walked ahead of me, I couldn't help but look at his ass. I loved a man with a good ass. It's one of the reasons why one of my

favorite pastimes is watching football. I wondered if he played because he looked like it.

Damn, Justin!

My mind had gone off on a tangent because I was supposed to be looking around. I hadn't missed anything because the back was more of the same white and gray. I smiled as we entered the office, which I assumed had a table set up to the right for meetings. He led me to the table, which had eight chairs around it. I chose the first chair, and Justin sat diagonally to me at the head of the table. He glanced down at his watch before speaking.

"My apologies, my business partner is running just a few minutes behind," he said .

"Your business partner?" I questioned, but before he could answer, the door opened.

"I'm so sorry, but there was an accident up the road, and I couldn't easily get around. I'm usually very punctual." I didn't need to turn around to know it was Stephon. The goosebumps formed all over my body, and I will never forget his voice's deep timbre. I turned my head just in time to lock eyes with him, where he paused by the door. Stephon Rockwell commanded my attention in a crisp white button-down shirt unbuttoned at the top, with the sleeves rolled up on his forearms. He'd paired it with gray slacks, accentuated with a black leather belt, oxfords, and the harness that held the two guns around his back. He was mouthwatering. His eyes traveled all over me, just like mine had him, making me wonder what he was thinking. I wanted more of him on me than just his eyes.

As if reading my mind, he came and sat beside me. He slid his chair up so close to me that our legs touched. I quickly crossed mine to create a barrier. All it did was draw my attention to the fact that this man made my pussy thump. I was going to fuck this man. I took a deep breath, and why did I do that? He smelled so damn good.

Lord, help me get through this meeting! I can't believe he owns this place. I need to conduct more research on this man.

"Miss Washington," he said as he studied my face. He took his bottom lip into his mouth and exhaled before shaking his head. His eyes never left mine .

"I see you have both of your lashes on today," he said, smiling. Before I could stop myself, I'd giggled and softly slapped the back of my hand across his hard chest. He grabbed it and held it in his hand while it still lay on his chest.

"Oh, you got jokes," I said, holding his gaze.

Shit, this man has me giggling. Me, Jourdan Nichelle Washington.

Not only had I giggled, but I'd just put my hands on this man like I'd known him for years. I quickly drew it back from his possession at the sound of Justin.

"You two know each other?" Justin asked. I'd forgotten he was even in the room.

"Something like that," Stephon answered and winked at me. I was completely rattled.

Get your shit together, Jourdan.

Somehow, I found my damn sense and took out my laptop. I uncrossed my legs and slid closer to the table.

"Let's get started, gentlemen," I said. I went into my bag, passing out the copies of the presentation I'd printed out. Luckily, I was an over-preparer because I'd printed three copies. Justin quickly opened it and started to skim through the document. I noticed that Stephon hadn't bothered to open his. Instead, he leaned over closer to me to see my computer screen.

“Ahem,” I cleared my throat and reviewed the current enrollment membership compared to other local competitors. Then, I showed my new logo and website plans .

“Damn, Baby, this shit looks good as hell,” Stephon said. Then, his hand grabbed my thigh in what appeared to be a thoughtless act. He leaned further into the table to inspect my designs. His hand slid to my center before stopping while he used his other hand to scroll the mouse pad up and down my computer screen. His hand resting between my legs started up that familiar thump he seemed to cause with little effort. Then his hand started to move back and forth around my thigh, grazing my pussy and stimulating my clit. Even though it didn’t appear that it was meant to be sexual, I couldn’t help but feel it. It intensified as he let his thumb trace circles on the top of my thigh. Then he added a gentle squeeze, all as he continued to admire my work. I was sure he hadn’t realized that he was about to make me cum because he was steadily strolling through my presentation with laser focus.

I didn’t think it was possible to feel my favorite chilling feeling and be hot simultaneously, but I felt both. I knew he could feel my heat when I crossed my legs around his hand. I let out a small gasp, signaling my orgasm. I began to jumble my words. I also couldn’t ignore something else that was present in his touch: care. I let it flow through me. I stopped talking to see Stephon staring into my eyes. Then he dropped them to where his hand was and abruptly drew it back like it was on fire. He knew. That’s when he straightened up and opened the documents I’d printed, looking at the design there instead.

His touch was wildly inappropriate, especially given our current non-relationship and professional environment. Also, I was disturbed by the fact that I’d been so long without intimacy; the first sign of it threw me over the edge. However, I wanted him to do it again. Justin had no clue what had happened, as evidenced by his excitement and verbal praises about my work. The truth was that I wanted his hands on me; I wanted him badly. I didn’t only feel the sexual tension of his touch. I felt the comfort,

intimacy, and praise I'd been craving for a long time. Then I thought of snatching his hand to put it back. I didn't. I continued my presentation, touching on social media management and engagement before finishing, opening the room for their questions.

"That is all I have for you; feel free to request any changes you may have. I also understand that you all are looking to remodel. I can also contact your designer to work together to make everything seamless. Do you have any questions?"

"So, what are your projected costs for this project?" Jason asked.

"It doesn't matter. I'll pay whatever she charges," Stephon followed up.

"Thank you so much, Jourdan..." He paused as if tasting my name on his tongue. He swallowed deeply before continuing.

"Miss Washington, thank you for your time this afternoon. I would love to move forward with what you have planned. Unfortunately, I have to leave. Justin will review the particulars and get everything squared away," he said, staring into my eyes as he stood to leave. I let the way he said my name wash over me, then nodded, watching as he exited, never turning back around so that I could see his face.

Something had changed just that quickly. Instead of letting myself feel this familiar sadness from his departure. I tucked it deep inside. I decided that I would finish up here and take my ass home. Even though Justin would never be able to tell because I was smiling. I'd gone from shocked, giddy, and aroused with Stephon to my current pissed-off state. Not showing on the outside was my mind having an erratic, irrational rant. It was so bad that my leg was bouncing uncontrollably under the table.

Jourdan, calm down. Stephon is not your man. I fucking can't believe he just left like that. Oh ok... Could I get away with shooting him in broad daylight? I should run out there and shoot his ass.

Then, the next thing I knew, I was sliding back in my chair and running outside. I powered through the main workout area, which had been filled with the after-work crowd, as fast as I could.

“Stephon,” I yelled after him as he briskly walked to his car. He was almost there, so I called out again. Increasing my pace.

“Steph...,” I tried to call out once more before he swiftly turned around. I was standing chest to chest with the man I’d just mentally threatened to shoot. He was tall but stood over my five-foot-nine frame, even wearing heels. We stood there, having an intense stare-off. The longer he looked at me, the angrier I got. My breathing was getting faster and faster; I was gearing up to give him a piece of my mind for leaving like that.

“Why in the fu...”

“I apologize,” he said as I’d begun to cuss his ass out for having me in this current state of mind .

“For what...” I softly started because I was taken aback. However, I didn’t get the opportunity to finish before he brought his hand to my neck, gripping slightly as he spun me around until my back was to his truck. I was pinned in between, feeling every bit of his heat.

“I want to kiss you,” he whispered.

“So do it, Stephon.” Then I felt his lips on mine, timid at first, then growing urgent before his tongue sought entry. With each precise and skilled swipe of his tongue, I began to melt further into his needy embrace, moaning my arousal. His hand traveled down over my breast before slipping underneath my shirt to caress my bare skin. His other hand wrapped around my waist, pulling me into his body. I could feel his

erection, and the moisture was pooling in the seat of my already wet panties.

“Tell me to stop, Jourdan; please tell me to stop,” he whispered.

“Mmmh,” I let out because I was seconds away from letting this man fuck me in this parking lot for everyone to see.

“Shit,” he huffed out, breathing erratically as he suddenly stopped. His eyes were closed, and his forehead was against mine. A horn blowing in the background brought him out of his haze. I was out just as quickly as he placed me in his embrace. He spun me around so he could enter his car. He stopped after his door was open to finally give me that eye contact I was looking for the last time he left my presence .

“Go back inside, Jourdan,” he gently commanded as he nodded toward the gym doors. I did exactly what he said and walked my ass back inside.

If he can tell me what to do, he can tell me what to do!

CHAPTER 9

Stephon

I slid the weights on the bar, then another to even it out. I was at three hundred sixty pounds. Lying back on the bench in my home gym, I briefly considered my safety because I was lifting alone. My gym was small, housing a treadmill, barbell rack, and the multifunction power rack I used primarily. Usually, I'd be at Hardrock shooting the shit with Justin and pushing each other to the limit. Justin played football with me at CU. He was a safety. He wasn't a part of my other lifestyle, and I would never tell him about it.

Today, I was pushing myself because I couldn't get thoughts of her out of my head. Six days. That's how long it had been since I saw her. Since I'd felt her lips on mine and had her body wrapped around me. It was all I could think about. I didn't even know Jourdan, but somehow, I found myself all over her; I was out of control.

Fuck It !

I picked up the weights, gauging if I was lifting too much. I probably was, but that's just how she had me. It was either lifting these heavy ass weights or sitting around with a semi-hard on. I chose the damn weights because, apparently, I was willing to risk it all, even my own life. Jourdan Washington was like that, and her work spoke for itself. With the bar over my head, I lowered it down until it hit my chest.

One.

Repeating the process with a grunt, I pushed the weights up and down, increasing my pace. I couldn't believe I'd touched her with such familiarity. I was big on consent. My body acted on its own accord. The closer I leaned in, the more her... everything invaded my senses. She hadn't tried to stop me while I was lost in her spell.

It was when I felt her legs grip my hand along with her heat and that sexy ass gasp that let me know that my touch had caused her to orgasm. I couldn't get it out of my head. However, that was when my good sense finally returned. That, along with the fact that we were in a very professional setting, and I once again felt my dick getting hard from her response. She just had to bring her sexy ass outside when I was barely hanging on to what little restraint I had. Then I fucking kissed her, and that damn moan let out.

“Shit!” I belted out as the bar I was lifting fell to my chest. I felt my muscles give as I tried to push it to the rack. It was a no-go. Letting the bar fall to the side seemed the safest option, so I let it fall to the floor. The sound of the weights clanging filled the room. I'd lost track of how many reps I'd done. My arms felt like fucking Jello. I quickly sat up and reached for my towel to wipe the sweat pouring into my eyes. I needed another way to release some of this tension... sexual tension, frustrated tension, this longing that I had out of nowhere.

I blame Brice's ass. Why did he have to bring his ass over here? I couldn't believe I let him fill my head with all his talk about how he felt his sister had a thing for me and wanted me to care for her. Now, that was all I could think about: taking care of her, protecting her, and being everything she needed. I knew that marriage shit wouldn't fly, at least not yet. I wasn't opposed to it; like my mother said, I wasn't getting any younger. I for sure wanted to leave a legacy and children behind.

I'd gathered that the night at Porter's Steakhouse, Jourdan was trying to get to Burks. I knew it wasn't the mayor because Brody was always with him, which was by design. And Miller didn't even live here at least full-time. According to the

information I'd previously pulled, he'd been floating back and forth from NY for the past two years. Miller had asked Burks if he knew any information on One, Two, and Three. I knew Burks was lying when he said he had contacts. If he knew anything, he would have said so because money talks. I had Pierre do what he needed to become his contact. I would feed him information. I'd also instructed him to get word back to Miller about the new One wanting to meet. Of course, I wasn't about to show my face. Wearing a mask was a must, but I needed to be able to dig deeper.

Pierre texted me, telling me he was meeting Burks soon and to give me the location. I didn't know about the connection between Burks and her father's death, but I was going to help her find out whether she knew so or not. I wanted to be at the location before they arrived. After giving myself a moment, I headed to the shower.

I stood at the sink while I waited for the shower to warm up. I was still wound up; hopefully, the shower would help. Stepping in, I let the water wash over my head, neck, and shoulders. Lathering up my washcloth, I closed my eyes and gave my body a once-over. On my second pass, my hand lingered on my dick before it hardened in my grasp. I squeezed, trying to wane off the erection, but it had the opposite effect. It throbbed under the pressure. Once again, thoughts of Jourdan popped into my mind. I stood with the weight of it in my hands before I slowly began to stroke my length back and forth.

"Mmh," I groaned. That, along with the spray of the water and the thoughts of Jourdan's mouth and body on mine, filtered through. I wanted her bad and let my mind take me to the possibility of having her.

My head was thrown back while she bounced up and down on my dick. I felt myself go deeper each time she descended my shaft. She slowed down and began to rock forward to the tip, then rocked back down slowly.

"You like that?"

“ Yeah, just like that,” I whispered. My hand was moving up and down my shaft, my grip tightening as I fisted closer to my release .

Then, she transitioned back to her quick pace. The feeling of her wrapped around me, and watching her breast bounce along with her ride, was taking me over the edge.

“I’m gonna cum, you’re gonna make me cum, Baby,” I whispered out.

“Cum then.”

I heard her melodic voice and moans in my mind as my eyes popped open.

“Shit,” I moaned out as I pumped my sensitive dick, releasing down the drain until I could no longer touch myself. I caught my breath and braced both hands on the wall under the spray. The water began to run cold as it cascaded down my head and neck. In shock that she had that effect on me, I quickly washed, rinsed, and dressed to head to the location P had sent.

“Shorty about to fuck my world up,” I said out loud into the room.

Jourdan

The sun had set an hour ago, quickly darkening the sky. I appreciated the time change in the winter because I worked better at night .

I sat across the street from Scooby’s Hot Dogs, watching one of Stephon’s employees meet with Burks. I’d studied his security firm website enough to know he worked there. He was the cybersecurity analyst. I continued following Burks a few days ago. However, today, he’d changed it up. The one time I needed to hear the conversation the most, he wasn’t wearing the damn jacket I’d put the bug on. Because of that, I’d been closely following him all day when I usually hung back. I hoped to have gotten

information by now, but it looked like I would still have to find my way inside the Mayor's Ball.

I'm sure my father would have chastised me for what I was about to do. I unsnapped my seatbelt, preparing to head to where they were sitting. I could hear him inside my head.

"Where are you going? Not like that, you aren't. They'd recognize you as soon as you walk through the door."

I was becoming more and more reckless. With those thoughts, I reached inside the car and retrieved my baseball cap. I pulled my ponytail through and secured it low over my eyes. Burks had seen me before the night I tried to ambush him at Porter's.

You better hope he doesn't notice you, JoJo.

As I waited for the cars to pass before I crossed, I glanced around to make sure that the task of getting close to him wouldn't cause more harm than good. I walked up and sat a few tables behind them. I started playing with my phone just as everyone around me was while they waited for their hot dog orders. The people in Cypress loved hot dogs, but in Southern California, it was Tacos .

It didn't take me long to realize that this wouldn't work. They were talking low. With the busy hum of downtown, I couldn't hear them. I could read lips, but only Pierre's because he was sitting towards me.

"One wants to meet with Miller. Can you set that up?" I assumed that Burks had told him yes because he nodded his head up and down.

"Get back to me with the location, time, and place when you do." Burks nodded again before Pierre stood to leave. He then headed to the window to place an order, and

because I was still following him, I remained seated until he left. As I decided to leave, movement caught my attention. In the shadows of the building and out, only enough for me to see him, was Stephon.

How long has he been there?

The fact that he'd been here the entire time is why he was so deadly. His targets never even know he's there. I'd looked around and cataloged everyone in the vicinity, but hadn't seen him looming. Stephon was slowly showing me Rock. He nodded to the side, instructing me to come to him.

Jourdan, please do not get up. Stay seated. Fight it, JoJo.

I stood, heading his way. Just like last week, when he commanded my action, I complied.

Girl. What. In. The. Hell.

When I reached him, he took my hand and began walking.

"Walk with me?" He asked. It came out as a question, but it wasn't because we were already moving .

"Tell me why you keep exposing your prowess, Lioness?" He asked. I started to talk but immediately stopped because I didn't know if I could trust him, even though he was showing his trust in me. My brother seemed to think that I could and that I should. And so far, he hadn't given me a reason not to, but that all could change. So, I hesitantly answered.

"I know Brice told you," I said. He nodded in agreement.

“I’m not asking Brice. I’m asking you, Beautiful.” I savored the warmth of his hand wrapped around mine and his term of endearment. I took a deep breath and embraced the comfort he gave me.

“My father was murdered by someone close to him. I believe it was a hit. I won’t stop until everyone involved feels my wrath.”

“Fair enough, but I don’t like how you’re moving.”

“Why will my big, bad husband swoop in and save the day?” He laughed. I smiled in return.

“Brice told you that shit.”

“Yeah, we don’t keep secrets from each other; we’re all we got,” I solemnly said.

“I know it doesn’t mean much right now, but you have me,” he said, bringing the back of my hand to his lips to place a gentle kiss.

“I’m surprised that you aren’t currently kicking our asses about how crazy the shit sounds,” he followed.

“Why? You think marrying me is crazy?” I asked in all seriousness .

“What? No... I mean, I didn’t mean it like that. I’d love for,” He stuttered out.

“Stephon, I’m joking,” I laughed at his distress. He looked over at me and smiled.

Oh my, damn. Jourdan! Get it together!

“I would marry you if that’s explicitly what you wanted. I would never force

anything on you, ever. With whatever you decide, I want to get to know you, all of you, Beautiful,” he said as he tipped my head back, swiping his thumb down my chin as he looked into my eyes. I hadn’t even realized that we’d stop walking or that we were standing beside my car, which I’d parked across the street. He’d watched me the entire time. It was surprising. Then again, this was Rock’s thing. It was something else that he was showing me that he could do. It was trust. After briefly getting lost in each other, he held his hand out to me.

“Keys,” he demanded. I sighed and placed them in his hand. He unlocked the door, got inside, inspected the rear seats, and started my car.

“You know I could have done that myself, right?” I said, smiling.

“I know,” he said, putting me in the driver’s seat and buckling me in. After he was satisfied with my safety, he closed the door. I rolled down my window to get his attention.

“Don’t you at least want my number so I can text you to tell you I’m home safe?” he leaned through the window, pushed my ballcap back, and gently kissed my lips .

“I don’t need your number because I know you’ll get home safe, Baby. Besides, I know where to find you anytime I want. Now go ahead and go,” he said, kissing me again. I nodded, rolled my window back up, checked traffic, and then pulled onto the road. I glanced into my rearview to see if he was still standing there, but he wasn’t. He’d slipped back into the shadows.

This man made me feel like I needed to sit my ass down somewhere. My defiance: I’m the best at what I do, and no man alive can sit me overruled.

Yeah, because you just drove away. Your ass was a lawn chair a minute ago. Folded like a damn dollar bill. Jourdan, you are in danger, girl!

It was as if he were my kryptonite, and the further I drove away, the more resolved I became. My mind told me it was a weakness, but my heart and body felt strengthened by him. He was quickly breaking down my walls.

Yep, Danger!

CHAPTER 10

Stephon

It was the night of the Mayor's Ball, and I had picked my mother up hours earlier to attend. She was beautiful walking around in her black Balmain gown with a halter neck adorned with crystals. At least that's what she'd told me because I didn't know a damn thing about women's fashion. Although the room was decorated in dim lighting, I had no problems spotting her in the room. She was currently bouncing from group to group with her little crew, Denise Haven and Savannah Cain. The party was in full swing, with more guests filing into the open ballroom. I decided it was time to start my walk around.

I pushed through the crowd of about one hundred guests, excusing myself to get through. There were also tables covered in black cloths and white floral arrangements that I had to maneuver through. By the night's end, there would be three hundred and fifty, pending everyone showed up. This event was a big deal for my team, and I wanted everything to go as planned. Once I was happy with the security inside, I stepped outside to check in with them and ensure the perimeter was still secure. Before I stepped outside, I caught one more glance at my mother. She looked cozy and familiar as hell in the arms of Marshall Declan, Devin's father-in-law and recent divorcee. Then he leaned in and kissed her lips. She was just with her friends. When in the fuck did he show up?

"His ass is knocking my mother down!" I exclaimed out loud to myself.

What the hell!

I swiped my hand down my face and returned to my task. I didn't have time to interpret what I'd just seen, but I would ask my mother about it later.

"Yo B, is everything still good inside?" I spoke into the walkie

"B. As in me? Brody?"

"Don't start with that shit, man," I said back into the walkie-talkie as I heard him laughing on the other end with a few of my other employees.

"Yeah, man, we're good. Stop micromanaging. Your ass literally just stepped outside two seconds ago." While Brody was going on about my management style, a Cadillac Escalade pulled up to the curb. It was one of mine. I knew my cars and who should be driving them. It was Mike's SUV. Some of the guests used our secure driving services tonight. The driver parked, exited, and rounded the vehicle's rear.

What in the entire fuck?

I couldn't help but stand there like a deer caught in headlights. She was in heavy makeup, seemingly changing the shape of her face and wearing a wig, but I knew that fucking body and seductive walk anywhere, even though I'd only seen it four times. She wore a perfectly tailored black pantsuit that was the standard uniform for the employees who worked at Rockwell Security when they were on the job. She looked like pure sin wearing it. Even though my in-person view had been minimal, I was ashamed of how often I'd watched that security footage. Yes, I was counting our interactions because I wanted to see her and that sexy ass body every day. However, I was moving at her pace. Besides, there wasn't a thing about her that I hadn't committed to memory.

With the epitome of my employee's poise, Jourdan opened the rear door to let Burks exit.

Oh, her ass is on one tonight! Where in the fuck is Mike?

Then she walked back around the SUV, opening the driver's door. She turned as if she could feel me staring, and we locked eyes. There it was, that fucking look that held me captive. That same look that was now proven to drive me up a fucking wall in a good way. Then, just as fast as she had come, she pulled the SUV away from the curb. I stood in disbelief until it rounded the corner. She was headed to the lot. All my drivers were to park and enter to secure the event while waiting for their assets' departure.

I turned, heading back inside, damn near in a jog.

"Yo, Steph, Steph. Are we good, man? I just saw you walk back through here like this fucking place was on fire. Is something wrong? Should we be on alert?... Steph," Brody said as he urgently tried to get my attention on the walkie.

"All good! Stand your positions," I spoke back .

I quickly filtered through the guests, trying not to be stopped or draw any attention that would warrant a panic. Brody was right. I needed to calm down. I walked briskly to the back of the venue and down the hallway to the rear doors. You could still see out into the ballroom, but it was otherwise covered in darkness. When I finally reached them, I stood in the shadows, waiting to see if she would come inside. I would be thoroughly impressed if she did. She'd managed to get to my driver and obtain my security plans for tonight. I needed to lock my shit down tighter and have a damn talk with Mike, who was probably somewhere knocked out in a damn closet.

Fuck!

After my third driver entered, she was the next person to come through the door. I grabbed her by the wrist and dragged her body against me into the darkness. She

wasn't resisting, so she expected me to wait in the shadows.

Good Girl!

With her back to me, I dropped my arm over her shoulder and chest and leaned her head to the side.

“What in the hell do you think you're doing, Beautiful?” I spoke into her ear as I hugged her body to mine. Instead of responding, she elbowed me in the stomach, then spun around quickly, raising her knee to do the same. I blocked her attempt, which caused her to throw a series of quick jabs. I was dodging and blocking her strikes. It only angered her, inciting a challenge. Her hands and legs started to fly rapidly as I backed up further, using my hands and evasive maneuvers to counter. After I'd grown tired of our little sparring match, I grabbed her, placing her back against the wall. She wasn't done, but I was. I dropped my voice, and then I gave her the warning to stop.

“I wouldn't do that if I were you,” I said, whispering into her ear, anticipating that she was thinking of a way to get out of my grasp. I caged her in between my legs, using my body weight to pin her. My hands rested on the wall on each side of her head when I leaned in. She smelled intoxicating. It was a sweet fragrance that made me want to taste her. I felt her quick breaths on my neck; it further aroused me. Meeting her mouth, I gently kissed, then flattened my tongue to lick hers, causing her breathing to hitch even more.

“Mmm, what will you do if I don't?” She moaned and said rebelliously as I lifted to stare into her eyes. Her mouth hung open after her taunt, making me bite her bottom lip before I completely captured it in another deep kiss.

“What do you want me to do?” I asked as I forced myself to break away from her. I felt her hands travel down my chest, caressing each groove and crest that I'd spent

years sculpting. Her hands finally landed on my now-hardened dick, wrapping her hand around it through the briefs and slacks that held it captive. I groaned. She smiled a sinister smile, removed her hand, and kicked me in the balls.

“Fuck!” I shouted into the hallway, hoping no one had heard my outburst.

“Oh, and Stephon...I want you to stay the fuck out of my way,” she said.

“Is that really what you want, Beautiful?” I called out through my pain. She looked over her shoulder and smiled as she faded into the ballroom guests like the lioness she was.

What in the hell just happened? On my mother, I think I’m in love!

In the darkness, I stood and leaned against the wall before laughing loudly. I was lost in my humor until a voice brought me out of it.

“Nigga you just gone stand there and hold your cracked ass nuts all night, or get back to work?” Devin said he was in tow with Ren and Demi.

“Yo, fuck you, D,” I said, causing him to laugh.

“I saw y’all over here having y’all’s little lovers’ quarrel. Does Brice know you’re sleeping with his fine-ass sister? That’s a bad motherfucker,” Demi said.

“Oh, so because she was over here trying to make sure my mother doesn’t get any grandkids, we’re lovers,” I said, staring at Demi’s serious expression.

“This ain’t about Adriana’s fine ass. Looking like J-Lo in that dress. Got damn!” he said as he brought his fist to his mouth and bit down.

“Demi, if my nuts weren’t hurting right now, I’d ki...”

“They are, though, with your Ol’ top-flight security ass. Where’s your whistle at?” he cut off my statement, laughing loudly.

“Anyways, Brice knows. His ass asked Steph to marry her,” Devin said. Ren and Demi’s mouths both fell open .

“Word!” They both said simultaneously. I swear Devin’s ass knew every fucking thing. There was a minute when he was slipping, but now that he’s retired and has all this time on his hands, he’s right back in everyone’s business. Or maybe he wanted to keep up with the other ‘business’ that had him so keen on Brice and I’s dealings. Additionally, I didn’t even bother to correct Demi about me sleeping with her because, as far as I was concerned, that was an inevitability. I wasn’t going to rush it, though.

“Get the fuck out of here. Like on some arranged marriage type shit like the mafia?” Ren asked.

“Exactly like that, talking about it could strengthen the family,” I said and laughed.

“We’re higher than the US Mafia, though,” D said.

“I told his ass that and cut all that ‘we’re’ shit out. You supply computer technology. That’s it!” I followed, making sure he understood. He gave me a scrutinizing look before Demi broke up our stare-down.

“Why in the hell would he ask you to marry her when I was right here?” Demi said.

“Shut your extra married ass up, Demi,” Ren said. They were all happily married, but Demi had been secretly married since he was eighteen.

His simping ass!

“Right, because where is Melanie’s thick ass anyway?” I said as I glanced into the ballroom, looking to see where their women were. I knew they were somewhere amongst the guests together. Something akin to anger flashed across his eyes before he smirked .

“Yeah, like I thought, talking about my damn mama like that.” I taunted.

“So, are you going to do it?” D asked.

“Surprisingly, Brice talked to her about it, and she didn’t sound like she would object. I’m down if she is. However, y’all saw her just now trying to destroy the family jewels; what in the hell do you think?” I said, both pissed off and turned on by the act.

“True! Y’all were over here fighting each other like Blanka and Chun-Li from Street Fighter. Well, maybe not Blanka because that’s one of D’s green-ass personalities. Let’s go with Ken.” Demi said, laughing. This nigga stayed calling Devin the Hulk or whatever big-ass green character he could think of. Before I could respond, my mother caught my eye.

“What the fuck,” I said as I gazed into the ballroom. My mother was having an intense conversation with Miller. I quickly started to walk in her direction, with D, Demi, and Ren walking just behind me.

“Bingo, we got action!” I heard Demi yell behind me.

How in the hell did he even get in here? Last I checked, he was in New York.

I reached Miller in record time, grabbing him by the collar and pushing him against

the nearest table. When he braced himself on the surface, discarded wine glasses fell to the floor, shattering, bringing the attention of a few nearby guests. Devin and his brothers crowded around us, blocking out their view. The other guests returned to their conversations because we appeared to be doing the same .

“Do we have a fucking problem?” I said to Miller as he looked at me and smirked. I saw red. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the man who was with Miller at the steakhouse. He had another man with him whose hand was ready to pull out. I mentally cataloged his appearance while Miller’s hand raised slightly, halting him from fully discharging.

I glanced at Devin, who had discreetly taken out his gun; he’d seen it too. His finger was on the trigger, low in front of his groin, where no one could see. I tightened my grip, restricting Miller’s airways.

“I said do we have a fucking problem?” I repeated myself, which I hated to do. He finally conceded by throwing his hands in the air before I let go of his collar. He fell over with a cough and went through the crowd with his two men flanking him.

“Ma, are you good? Do you know that nigga?” The questions were fired out before she had the chance to answer them.

“It’s ok, I’m fine, Stephon,” she said, but I knew she was anything but. Not to mention, she hadn’t answered my second question.

“If you want to leave, just let me know, and I’ll take you home.”

“Nonsense. The night isn’t over, and you already threw him out. Besides, you still have work to do,” she said, patting my chest and walking back over to where her friends were. I blew out a harsh breath. My mother was bothered. I could see it written all over her face. The worried lines creased her forehead and eyes. Just as

quickly as they had appeared, they were gone. It was too late; I'd already seen them. Miller had just moved himself up on my list. I knew where my mother was, but because of that motherfucker I'd lost track of Jourdan.

Shit!

"Damn, your mama got all the old niggas in here going crazy tonight," Demi said and laughed.

"Yo, between Jourdan and my mother, motherfuckers better tread lightly around here. I'm already on ten, and they don't want to see eleven," I said to Devin and his brothers, who were still huddled around me. I was raging inside.

"Look at D's ass! Put that shit up. You're AARP now. That means your old ass is retired," Demi said. Devin quickly holstered his gun and put him in a headlock.

"Here they go with this shit," Ren said, shaking his head. They all laughed at their antics. I was too focused on Miller and his two men, still making their way to the exit. I turned and headed for the back exit that Jourdan had come in through earlier.

"Yo, Steph, Steph," Ren called out. I would have turned to answer, but Steph wasn't the one he was calling out to. Almost to the door, I heard a transmission from the walkie.

"Steph." It was Brody's ass.

"How in the fuck did that nigga get in here, B?" I returned. The fact that he'd decided to all of a sudden do his damn job wasn't lost on me.

"I had a little situation at the door," he said. This was exactly why I had trust issues. I didn't have time to dwell on it. Once I hit the exit, I slipped down the side of the

building, covered in darkness. The street on this side of the building had several cars parked. I quickly headed towards the front. About halfway up, I met Miller and his men coming down. They'd stopped beside two of the parked cars.

“What do you want to do, Boss? Do we need to run up on that bitch in there?” One of them asked.

“She's not a bitch, and that's none of your fucking concern. What I told your ass to do was watch him. Not let his ass come and hem me up. I'm going back to New York tonight. What I need your ass to do is stay here and wait for Burks to give you the information on that meetup. You got that? I made the shit simple for you. Don't fuck it up. I don't want to have to visit your mother to tell her you went missing,” Miller said before he and his right hand got in the first car and pulled off.

The darkness continued to conceal me as the man stood at his car, pulled out, and lit a cigarette. I snuck up behind him and put him in a chokehold, restricting his airways. The cigarette fell to the ground, slumping him in my arms. Still shrouded in darkness, I searched his pockets for his keys and unlocked the car door, throwing him in the passenger seat before I rounded to get behind the wheel.

Checking the mirrors before I pulled out, I traveled up the six blocks from the hotel where the ball was held to go to my security firm. I took out my phone and opened the gate. Then I hit another button to open one of the service bays and drove inside. I couldn't risk anyone seeing this car here. So I took out my encrypted phone to text Trigger.

The firm's garage now!

Trigger

On the way.

I glanced over at my passenger to see that he was waking up.

I can't have that!

Before he turned his head to look over at me, I pulled back my fist, connecting with the side of his face to knock his ass out again. This garage was where we serviced our vehicles. It looked like the typical auto service center with car lifts, tool chests, and the fresh smell of oil and gas. I rounded the car, picked up whoever this was, and threw him over my shoulder.

The firm's garage held two offices. One was for my lead mechanic, and the other was mine, where I was taking him. Inside was a bookcase that opened to a stairway leading to my sterile house. I called it a house because it held several rooms for various situations. The house was lit with fluorescent lighting and was completely stainless steel, down to the furniture. It was completely undetectable from the outside and one hundred percent soundproof.

I chose the smallest room, ten by ten feet, and threw him down in the corner of the room on the floor with a thud. After searching him for his wallet, phone, and other shit that may give him hope, I chained him to the hooks on the floor. It was heavyweight and had about three feet of tension. When he woke, he would be in complete darkness; if he screamed, no soul would hear him. Well, not any living ones. I would clone his phone and turn off his location later. The room was also equipped with a toilet. It was essentially a jail cell .

I left the room and headed down the hall to the kitchen. Because I wasn't a complete fucking savage, I searched around until I found a bottle of water and a half loaf of bread. I went back into the room and sat them down at his feet. I didn't have time to get the information I needed because I had to return to work. Until then, his ass would be here.

While I waited for Trig, I sat at the desk and quickly pulled up camera footage from the traffic cameras. Then I deleted myself as I drove from the ball. I also checked the hotel footage to see Trig's location, which showed him slipping on his job. As I looked for the time stamp, I found him in the corner arguing with his woman.

This nigga!

Just as I logged out, Trig popped into my office. His look told me he already knew what was up. I locked up, walking out with him behind me.

“I need you to take this car and get rid of it. Tonight! Take me back to the ball first, though,” I said as he nodded.

“My bad, Rock. Jade’s ass popped up tonight, talking about she was trying to see if I was really working. Then she said she was going home and cut out the back of all my pants since I wanted to have my ass all out in the streets. You know her ass will do it, too,” he said in a worried tone.

“Please tell me Jade’s ass didn’t say that,” I said, grabbing the bridge of my nose, trying to stop the laugh from spilling out.

“Rock, I was about to be assed out like Prince, my nigga.” When he said that, the laughter burst through. After I got control, I let his ass have it .

“Trig. You're, my man, one hundred grand, but you have too much shit going on sometimes. If something had happened to my mother tonight, I would have killed your ass,” I said, giving him the sincerest expression.

“I got you, Rock. I understand because I would have told you the same if you let someone run up on my mother. Except... I would have said I would have tried to kill your ass. Key word tried because you be on some other shit. Respect!” He said

calmly, holding my gaze before we both laughed. He held out his hand to dap me up and bring me in for a brotherly embrace.

“Let’s get back,” I said, heading to the passenger seat to get in.

“You just gone leave his ass in there?” he asked, and I nodded.

“Shit! For how long? It’s dark as shit in there and quiet as hell. He’s gonna wish he was dead,” Trig said.

“For as long as I feel like it,” I said and shrugged, with Trig shaking his head and laughing.

“See, other shit,” he said, cranking the car and backing out of the bay. This last month has been too noisy. I liked the world around me to be quiet.

CHAPTER 11

Jourdan

I sat in a chair directly in front of Marcus Burks, my elbows perched on my knees. Glancing at my watch, I saw that it was approaching twelve-thirty. My little run-in with Stephon was fun, but I was on a schedule. It was hard enough to hack into his security details for the night to get information on Burks' driver. It had taken me three days. I had to give it to him; his server was airtight.

However, our little back-and-forth was why it was later than I'd planned to be here. We'd returned to his townhome after he'd texted saying he wasn't feeling well and was ready to leave the Ball. I suppose the Rohypnol pills that I'd been slipping into his drinks had something to do with that. By the time we'd pulled up to the townhome, he was in and out of consciousness. Luckily for me, he was able to walk inside. It would have been hard to drag his heavy ass inside alone but not impossible. Once inside, I sat him in one of his dining chairs and tied him to it like the hog he was .

His home was a certified bachelor pad. The last time I was here, I didn't get the chance to look around. It was full of black leather, and you could tell a woman hadn't been involved in his décor choices.

"Wake up, sweetheart," I said as I reached my latex-gloved hand up to smack his cheek lightly. We were knee to knee as I sat in a chair directly before him. He groggily came to and tried to stand, but the restraints prevented that.

“What the hell,” he said. I reached back for my gun. I loosely held it as I leaned forward, getting so close to his face as I spoke that my breath caressed his skin.

“I know you imagined that when a woman finally tied you up, you’d be naked and receiving pleasure. You’re not. Nothing about this is going to be pleasurable.” I said, sitting back in the chair and spreading my legs. The nose of the gun sat at my center. Every man’s weakness was pussy, especially his.

“Unless you tell me what I want to know,” I said as I ran my other hand down my center. Then, I snapped my legs back closed. His dick rose beneath the fabric of his suit pants. I gasped.

“You’re enjoying this, aren’t you? You sick bastard!”

“What do you want to know?” He slurred. I didn’t miss the smirk that was on his face. He thought that this was a game. The anger I felt festered beneath the surface of my skin. My trigger finger twitched in the hold of the gun. I inhaled a breath to calm myself down.

I’m going to shoot his ass in the dick. Not yet, Jourdan .

“Do you know who killed my father?” I asked. His head was beginning to slump further over. He was fighting to hold it up.

“Who is your father? I don’t even know you, woman,” he groaned loudly.

“My father was Brian Washington.”

“Never heard of him,” he whispered.

What in the hell is wrong with him?

The doses of roofies that I'd given him didn't warrant the reaction that he was currently having. I stood, rushing over to him. When I lifted his head, I found dilated pupils and traces of white powder around his nose. I checked the pocket of his tuxedo jacket, finding a half-used packet of Ecstasy pills and the rest of the coke he'd snorted sometime during the night. I was tailing him the whole night, meaning he'd done it just before we left, when he'd told me he needed to use the restroom first.

"No, no, no, no, no, no." I checked his pulse to find that it was slowing down, and then he started to seize. I quickly undid his restraints so that they wouldn't leave bruising. Because of his wicked vices, I would no longer have to do the cleanup. He was dying, and I didn't have the meds to reverse it. I was headed right back to where I started, no closer to getting any answers. I replaced the chairs as I'd found them, then started picking up the bugs that I had scattered through his apartment. I'd worn gloves the entire time around Burks, so my fingerprints wouldn't be present anywhere. I headed towards the doors, and then I stopped. Contemplating kicking his ass post-mortem because he'd died before I'd gotten my information or the chance to kill him first .

You can't leave him, though. You have to clean up. Stephon's company picked him up and dropped him off. It will hurt his business if a councilman dies on his security watch.

"What in the hell am I going to do? Fuck!" I yelled out into the room. I needed my computer; my phone wasn't going to cut it. I wanted to call Stephon, but I didn't want to go to him with my tail tucked between my legs because I'd told him in so many words that I didn't need him.

Demi.

I took out my secure phone to call, but decided it would be better to text in case he was in bed. I didn't want any problems with his wife.

I need to cash in that favor.

Demi

Hold, please.

Did this nigga just tell me to hold over text?

After a few minutes, an unmarked call came through. I had my phone set up to scramble all voice calls over the airwaves and set to erase proof of said call once it was terminated. Demi knew this.

“Is there some reason you’re texting me instead of your man, Chun-Li?” Demi asked.

My man?

“Stop joking around. This is serious. And I didn’t tell Stephon, who

Isn’t my man because I didn’t want him to know,” I said as he hissed at my declaration .

“Yeah, ok, keep telling yourself that. What do you need? Speak

quickly because if Love wakes up and finds me talking to another woman at this hour, she will stop giving me my medicine. And if I don’t get my medicine, I will turn into M. Bison, then everybody is getting their ass whooped. You know I need it because I got a few screws loose,” he said, laughing into the phone.

You ain’t never lied!

“Ok, so I kidnapped Burks as Stephon’s driver, but he overdosed, and I don’t want

any traces that Stephon's team or I even had picked him up tonight. I would clean it up myself, but I don't have my computer," I sighed. I heard Demi's fingers racing over his keyboard. He spoke after what seemed like an eternity, but it was only around five minutes.

"It's done. I also erased you from the street cameras. Now get the fuck out of there. Aye, I don't know what y'all got going on, but don't let D find out. He's having a hard enough time staying out of the game as it is. I think his hulk ass is bored," he said thoughtfully.

"Thank you, Demi," I said in a singsong voice.

"I'm hanging up, you won't seduce me, you damn siren," he said before the line went blank. I laughed and then left the mess I'd made.

Demitri Cain has no sense!

CHAPTER 12

Jourdan

It was two o'clock AM, and I was just now making it home. After one final walkthrough of Burks' townhome, I returned Stephan's SUV to his fleet parking lot, where I'd ambushed Mike. Then, I walked the three blocks away from Rockwell Security to where I'd parked my car in one of the downtown parking decks. When I finally pulled my car into my garage, saying I was tired would have been an understatement. I have never been happier that I didn't have to fumble inside a purse to fish out my key.

I tapped in my code and barged in, throwing my stuff on the foyer table. In addition to my exhaustion, I needed to shower and decompress, but first, I needed a drink. I walked over to the fridge and took out a bottle of wine. It was the bottle I was chugging on the other day, so I disregarded the need for a glass again, turning it up. I also grabbed a water bottle because I would probably finish the wine. As soon as I reached the couch, I sat down and fell back, closing my eyes .

"Today drained me," I said dramatically out into the room.

"Did it now?" I heard, and then I quickly reached under the cushion and drew my gun in that direction. The goosebumps had appeared on my skin at his voice and presence. My eyes were still adjusting, but I didn't have to see or hear his voice. Once I focused, I could feel him.

"You think your trigger finger is faster than mine, Stephon?" I questioned with all the

gall I could muster. I didn't know if it was, but I guess we could find out.

“What makes you think it isn't?” He said. My eyes finally adjusted to the darkness, and I found him sitting in my love seat facing the door. The faint moonlight from the window gave him a glow. He was relaxed. His arms were sprawled along the back of the chair, and his chest was open. The only thing between us was the coffee table. Close, but yet so far. He'd made himself an easy target. As I continued traveling his length, I saw his legs spread wide. I'm sure to make room for the thickness I'd felt earlier. I sucked in a breath.

Damnit, why are you thinking about that man's dick at a time like this?

“Why do you have shoes on in my house, Stephon?” I asked. He stood and took off his wheat Timberland boots, carrying them to sit by the door. He wore a pair of relaxed grey Fear of God Essentials sweats, a plain white t-shirt, and a black bomber jacket. On his way across the room, he took off the coat and tossed it to the back of the couch. He finally sat beside me and pulled me over to straddle his lap .

“Where have you been? I've been waiting for you,” he said. I could hear the seriousness in his voice. However, I couldn't focus on his question because I was too focused on the soft bulge between my legs and the corded muscles of his arms covered in deep black tattoos that ran up his neck. Stephon's body was built like a god, and I wanted to explore it. I reached behind to set the wine bottle on the table to free up my hands. I started at his abs and guided my hands up his neck to finally reach his head, where I ran my fingers through his curls. I'd wanted to do it since the first time I saw him. As I did, his eyes closed as if he was relishing the feeling. I felt his dick jump beneath me.

When his eyes returned to mine, he sat back for a better look. Then he stood with my legs wrapped around his waist, carrying me upstairs toward my primary bedroom.

“You gave yourself a tour?” I asked.

“Something like that,” he said while laughing.

“I need to redo your security, by the way. The shit is trash. It only took me two minutes to get in and disarm it.”

“Well, you’re not a regular guy. Therefore, that’s not a fair assessment.”

“I’m glad you know, Baby.” Instead of placing me on the bed as I wanted after he entered, he bypassed it, going straight to my bathroom. Still holding me like I weighed nothing, he leaned into my shower, turning the water almost to its highest setting.

“Water temperature on hell. Right?” He said, and I giggled. I couldn’t believe I was once again giggling. He placed me on the counter, washed his hands, and began rummaging through my drawers. He was reading each label until he found what he was looking for.

“Stephon, what are you doing?”

“I can’t keep my fucking hands off you. I can’t control the shit, and I don’t want to. Right now, I want to be all over you. I want to kiss, hold, touch, and hug every inch of your body, Jourdan. I can’t do that when you smell like that nigga,” he said as if pained that he couldn’t act out his desire. Then he took a makeup wipe and gently cleaned my face to clear everything I wore, including the resolve I’d created to keep men like him away. I exhaled the breath I hadn’t realized I was holding as his touch poured promise into me. I couldn’t help the feelings that consumed me as I looked at him.

“Stephon, I can get used to this,” I whispered.

“That’s the plan.”

Is this man even real?

Then I wanted to kill the woman who was before me, who got the tender love and care he was showing me. Once he was done, he took my neck and pulled my face to his, kissing me deeply.

“Mmm,” I moaned as his tongue swirled around mine. Everything he was doing was turning me on. It was the way he was caring for me that was slowly breaking down my walls.

“What’s her name?” I asked because I was contemplating another mission after that kiss.

“Whose name, Baby?” He said, leaning back to capture my eyes fully .

“The woman who taught you all this.” Amusement flashed over his.

“Are you jealous, Jourdan?” I squinted my eyes and shook my head.

“My mother. After my father died, it was just me and her. We spent a lot of time together. Every night, when she got home from work, I would sit with her while she took off all her makeup. It was the only time we could catch up because I spent my afternoons playing high school football,” he said. I’m sure he watched the relief wash over my eyes.

I didn’t share men and wasn’t about to start now. I also had no problem dealing with a woman who thought she could come close to my man. His mother, though...I took a breath and sucked my jealousy right back in. That woman was damn near Clair Huxtable, at least from what I found and could see as she bounced around the Ball. I

was surprised that Mrs. Haven and Mrs. Cain hadn't brought her over to the dark side because those two didn't take any shit. I'd seen Mrs. Haven chop Demi in the throat tonight. Shit maybe they had. Clair did have that sharp tongue. She had them damn kids in line.

Hell naw, let me shut my ass up and change the subject.

"I knew you played football; you have a football player's ass," I said as I reached around to squeeze it.

"Jourdan," he said in warning as he laughed and hastily removed my hand .

"I'm sure your research to discover everything that is Stephon Rockwell got you that information. What I heard is that you're scared of my mama," he said, chuckling. I sucked my teeth at him.

"Now that you've successfully steered the conversation away from your envy, are you ready to tell me where you were?" he asked as he removed my wig, switching back to his serious demeanor.

"You already know where I was because Demi called you, didn't he?" I said with a slight attitude because Demi had snitched. He nodded.

"I asked you, though, not Demi," he said and sighed, his arms flexing to hold his weight as he placed them on the counter, caging me in.

"Let me help you, Jourdan. That's what I'm here for. It's literally my job, Baby," he said with pleading eyes. He was frustrated. I honestly didn't like that I brought on this disposition.

"You keep calling me Baby. What does it mean?" I asked

“Would you like me to stop?” he returned, and I shook my head no.

“Shower so we can talk,” he said before exiting and closing the bathroom door.

Stephon

I sat on the edge of Jourdan’s bed. I finally took a better look around the room I’d only seen in the dark. The king bed I was on sat in the center of the room and was made in a brandy-colored bedding set with black accents. That theme carried throughout the room and furniture down to the black chaise lounge by the window. To my right was her closet. For someone I’d thought wouldn’t be here long, she’d made this place feel homey, for lack of a better word.

I glanced at my watch to check the time. It was nearing three o’clock AM. I’d left the mayor’s ball for the second time at eleven to take my mother home. I returned to ensure my team had adequately secured the night’s end. Things tended to get dicey when people had alcohol running through their system. Once I returned home, I showered and sat on the edge of the bed to decompress. Before I could lie down, I received a call from Demi. Telling me that my woman needed his help tonight, and she didn’t want me to know about it. He also told me to keep it from D. I didn’t need him to tell me that. From what I saw tonight, he was eager to jump back in. None of us wanted that.

My woman, though ?

I let that title bounce around in my head before lying back and closing my eyes. I didn’t know how long I’d lain there before I heard the bathroom door open. I sat up, looking across the room to find Jourdan leaning against the frame, wearing a black silk robe with her hair cascading down her back.

“Stephon, I don’t want to talk,” she said.

“Come here,” I instructed. She wasted no time walking over to me. I focused on the sexy sway of her hips as she did. I widened my legs so she could stand in between them. Once she reached me, I took my hands and trailed them up her thighs until I reached her ass, where I rested my hands. I gently massaged and gripped her plumpness into my palms, eliciting a sweet moan from her parted mouth. Even though she had goosebumps from my touch, her soft skin was warm.

“You’re so fucking beautiful, Jourdan. Please tell me what you want. I need to hear it, Baby,” I said, my voice cracking from my desire. I removed my hands until she permitted me to ravage her body. I pressed my face into the silk fabric of the robe, feeling her warmth underneath and inhaling her sweet scent and arousal. My mouth parted as I skimmed the fabric, and my lips placed soft kisses through it.

“You said you wanted to be all over me. I want that, too. I also want you in me, Stephon,” she said as fire lit in her eyes. I groaned because she didn’t understand what she was asking me for. I planned to ruin her. I traced my finger from her neck down the edge of her robe, slowly pushing it open and over her breasts, letting the fabric trail over her nipples. They hardened for me instantly. I heard her hiss under my touch. I flattened my tongue and licked the underside, traveling up until I reached her nipple, trailing circles around it, being sure to keep my eyes on her. I wanted to know how every touch made her feel, how wet it made her pussy, and everything it took to keep it that way. She was so responsive, and I was just getting started.

Her nipples were growing harder with each pass of my tongue, perfect for me to suck when my mouth wrapped around it. I gently skimmed it with my teeth on my release, then blew. Taking her breast back into my hand, I caressed it while I moved on to show the other the same attention. Her head fell back, and her fingers dug through my hair, tugging and pulling at my curls. I closed my eyes, and a groan of my own escaped. The feeling of her fingers raking my scalp heated my entire body. I’d never been more aroused, and the blood rushing through my body quickly hardened my dick. It was evidence of the way she had me open.

“Mmmh, Steph,” she moaned as I let my tongue explore her further as I traveled down, tasting and sucking every part of her skin that was exposed. I wanted to taste every inch of her body.

“Untie that shit and take it off for me.” She did, letting the robe fall from her shoulders and drop to the floor without hesitation.

“Good girl,” I said as I scanned her body from head to toe trailing back up her thick thighs until I arrived at her plump, smooth pussy. My hands were once again moving on their own accord, sweeping over her, before I took two fingers and parted her lips. I circled her bud several times before dipping my fingers inside her tunnel. Her face relaxed in pleasure as I pulled my fingers in and out. My mouth watered at the sight of the slickness that coated them. I removed my fingers, sucking her essence off until nothing was left.

“Mmmh, I knew your pussy would taste this fucking good. Put your foot on the bed for me,” I said, pulling my t-shirt over my head and throwing it to the floor. She followed my instructions, and I pulled her forward, spreading her wide.

“Can I taste you, Baby?”

“Yes,” she whispered in anticipation. I leaned down, placing teasing kisses down her open thigh until I reached her lower lips. I put more kisses around them before sucking one into my mouth and then the other, dipping my tongue to spread her open. I flattened it, running it from her entrance, gathering her wetness, and carrying it up to slowly flick across her clit.

“Steph,” she moaned out. Then I felt her hand land on my shoulder while the other gripped my hair. That combination spurred my urgency to make her cum and instantly made my dick harder than it already was. I needed to hear it again. I needed to feel her fingers clawing at my skin and trying to pull my hair out. So, I repeated the

motion, lapping at her honey goodness until I heard her cry out my name.

“Steeeeepppphh.”

“Mmmm, so fucking good. I growled between the laps of my flattened tongue. I could feel my dick throbbing in my sweats and briefs. The sounds alone were enough to make me feel the need to release.

“Stephon, don’t stop,” she moaned. I didn’t. I went harder, flicking my tongue rapidly on her clit until I felt her legs buckle. I steadied her in my grasp, pulling her closer.

“Steph, I’m gonna cum,” she said as I felt the mess I was making run down my beard. She tried to pull her leg down, but I fell backward, making her straddle my face, locking her in place by her thighs to cum on my tongue.

“Steph, mmmh, you eat my pussy so good.” That statement turned me into a savage as I tightened my grip to continue my assault. Her screams and moans made my dick so hard I couldn’t take it. I released one of her legs to quickly wedge my sweats and briefs down just enough for my dick to get free. Then, I stroked it to the rhythm she was using to rotate her hips around my face. As her pace increased, so did my hand until she came again, drowning me in her essence.

Jourdan’s breathing matched mine as she shifted to straddle me. She leaned down and took my mouth, sucking every bit of her essence from my tongue and lips into hers as she hurriedly kissed me. After she’d had her fill, she sat up. My eyes were transfixed on her as she traced her hands down my chest, chilling my spine. Then her heavy-lidded eyes scanned down my body until they landed on my hand, still wrapped around my dick. The tip was filled with pre-cum, and I used my thumb to spread it over my head before coating my hand with it to glide it down my shaft. I continued to stroke as she watched until she smacked my hand away and maneuvered backward until she hovered over my length.

“Shit, wait, my condoms are in the car,” I breathed out as she began to slide back and forth, mixing our arousal and using my head to stimulate her clit. She felt good, and I hadn’t even entered her yet.

“Fuck, Jourdan!”

“I said I wanted you inside; I never said I wanted anything between us.”

“You trying to trap me, Jourdan?” I said with amusement. She could have straight up told me yes, and I wouldn’t have objected. I wasn’t objecting now. She could have anything she wanted from me, including this dick and everything that came with it, because it was already hers .

“We both did a deep dive. I’ve seen your medical records and know you’ve seen mine. I want to feel every bit of you in me: everything, the thickness, every ridge, vein, and tip when it touches my cervix. You can pull out,” she said with conviction before she wrapped her hands around me and lined me up to her entrance. I swiftly flipped our position, standing back out of her reach. I needed to shed the rest of my clothes, so I quickly slid them to the floor and stepped out. As I did, her eyes scanned my body in appreciation.

“You like what you see? You think you’re ready for me?”

“Yes, now put it in.”

“I guess that means you made your decision,” I said as I moved the head of my dick over her clit, eliciting a deep moan.

“What decision?” She asked, sounding breathless as I worked to coax out her third orgasm.

“That you’re mine. Because if I give you this raw dick, it must mean you’re ready to marry a nigga. My condomless dick is only going to my wife, Baby. Is that what you want?” I asked, alternating between smacking her clit and rubbing it with my head.

“Yeah, that’s what you want... to be mine. Until death do us part,” I used the tip to tease her entrance, coating myself in her slickness before sliding it back up to trace over her sensitive clit.

“No objection?” I asked as her legs tried to close, and her fingers gripped the sheets. She was cumming again. I pinned her legs open, lined up to her entrance, and sank in. Her hand immediately went to push me away as her cum gushed out around me.

“Mmmh. Yeah, it’s mine. Tell me it’s mine, Baby. ”

“Stephon,” she panted.

“Tell me!” I growled.

“What? So, now you don’t want this dick that you just tried to take.” I was unmoving and filling her to the hilt.

“Mmmhmm. Look at this shit so fucking wet.” I moaned. She was tight and hot; I could feel her pulsing around me. I held my position, watching her sexy body writhe beneath me.

“It’s yours, Stephon. Yes, I want it and everything that comes with it. Oh my...,” she said, but didn’t move her hand.

“So, move your hand then, Baby. I’m not moving until you do.” Her mouth hung open in pleasure because I was also strumming her clit with my thumb while I sat deep in her pussy. She didn’t move it. I already knew it was mine by the way she was

squeezing my shaft and gently rocking into me. She wanted control, but I wouldn't give it to her.

"Have it my way then," I said, pinning her hands above her head. Then, I began to stroke slowly deep into her, rolling my hips. Her breathing was labored, and her eyes rolled to the back of her head.

"Eyes on me, Jourdan. I want you to watch what I'm doing to my pussy." To help her focus, I grabbed her neck, bringing her eyes to me while I applied light pressure. I increased my pace. I was now stroking deep and quick, her breast bouncing with each connection.

"Yeah, that's it," I said, leaning forward to take her mouth and then, trailing my tongue down her body and back up, tasting, to make good on my promise to be all over her .

"Look at you, fucking beautiful," I said, burying my head into her neck and sucking.

"You gonna cum for me? Please give me one more. Can you do that for me, Baby?" I couldn't last much longer. The pleasure was intense. It increased when she wrapped her legs around my waist.

"Ahhhhh, Stephon," she screamed as she came. Her legs were still around me while I continued to stroke her through her orgasm until my impending one started to consume me.

"Let me out, Jourdan, mmmm." I said through a moan and tried to pull out.

"I changed my mind; give it to me," she deviously moaned as her grip tightened, holding me while she rocked out her orgasm. She took my mouth and kissed me. Her tongue tugging and pulling mine threw my body into an ascent. She ran her tongue

down my chin to my neck, where she began to suck. Once she started fucking me from underneath, I exploded inside her.

“Mmmm, Shit! I said as I stroked out the last of my cum.

“You’re fucking trouble,” I said after I’d caught my breath. She smirked like the menace she was. I stood to get warm towels to clean us off, gently wiping her clean before returning them to the bathroom. Once inside, I went back through her drawers until I found her bonnet. She was spent, and so was I, so I secured it as best I could, then lifted her limp body to peel back the bedding. Her head fell to my shoulders while she cradled my body. I climbed inside with her still attached to my chest. I attempted to lay her on her side of the bed, but failed because even in her tired state, she clung to me. I left her on my chest, content because she fit me like a glove. She belonged with me.

“We still need to talk, Jourdan,” I said. She was already asleep.

Damn.

CHAPTER 13

Stephon

The numbness in my arm was finally enough to wake me up. I looked down to find the cause still nestled nearly atop me. Jourdan had both her arm and leg wrapped around my body. I searched for the clock to see that it was nearing ten AM. I was an early riser, but after last night, I woke well past my usual time. I usually got up at eight, even on the weekends. I hadn't planned to stay the night here, but I would make the most of our time since I did.

My mind immediately went back to the night I had. I groaned internally at the amount of shit I suddenly had to deal with. Burks was dead, which reminded me that I needed to hit P up and see if he'd heard anything about that meet-up with Miller. Burks was my angle, and Jourdan could have possibly fucked that up. Not to mention, she thought he had information about her father's death, which was also a case I needed to hurry the hell up and solve. Jourdan's recklessness was going to get her hurt or killed. I wasn't going to allow either. Then there was Miller and my mother.

What in the fuck was up with that ?

I was definitely going to get to the bottom of that shit. I had a few more days to answer that question. I planned to give Miller's man three days before I went to get the answers I knew he would easily offer after being in darkened solitude.

I slowly slid Jourdan to the middle of the bed, careful not to wake her. Then, I looked down at the beauty that came into my life and upended my world and perspective. I

was allowing her my trust when I wasn't one hundred percent sure of the outcome. I knew Jourdan had reservations about the relationship we were forming, but I, for whatever reason, was moving full steam ahead. I didn't want to rush her into this proposed marriage. However, I'm not sure my mind reconciled that sentiment with my heart. I would marry Jourdan today if she said so, because I knew she was meant to be my wife.

When a nigga knows, he knows.

"Are you just going to stand there and stare at me all morning?" She asked in a sexy voice that was filled with sleep making my blood flow straight to my dick.

"Maybe. Spend the day with me, Jourdan," I said, trying not to leave any room for her to say no.

"You say things as if you're giving me an option, but lucky for you, I can't seem to tell you no. The fact that your dick is winking at me isn't making things any easier right now," she rushed out with a look covering her face as if she hadn't meant to let that information slip. I pulled on my sweats because I wanted her attention on my eyes and mouth when I said what I had to say.

"I always want the choice to be yours, Baby. Like I told you before, I'd never make you do anything you don't want to do." Her shoulders sagged as if she were processing whether what I told her was truthful.

"Tell me what it means."

"What, what means?"

"Baby," she said as she looked off, scared of my answer, before returning to meet my eyes. I picked up her robe and handed it to her. After she'd secured the tie, I took her

hands and pulled her from the bed to stand with me.

“It means that I’m in this if you are. I’m willing to trust you if you allow your trust in me, Jourdan. I know this relationship was proposed, but it doesn’t have to feel like an arrangement.”

“Okay”

“Okay?” I asked, leaning down to search her eyes.

“Yes, that's okay. I'll spend the day with you,” she said, deeply breathing.

“Also, to see where this goes.”

“Good.” I placed a chaste kiss on her lips.

“Go shower and get dressed. I have to get my things out of the truck. I’ll shower in the guest bath.”

“Not with me?” She asked. I took her by the chin and traced my thumb down her lip before wrapping my hand gently around her throat. I felt her pulse increase under my thumb and watched as her chest rose and fell. Then, I pulled her into my erection so that she could feel that she had the same effect on me. She moaned, and I almost lost control.

“No, because I want to get to know you, Jourdan. So, no more sex until I put a ring on your finger. Because if I get in that shower with you...” I leaned in, licking the seams of her lips, making them fall open.

“The only thing I’m going to want to know is if you’re ready to cum on this dick.” She took in a breath, and I stole what little was left by sliding my tongue against hers

in a heady kiss until I abruptly pulled away. She was aroused, and I could tell that she wasn't used to being told no because the look that she gave me next was challenging. Then she walked away, going into the bathroom and closing the door.

Fucking trouble!

I grabbed my shirt, threw it on, and headed to get my bag. I decided to use the garage door instead of the front door. I passed my coat on the couch, but left it since I wouldn't be there long. I noticed that Jourdan never wore a coat. The only time I'd seen her in one was the day she was on her lioness shit. How she fought with it, let me know she didn't prefer to wear one. I stepped down the landing and walked past Jourdan's BMW X6, seeing I had enough room in her oversized garage to put my truck in. While I got my bag, I pulled in beside her car. That way, she wouldn't have to step out into the cold air. While in there, I looked in her car for her extra garage door opener. I found it in the glove compartment and clipped it to my visor.

Steph, you're wildin' right now .

I curbed my thoughts because maybe I was. I would be that and worse when it came to mine, and she was... undoubtedly mine. Besides, I wanted to see how far I could push the walls that she'd built. I planned to knock every one of them down.

Every last fucking one!

After marking my territory around her house like the big dog I was, I quickly showered and got out. I didn't want a repeat of my recent shower session. I'd told Jourdan no sex, but it was probably going to be harder for me to say no now that I knew what her pussy felt like. I was sure it was the closest I'd get to heaven. Hell, that's what it felt like. I didn't know what the hell her ass was doing in the shower all this time, but she still wasn't out by the time I'd finished.

I found my way into her office and sat in her desk chair. I noticed her computer was open and unlocked. I tapped the mouse pad, and my gym's webpage appeared. I couldn't tell if it was finished, but it was definitely better than the shit I had before. I was low-key mad that I hadn't done this sooner because I was leaving money out there.

"You just love making yourself at home in other people's houses, huh?" Jourdan said from where she had just appeared in the doorway. She was wearing all black. A simple pair of straight jeans that were loose but still managed to hug every single curve, and a long-sleeved black t-shirt. The ponytail she always wore was slicked back and thick, fanning down her back. It was usually bone straight. In her hands, she held a pair of block-heeled combat boots. I couldn't help but notice that we were matching .

"Nah, not people's houses, just yours," I returned. She rolled her eyes, which caused me to laugh. I stood and headed over to where she stood.

"So, what are our plans?"

"Why can't you just hop your beautiful ass in the truck and ride?"

"Because I don't know if you're about to take me to one of your little rooms," she said.

"Jourdan, what in the hell are you talking about?" I knew exactly what she spoke about, but how had we gotten back here? I ignored her because I could show her better than I could tell her. I grabbed her hand and slid past her in the door frame, pulling her along. We stopped in the foyer. I took her boots from her hand, squatting to help her into them while she looked down at me intently. She hadn't realized that I'd waved the white flag. I was ready and willing to surrender to her in every way.

I led her toward the garage instead of leaving through the front door. She stopped again.

“Where are you going? Your truck is out front, right?” She asked. I opened the garage door with her peeking over my shoulder.

“Why... Stephon... how...,” she stopped talking to laugh. I smirked.

“So, I can come inside you but not in your garage. We gotta work on your hospitality skills, Baby,” I said.

“I should have just kicked your ass out after you got me off, like all the rest of them,” she huffed out with a playful attitude that I was about to fix. I abruptly drew her body close to mine and cupped her pussy through her jeans. Then I leaned to whisper into her ear.

“See, you messed up when you made me cum up in here...,” I said as I ran my finger back and forth down the seam of her jeans, pressing into her clit and holding my finger there to add pressure. It caused her to take a deep breath.

“Mine,” I said, then gave several sharp pats on her pussy.

“Which means I can come all up and through here,” I said, nodding and gesturing around the house. I returned to her face to peck her on the lips.

“Fuck you, Stephon,” she said, brushing past me and heading towards the truck. I caught her wrist and waited for her attention.

“You can do that again when you’re officially my wife.” She jerked her arm away, and I heard the door open and close shortly after. I laughed and locked up, heading down the three stairs and landing behind her. Once I got in the truck, I hit the garage

door opener and started the ignition.

“I can’t wait to go to your house and show you the same courtesy. I might make a little visit while you’re at work, like you did me,” she huffed, crossing her arms. I laughed again.

“Well, since we’re laying out all the rules, don’t touch a car door handle again while you’re with me, either.” She turned to stare out the window so I couldn’t see her smile, but it was too late. Jourdan Washington was precisely the good trouble I thought she was.

CHAPTER 14

Jourdan

Stephon drove through the streets of Cypress like he owned the roads. I glanced out deeply tinted windows as we hit the interstate and approached the city's center. We'd been driving for about ten minutes and hadn't reached our destination. He was quiet, too quiet. I studied his profile to see the creases form on his forehead. He seemed to be in deep thought. I understood his demeanor if he was thinking about anything I was.

I'd decided that I was going to marry this man. Was it arranged? Maybe. Convenient? Most definitely. Neither of those was why I was doing it. I felt something whenever we were in each other's presence. Something that I wanted to swallow me whole. The question lingering in my mind was, could I trust it?

Outside of the thoughts that spoke loudly in my head, Steph had The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill playing in the background. I took a break from my thoughts, letting her melodic voice fill the void. Until Steph finally spoke .

"There's a kids' football league that I coach for. We have practice this afternoon. I figured we could grab lunch and then head there. It starts at three. You down?"

"Yeah, I'm down. It's not like you left me much of a choice, Stephon, since you're just now telling me where we're going." I said in a teasing voice.

"That may have been intentional," he said, smiling. Those damn dimples and those

perfectly straight teeth. I wanted to kill him like Brandi tried to kill Darnell in *A Thin Line Between Love and Hate* for messing with my emotions like this. Except I would succeed.

Yeah, ok JoJo, talk your shit because that's all you're doing is talking. He has to be fucking with me, right?

I sank further into the seat, fighting between love and hate. I loved how Stephon made me feel, but I also hated it. Then, the song *When It Hurts So Bad* started to play further, toying with my emotions. Now, I was the one with wrinkled lines marring my forehead.

“What’s wrong, Baby?” His flexing muscles transfixed me as he guided the truck into Two’s parking lot. He whipped into the spot and cut the engine.

“Just thinking about love. Being in love means that I will eventually give up my power. I don’t want to be hurt. My heart has been broken enough to last me a million lifetimes. I don’t want to go through it again.” Stephon opened his door, got out, and walked around to open mine. He unbuckled my seat belt and then turned me to face him. Regardless of my inner turmoil, I couldn’t ignore that being with Stephon felt right; he felt like home.

“Jourdan, I don’t want to take your power. I want to amplify that shit. I want you to feel more powerful than you’ve ever felt before,” he said, then leaned in, kissing me deeply. It was possessive and full of promise. I pulled him into me, taking all that he was willing to give before he stopped, pecking my lips a few more times before he spoke.

“Come on, I’m starving. We skipped breakfast. I’m too big to miss meals,” he said as he helped me down.

“You could always eat me,” I whispered.

“What was that?” He asked.

“I didn’t say anything,” I responded while shaking my head.

He held my hand as we crossed the lot and headed inside. The hostess greeted us at the door.

“Welcome to Two’s. Oh, hey, Stephon. It’s nice to see you again so soon,” she said, her smile eager. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes, opening them to find hers glued to Stephon.

“Will you and your guest be...?”

“Wife.” I bluntly spoke.

“Excuse me?”

“You’re excused. You said guest, but that would be incorrect because I’m Stephon’s wife. I felt Stephon behind me. His arm wrapped around my waist, pulling me into his body, where I felt his erection.

“You better tell her my usual booth because if she takes us to private dining, I’m not just going to eat you, Jourdan. I will spread you across the table, say my grace, and devour you. We don’t have that kind of time. Like I said, I’m a big man, Baby,” he whispered. Then, he leaned further down to peck the side of my neck. My eyes closed again involuntarily. I found the hostess flustered and uncomfortable when I opened them this time.

Mine!

“We’ll be sitting at his normal booth.”

“Ahem, my apologies, Mrs. Rockwell. If you two will follow me,” she said after clearing her throat. After we were seated, a waiter promptly came, and we both placed our orders. Steph ordered the chicken marsala without even looking over the menu. He did it so quickly that I figured it had to be good, so I ordered the same. We both sat silently as the other guests' conversation sounded around us. Since it was Sunday, the restaurant was brightly lit by the open shades that let it all in. It was a stark difference from the night ambiance that it held. I could see Stephon studying me out of the corner of my eye. I finally gave him my attention.

“Who broke your heart, Jourdan?” Stephon asked after we sat for a moment in silence.

“I’ve been in love before. However, the loss of their love could never compare to the heartbreak of losing both parents. I thought that maybe if I could just find out who murdered my father, it would help me mend some of this brokenness.” I said, flailing my hands around, trying to emphasize how I felt on the inside. He grabbed them, placing them in his. His calmness flowed through me instantly as his fingers threaded mine .

“I get that. I threw myself into football heavily afterward. Although it never felt the same. When my father was rooting for me from the stands, I felt bigger than life. I was gutted after my injury when I realized that I couldn't accomplish the dream I told my father I would. I didn't stay there in that darkness, though. I talked that shit out with my mother, and D. You can't hold on to that hurt, Baby. As long as you're with me, and if you'll allow it, I will do everything possible so you do not stay there,” he said and paused, examining my face to make sure I understood.

“You can talk to me. I know we're new, but our backgrounds put me in a position to understand exactly what you're going through. I know you're not rocking with him

right now, but you can also talk to your brother. You also have a best friend, right? Don't let that shit consume you Jourdan. You'll miss everything important even when it's staring you right in the face. Trust me!" I took in his words and could tell he meant them the same as he'd told me before.

The waitress came, and Steph let go of my hands. She set our meals before us, and we said grace before I took my first bite.

Damn!

That thought must have shown on my face because Steph smiled at me.

"I'll never steer you wrong, Baby."

"Um, Huh," I hummed and smirked before pinning him with a hardened stare.

"Since we're being honest and open. Did you fuck that hostess? "

"Why? Are you going to kill her?"

"Maybe or you. It depends on your answer." I said as he laughed.

"Your brother asked me the same thing; you two are funny as hell. No, Mrs. Rockwell," he said with emphasis, then continued.

"I don't know why y'all think I go around slanging dick to every beautiful woman I see."

"Oh, so you think she's beautiful?"

"Come here," he said, pinning me with a hardened gaze of his own. I placed my fork

down and slid into the booth beside him. He spread his legs, pressing his closest against mine. I looked down to see the bulge in his sweats.

“Touch it,” he ordered. I glanced around, making sure no one could see before I followed his command. It was hard and seemed to get harder when I gripped it.

“Your jealous threats only make my dick hard. I wouldn’t handle threats from you like I do all the others,” he said as he traced his hand down my face before grabbing my chin.

“Your threats will end with you bent over, maybe this table, if you keep trying me,” he said, bringing his face to mine and pausing.

“Now eat before I show you by making good on it.” He pecked my lips and slid my plate over. Then he lifted my fork and sliced a piece of the chicken, ensuring it had enough sauce before he lifted it to my mouth.

“Open up for me, Baby,” he said, nodding, directing me to do as he said. I crossed my legs and squeezed them together, trying to stop the throb that he’d just put there. I wrapped my lips around the fork with the chicken, which tasted even better than it had a few moments ago.

“Good girl,” I heard him groan under his breath before he released the fork back into my hands. After a few moments, just like before, his hand gravitated between my legs, where it rested. I glanced over to see him eating his Chicken Marsala like he didn’t have a care in the world.

He has to know what he’s doing, right?

We spent the next twenty minutes eating, laughing, and getting to know one another before heading to his team’s practice.

“Coach Steph, Coach Steph!” The kids yelled and crowded around Stephon the moment he entered the indoor field. There were around forty kids, all of whom appeared to be in fourth or fifth grade. Five minutes earlier, we’d arrived at Sports Plex, an indoor sports arena. The area of the venue we were in housed the turf field, where the kids were suited up and running around. It was warehouse-sized and outfitted with white walls, bright lights, and skylight roofing.

“Coach, Coach, is that your girl?” One of the pre-teens asked. Before Steph could answer, the kid had stepped up to me with his most confident swagger .

“Do you know magic? Because you just made everyone disappear,” he said as he took my hand. Stephon smacked the kid’s hand away and tackled him to the ground.

“Canon, you must be trying to run the whole practice by coming after my woman like that,” Steph said. The kid erupted in laughter as he tried and failed to get up numerous times.

“Aye, Shay, you better get your kid,” he yelled across the field. Shay, who I now knew to be Canon’s mother, smiled back as if she’d won a damn prize.

“Hmph.” While I watched nearly all the kids try to help their downed teammate off the ground, Justin finally spoke.

“We meet again, Ms. Washington,” he said, lifting my hand to kiss. Kids flew as Steph lifted off the ground, running over to smack Justin’s hand as he’d done Canon’s.

“I see both you and Canon trying to get dropped today.”

“I’m just fuc..messing with you, man,” Justin said, catching his slip of the tongue in front of the kids. I found a seat as Steph and Justin quickly started their practice. I’d

been so busy focusing on Steph and how he interacted with the kids that I hadn't even seen him come in.

JoJo, you weren't worried about whether he was good with kids the other day.

Across the field, on another set of bleachers, I could see a group of the kids' mothers huddled around, watching Steph and Justin more than they watched their kids. Hell, I didn't blame them. They were moving with as much agility and speed as the kids. At this point, I was sure that Steph was putting on a show to impress me because they were going so hard. Evidence of how in shape they were, neither of them had broken a sweat.

Before the next play, Steph took a phone from his pocket and frowned at whatever appeared on the screen before responding. It was a different phone than the one they used to handle business. It also wasn't his primary phone. My brother carried three, but I knew one of his was for the hospital. As the lioness, I was keen on things that felt out of place. That phone was raising my haunches.

While his attention was on the phone, Justin split the kids into two groups of ten, leaving him and Justin as the eleventh man. He was running the defensive side while Steph ran the offense. Steph huddled up with the quarterback, giving him the play they would run. The ball was hiked, and Steph took off from his starting point, heading to his designated spot on the field as a receiver. Before he reached his place, I saw his stride stutter, but he recovered. He reached his spot and caught the ball. He was hiding it well, but I could see the slight limp that appeared; he was favoring his left knee.

Whatever was on that phone distracted Steph enough to throw him off his game. He'd been sure of all his movements before then. The kids ran the play that Steph had demonstrated while he stood off to the side. I stood, heading in his direction to see if he was ok. Secondly, I wanted to know what was on that phone. Before I could move,

I was stopped by a hand placed on my arm. I looked down at the hand of the man who was touching me without permission. I'd seen him come in with the other group of kids who were to practice after. Shouts from the kids filtered back in, reminding me I should play along for now.

Hmm, one of my favorite games.

I smiled at the man, giving him my consideration to see why he'd thought to be so bold. Once I gave him my full attention, he began to speak.

"My apologies. I've never seen you here before. One of your kids plays for this team?" The stranger asked.

"Nah, our kid is playing hide and seek right now, but they both play for Team Steph," he said in a deadly tone, causing the man to snatch his hand away quickly. It was like he had teleported to where we were because he appeared so fast.

"So, do you want to end up in Jeopardy or the Wheel of Misfortune? Since you want to play games by asking all these damn questions," Steph said with his head cocked to the side and standing in a wide stance with his hands low in front of his groin. The guy held his hands palms forward, backing away. It was almost as if he were trying to decide if the conflict was worth it or if I was worth it. However, Steph didn't back down; his presence seemed to magnify. We both watched as the guy turned and walked away.

Damn, I didn't even get to play.

"Ok, now I'm wet," I said, eliciting a loud laugh from Steph.

"I bet you are. Baby, fuck these kids. If a nigga puts his hand on you break that shit," he said before pecking me on the lips.

“Coach Steph, come dance with us.” One of the kids asked, breaking up the intensity .

“They do this at the end of every practice. Let me get back over here,” Steph said, kissing me again.

“Can we dance to that 21 Savage bonnet song?” Canon asked.

“No!” Both Steph and Justin shouted out immediately. I laughed because he was among the youngest in the group. That boy was going to be something else.

“Boy, what your lil’ ass know about that song? You know what? Don’t answer that. I need to speak to your mother. You’re too fresh today for me,” Steph said as he left my side to go over with the kids and fell in line with the crowd of dancing boys.

Speak with his mother over my dead body . Why am I all of a sudden so damn territorial?

I uncomfortably lifted my hand to swipe down my ponytail. I couldn’t believe that I’d only had the dick once, and his ass had turned me into Jackie Christie from Basketball Wives. She’d once said that if her man needed CPR to survive and a woman was the only one who was capable, then she’d let him die.

It's a good thing I know CPR.

After stewing in my revelation, I tuned back into the kids. They were laughing, jumping around, and performing their best moves. They were also laser-focused, teaching Steph and Justin the latest dance moves they’d learned online. They’d chosen another popular song to dance to that wasn’t as raunchy. They were currently tipping out and doing the sturdy.

I should have known that he could dance, especially after the moves he put on me.

Focus Jourdan !

I couldn't stop the warmth that spread over me before the goosebumps appeared. I didn't understand the magnetic pull that Stephon and I had on each other. It was like we were meant to be. My visceral reaction was to run from it, but I wouldn't this time. This man was going to ruin me.

Damn you ovaries! It's all these kids' fault.

CHAPTER 15

Stephon

The drive back to Jourdan's house had been quiet. My mind was all over the place. While at practice, a text from Miller on the phone I cloned last night had come through. The text wanted to know if he'd heard anything from Burks. That was only part of the problem because, no thanks to Jourdan, Burks ass was dead. I needed to solve that problem sooner rather than later. What really confused me was what he texted after, telling Malik Richmond, who went by Kilo, to stay on me and instructing him to watch my every move.

That shit wasn't happening!

I went through my mental Rolodex, trying to recall any time I had encountered this man. I'd only been around him once. I exhaled before I realized my hand was wrapped around Jourdan's thigh while my other hand guided the wheel. She tensed when I made contact before relaxing. The unconsciousness in which my hands had to be touching her in some way blew my mind. My touch had startled her because it appeared that she was also lost in her thoughts.

"Stephon, what's wrong? I saw your reaction to whatever was on that phone. Tell me what's going on."

Damn, she's reading me already.

"I don't want you to worry about it right now. Before you go off, it also has nothing

to do with your father. I'm still working on that. If it changes, I'll let you know. For right now, I need you to trust me. Can you do that, Baby?"

"You know, once we get married and I become Mrs. Rockwell, there will be no more withholding information." I smiled because she wasn't backing down from the whole marriage thing.

"Are you threatening me, Ms. Washington?"

"Yes," she answered stoically while staring me in the eyes. The act made my dick hard.

"Hmph," I grunted out and smiled again.

She wasn't satisfied with my answer, but decided to let it go. Here I was, telling her to trust me when I hadn't fully trusted her. I feared she would get too emotional if I told her the truth. Her emotions prevented her from getting the information she needed from Burks before he died. This felt like the only way I could protect her for the moment.

After another ten minutes of our drive, we arrived at Jourdan's house. She looked at me, grimacing when I opened the garage using the opener I had stolen from her car earlier. She tried to jump out of the truck quickly, but because I was closest to the door, I beat her to it, entering the code to get in .

"Tsk, Stephon, why are you like this?" She groaned with me, laughing again. I stepped inside, partially blocking the doorway. She leaned into my body, trying to push through.

"What did I tell you earlier? Ain't shit changed."

“Move before I kick you in your balls again.” I quickly stepped aside and smacked her on the ass as she walked by. She let out a yelp before turning to try to knee me again. I caught her leg, using it to drag her body into mine.

“I promise you that shit will never happen again,” I said as I let her leg go and headed to the bathroom to wash my hands. I had this thing about washing my hands anytime I came from outside back into the house. Once I was done, I headed upstairs to retrieve my bag. I found her sitting on a stool by her window. Beside her was a guitar I hadn’t noticed when I gave myself a self-guided tour. She was staring out, looking at the sunset. She finally turned her attention to me.

“You’re leaving?” I nodded before responding. I couldn’t tell by the look on her face if she was happy to have me out of her space or if she didn’t want me to leave.

“You good with that?”

“I am, but before you go, I have one request,” she said with that look of defiance I’d become accustomed to seeing from her.

“I’m not fucking you, Jourdan.”

“Boy, I don’t want your raggedy ass dick,” she said as she flicked her wrist, waving off my assumption.

“The lies you tell,” I said, laughing .

“Tell me what you want, then,” I said. She took out her phone and connected it to her Bluetooth speaker. I would welcome asking her this question for the rest of my life.

“I want you to dance for me.” I sighed as I heard the song Should’ve Worn a Bonnet playing through the speakers. We both laughed because Canon’s lil’ ass should not

have known what this song was. When the beat dropped, I lifted my shirt, tucking it between my teeth and showing my abs. I stepped forward sexily before stopping to spread my legs, where I brought my hands down in front of my groin and pumped them, rolling my hips. I closed my eyes and imagined she was bent over before me. I glanced up to see her enthralled with my little impromptu performance.

“Damn,” she said while biting her bottom lip into her mouth. I couldn’t hold back my smile. She stood and walked toward me, circling me like she was hunting her prey. She finally stopped in front of me after a couple of rounds.

“It’s these dimples. They are going to make my pussy wet every time,” she said as she slid her finger from my dimple, down my chest, and to my dick. She added more fingers on her journey until she was gripping my shaft, which had gotten harder with her touch. She had a fire in her eyes and didn’t know the flames she was fanning in mine. I grabbed her and spun her around, bringing her back to my front by the neck.

“Let me see,” I whispered into her ear. I took her hands and guided them to her jeans, urging her to unbutton them. Once she’d completed the task, I took one of her hands and pushed it into her underwear .

“Play with that pussy for me, Baby.” I covered her hand on the outside of her jeans, feeling her movement as she dipped inside and brought her finger up to swirl her clit.

“That’s it, Baby. I want it soaked before I taste it,” I whispered again, this time letting my lips and tongue join in by licking and kissing her neck.

“Mmmm,” she purred out. This was only the beginning; I wanted her to be hoarse by the time I was done with her.

“Make it cum for me,” I said as I let my breath tickle her skin. Her nipples caught my eye as they poked through her bra and shirt. Lowering my hand from her throat, I

dipped it into her shirt, pushing through her bra to split one of her nipples with my fingers. Applying light pressure, I threaded it back and forth, grabbing handfuls of her plump breast with each pass.

“Steph,” she cried out.

“Cum, Baby.”

The movement of her fingers was speeding up, and her body tensed against mine. When I was sure that she was cumming I sucked at the base of her neck until she cried out. As her chest rose and fell rapidly. I spun her back around to face me; her fingers were still inside her pussy. Her eyes were wild and filled with passion. I returned the look in her eyes because I wanted her to see that she was calling to a place where I had no inhibitions. A call that I would answer without hesitation.

“Put them in my mouth,” I urged. She slowly lifted her hands from her pants and placed them in my open mouth. The smell of her arousal and the sweet taste had me closing my eyes as I sucked every last drop off her fingers.

“Mmmh, you taste so damn good. Feed me,” I growled.

The way she looked at me, you would have thought I’d just stripped out of my clothes. I wanted to, but instead, I would strip her of hers because I was feverish. I walked her backward until I pushed her back down on the stool. I roughly split her legs and stood between them. Her breathing became labored as I pressed my erection into her center and ground.

I grabbed her ponytail, wrapped it around my hand, and used it to pull her head back, exposing her neck to me. I leaned in, flattening my tongue at the base of her neck, and licked up and around her chin until I reached her bottom lip. Then I tugged her hair harder. When her mouth fell open, I darted my tongue out to lick around her lips

before I connected with her tongue, kissing her passionately, letting her taste what had me on the verge of losing my mind.

“Up,” I commanded as I let go of her hair. She stood, and I worked swiftly to rid her of her jeans. I yanked them down hard to her ankles, along with her panties.

“Stephon, I thought you said no sex,” she said through her labored breathing. I ignored her statement for a moment. Once I was satisfied that her jeans weren’t in my way, I pushed her back down, spreading her thighs. She was dripping for me. I slid my hands from her knees and up her thighs until I reached her pussy. While there, I let my thumbs dip inside before gently dragging her wetness over her clit one by one. She hissed. Then I lowered to my knees. In moments, my fingers spread her open. I started at her hard clit and placed a kiss on it, then another, before swiping my tongue across it.

“Yesss,” she whispered. I looked up to find her eyes studying my movements. My mouth replaced my hands so that I could use them to grab her thighs, opening her up further to me. I had all of her in my mouth, licking and slurping on her clit. She reached down, holding my head as she ground on my mouth. Her holding and gripping my hair was the trigger that made me feel like I was outside of my body. I started to lap her up and down, stopping to suck on her clit until she came again.

“Mmmhmm,” I hummed as she held my head in place to ride out her orgasm.

“Yeah, that’s it, give me that shit,” I said before she let out a deep guttural moan as I made her cum.

“Mmmmmmm.” She moaned as I stood, connecting my mouth to hers, breathing in her orgasm before I added my tongue and swallowed it. I stuck my wet fingers in her mouth, leaving them there for her to suck as I freed my dick.

I was conflicted. In contrast, my body was screaming at me to make her mine for another night. I wanted her to be as sure as I was that this was what she wanted. That I was what she wanted without my dick further clouding her judgment. My body won out when I slammed into her center.

“Look what you made me do. You’re so damn spoiled. This fucking good ass pussy,” I said as I looked down at my dick that I’d pushed inside her as far as I could go. The base was covered in her slickness.

“Fuck,” I belted out. She felt so good that my eyes were trying to roll to the back of my head. Her heat wrapped around me tightly as she squeezed.

“Got damn!” With all the strength I could muster, I slowly pulled out and looked down at my stiff dick covered in her essence and groaned again. I quickly tucked myself back inside my sweats before I changed my damn mind or lost it. Either way, I needed to leave.

“What are you doing? You’re not going to finish what you started?” She asked.

“Nah, this is what your ass started. I’m good. That was for you, Baby,” I winced as I stepped back, playing off the pain I felt in my knee. The sharpness was enough to kill my arousal immediately. I was so caught up in her that I hadn’t realized I’d been down on it too long. I aggravated it earlier, trying to impress her. It was a reminder that I’d shattered my shit and that I wasn’t as young as I felt. I’d gladly take the little bit of pain I just endured to drown my face in her essence.

“The lies you tell. For me, my ass!” She said in a deep tone, intending to mock me as she quickly fixed her clothing while rushing over to me. Before she reached me, I lifted my shirt and reluctantly wiped my face.

“Steph, are you ok? I saw you tweak your knee earlier.”

“You saw that? She nodded. I laughed, shaking my head because I thought I’d hidden it well .

Damn lioness.

“I’m good, but I need to go, Baby. Bad knee and all; I’m two seconds from fucking the shit out of you. Why in the hell did I tell you no sex?” I whispered against her lips and chuckled.

“I know,” she sighed. The grasp that she now had on my shirt told me that she wanted to protest more. However, she leaned back and nodded before letting me go.

“Come, lock up.”

“Why? You already have the keys and all the codes to the safe.” I laughed at her statement.

“As long as you know!” I said and smirked. Then I turned back to her, grabbing her chin so she could look into my eyes.

“Jourdan, I’m trying to have the keys to your heart,” I said, kissing her one last time and drawing a heart with my finger on her chest. She looked down as I did, then I tipped her chin back again.

“It’s not to keep me out, though. I will drop bodies over you. Smith and Wesson have been itching for action, so lock up behind me,” I said, sobering to relay the seriousness of my statement. I pulled her hand as she followed me to the door. I let it go so that she could close it behind me. I listened for the lock to engage and hopped in the truck. Once I’d opened and backed out of the garage, I waited for it to close. I was gone. A nigga had fucked around and was falling in love in two-point-five business days.

Fucking Jourdan Washington.

CHAPTER 16

Stephon

Meet me at the firm's garage in 30

P

Yup

Trigger

Word

N ight had fallen, and the streets were quiet as I headed toward downtown. Not many people hung out there on Sundays, opting to prepare for the workweek. It was precisely where I wanted to be. I was pent-up. I don't know how I found the strength to pull out of Jourdan. The whole thought of not being deep inside her right now was further pissing me off. Since I couldn't release it how I wanted, I channeled it into anger. That anger would be taken out on Malik, the man locked away in the garage's basement.

I pulled up and entered the code to open the gate, patiently waiting for it to open. Pulling in, I scanned the lot for Trig and P, who hadn't arrived yet. I still preferred to be the first one in any place. Besides that, I needed to calm down. I was bound to fly off the handle and kill this man off the strength. P and Trig hyped me up, and I'd usually let them, but I needed information. With Burk's death, I feared he hadn't had

time to connect with Miller. I knew what Miller wanted; it wasn't a great mystery that needed to be solved. He wanted the top. What puzzled me was what he wanted from my mother.

Since we left New York, I had never seen my mother with a man. Not that I was privy to all her business, but the way Miller talked to her, and she didn't seem fazed by it, bothered me to no end. That was now my primary reason for wanting this meeting.

I parked by the door, killed the engine, and opened the rear cab. From there, I changed out of my sneakers and into my all-black Timberlands. Before I could make the switch, something caught my eye. It was a tiny, silver device, approximately two centimeters in diameter.

Did Jourdan put a tracker on me?

I couldn't believe what I was looking at. It was either one of two reasons why she'd placed it there. Either she had the same trust issues I did or was wildly possessive. The fact that she did had me smiling. I left the tracker where she'd put it, then fished for my hoodie. I threw it on along with my ski mask, rolling it up. The last thing I needed was in my lockbox. I entered the code and took out my holster, draping it around my shoulders .

I was pent up and planned on ridding myself of some of this aggression, but I needed the twins to do that. So I took one and removed the clip and the bullet from the chamber. I replaced it with an empty clip and tucked it in the back of my sweats. My other twin went fully locked and loaded into the holster under my left arm. By the time I finished, Trig and P had pulled in, parking beside me. They knew not to be a minute late. Punctuality was a must under my command. They both exited their cars, dressed in all black and wearing ski masks, just like mine.

“What’s good, Rock? You ready to handle that nigga in the basement already?” Trig said as I dapped him up.

“Did you just get some pussy?” Trig asked, leaning his head to the side in question.

“Nah, why?” I asked. Then, I discreetly smelled myself before I smiled again. Jourdan’s scent was all over me, but I wouldn’t give him the satisfaction of knowing he was right. Besides, I didn’t want anyone to know what my wife’s pussy smelled like. It was grounds for dismissal. The kind that made your family deem you as missing. I was once again claiming this woman as belonging to me, and I hadn’t even put a damn ring on it. I needed to handle that.

Wife? Yep, that woman owns you!

“You a damn lie. You know I have a sensitive nose, especially for that.”

“Aw shit, here his ass go. This nigga Trig swear he a damn bloodhound for pussy,” P said as he leaned on the door of his car.

“Nah, I don’t run red lights, but I for damn sure can sniff one out,” He yelled out, then started barking like a dog. I dramatically made a show of looking around. I placed my hands over my eyes and squinted to look off in the distance.

“Yo, who in the hell is that? Is that Jade?” I asked. He spun around, looking in the direction I had. In perfect timing, a random car was coming down the block. All the color drained from Trig’s complexion. P immediately started laughing.

“Damn, Jade got your ass on lock. Rock is fucking with you,” P said as he continued to laugh.

“Nah, you weren’t there when she popped up on me at the mayor’s ball last night.

She took all the laces out of my shoes. Talking about how I didn't need them since my ass didn't want to be tied down. I had to wear my Yeezy slides to the gym this morning. I almost broke my damn ankles on the treadmill," Trig said, with both P and I laughing loudly.

"Trig, why in the hell would you? Never mind," I said as I continued to laugh and walked off.

"Bring your goofy ass on." We all filed into the building, not even bothering to turn on the lights. The building was equipped with off-peak hour lighting. It was enough to see and deter any break-ins. Unlike last night, there was a car in the bay and one on the lift. My mechanics sometimes came in on Sundays to get a jump start on my fleet's maintenance.

"You were with that fine-ass woman who had on one of our uniforms, weren't you? I ain't say shit because you didn't, and I knew your ass saw her. I figured she was with you. That's her all over you, right?" Brody asked .

"No, your ass didn't say shit because you weren't doing your damn job," I said because he just wouldn't let it go.

"Wait, what woman?" P asked, confused by the whole conversation.

"Will both of you niggas get off my dick. Please!" I said over my shoulder as we continued down the hall. Once we arrived at my office door, I entered my code.

"So what's the plan? He done with tonight?" P asked.

"That depends. If he answers correctly, he's as good as gone," I said.

"Oh, but first, did Burks set up that meet-up?" His answer would determine how I

approached the man in the basement because I was the only one here who knew Burks was dead.

“Yeah, Burks gave me the direct line to his right hand. He called me right before Mike picked him up for the ball. I know how you feel about your Sundays, so I was going to tell you tonight during our check-in,” P said, gauging my reaction because he withheld information. Luckily for him, I wasn’t concerned with his timing because I wouldn’t have wanted anyone interrupting my time with Jourdan, especially not for this unimportant shit. I fanned my hand, indicating for him to continue.

“He said to give him two weeks to set up the location and time. He said that Miller would be out of the country.” I nodded, digesting the information that he’d just given me.

“Let’s go to work then,” I said. I looked at Trigger, who nodded, ready as well. I turned to my bookcase and entered the code to open it. The bookcase slid to the side, and automatic fluorescent lights illuminated the staircase. We went down the landing and directly to the room where he was being held. Before entering, we all dropped our masks, and then I slowly opened the door. The air was stale and thick. Luckily, he’d found the toilet because if I had to smell his foul ass odors also, I may have just gone ahead and shot him.

It had only been twenty-four hours since I’d chained him to the floor in complete darkness. I wasn’t expecting to get much from him. He wasn’t broken enough; fight or flight desperation would make his mouth move. He quickly sat up, covering his eyes to shield them from the bright lights as they adjusted. He immediately looked around the room, taking note of everything in it, which wasn’t much. His eyes finally found the food and water I’d left. He quickly devoured a slice of the bread and chugged the water. I’m unsure how he hadn’t felt it because I placed it by his feet.

“Word on the street is that your boss wanted to see me. Tell me why.”

“Shit, you know why. Everybody wants to wear the crown,” he said.

“Why would some old washed-up motherfucker like Miller be looking to take over now?” I asked.

“He’s been trying for a long time, ever since he moved from LA back in the day,” he said. My mind began to turn, and I felt like I was piecing together pieces of a puzzle that didn’t fit. However, when he spoke of Cali, I decided I didn’t want him to say another word tonight .

“P, go to the kitchen and get his ass another bottle of water. Pour a third of it out.” I didn’t know when I would return, but I didn’t want him to die of thirst and starvation before I did.

“You don’t want to know anything else. I’ll tell you everything you want to know; just let me go,” he pleaded. He was a little too eager for me, and I didn’t like that. You could almost assume that Miller had banked on his man getting caught with how he was trying to feed me information. I took the bottle from P and walked it over to where I’d set the last one. I wanted to test the theory.

“I’ll be back,” I said as I looked into his eyes. The longer I stared, the more it angered him, and that was exactly what I wanted. I took my key and unchained him. If he really thought that I was going to let him out of here alive, then it meant that he was just running his mouth because he was a pussy, and a snitch.

“I’ll tell you what if you can get a lick in. I’ll let you tell me everything you know right now and leave.” He stood in a fighter's stance, and I did the same.

Shit, he’s just a damn snitch.

My former thoughts disappeared after he took my proposition at face value. If it were

me, I would have taken my death like a man and never said a fucking word. I studied his stance to see if he would be a worthy opponent. He wasn't, at least not to me. I dropped my hands from my face, lowering my defense. His first punch came swiftly. I leaned back to dodge his advance. I let him get off a couple more attempts while I danced around him. He charged me again, throwing a combination right hook and jab with his left. This time, I threw my hands up to block .

“Come on, Rock, stop playing with this man,” Trig said. The frustration was showing on my opponent's face as he continued to swing, using more and more of his energy.

“You're right!” I exclaimed. I stopped toying with him and took the gun from my back. I flipped it, gripping the barrel, and held it out for him to take. He cautiously took it from my grasp.

“Go ahead,” I taunted. Without a second thought, he lifted the gun and pulled the trigger. Then, he started to squeeze it in rapid succession. After he'd run out of desperation, I took out my gun and shot him in the leg. It was a perfect shot that was meant to cause enough pain to agonize him until I returned. The effect was already present as he leaned over, gripping his thigh.

“Stand the fuck up.” When he did, I got back into my fighter's stance, egging him on again. His first swing missed its mark, and so did the one after. Figuring I'd finally gotten my fill, I caught him in the gut on one of his wild swings, then uppercut him to the chin, dropping him cold.

“Ooh, shit! Is his ass snoring? Yeah, he ain't waking up until tomorrow, maybe not even then,” P said. I turned to find him and Trig kneeling over his body, fist to mouth, laughing.

“Somebody needs to teach his ass how to squabble,” Trig followed, filling the room with more laughter.

“Y’all’s ass needs to grow up,” I said, smiling and shaking my head at their antics. I kneeled and chained his wrist back up, then stood to leave with P and Trig, turning off the light and locking up behind me. Once we reached the top of the stairs, Trig started asking questions .

“I know that’s not all you wanted to know, so why did you hold off?”

“I have something else I need to handle before I ask him for the rest. Are you good with that, or are you going to keep questioning me like I don’t run shit around here?” I asked.

“Nah, Rock, we good! Shit, I’m trying to wake up tomorrow I got shit to do. I can’t afford to sleep that long,” Trig returned. I heard P laughing behind us. I needed to dive deeply into Miller’s past; I wanted to know everything I could about him. However, it would have to wait. I needed to rest my body and mind.

“I’m out. Y’all lock up,” I said as I headed out of the building. They nodded and began laughing and talking again about how I had knocked Miller’s man out. I let their voices fade as I continued to my truck so that I could head home.

CHAPTER 17

Jourdan

I gathered my breath as I stood out of the camera's eye at the corner of Stephon's house. I was trying to ensure there wasn't another near the door where I needed to enter. I was in his backyard after running several blocks from where I parked. To the unsuspecting neighbor, I appeared to be going on an early morning run. I stood for a moment longer, looking around his property. His house made my modest two-story look like a playhouse. It was a contemporary-styled home with two stories, but probably double the size of mine. It was black with large windows and gray stone features. The lawn was perfectly manicured, and in the center sat a beautiful pool.

I finally moved underneath the cover of his back porch and made my way to the door. I quickly took out my pocket knife and popped the panel. He used a biometric lock and code similar to the one I installed on my doors. Since I was familiar with the setup, it took only a few moments to crack open. Once it was off, I hooked up my decoder and waited for it to render the results.

No way!

I read and re-read what appeared several times. The number that was decoded to allow me access was my birthdate. After standing for a moment in disbelief, I returned the panel to its original position and entered the code to unlock the door. As I glanced around, I kneeled, taking off my shoes one at a time, and placed them by the door before entering. My breath was taken away by what I saw. It was grand but still felt homely. A tan sectional and chairs with espresso accents filled the oversized

living room. Pops of rustic orange and navy blue were used throughout the décor and artwork. Family photos were also sitting on a credenza to the right of the door. I studied the pictures of him with his parents and noted again that he'd taken his looks primarily from his mother. His meticulousness was shown in the way that I couldn't spot anything out of place.

I skimmed my hand on the sofa as I walked by and headed to the kitchen. I loved a good kitchen, and Stephon's did not disappoint. There was a vast marble island with waterfall edges, and the appliances were high-quality and outfitted for a chef. Still making a point to run my hands over every surface in his home, I made my way to his refrigerator, where I found a bowl of fresh fruit that I helped myself to, along with a bottle of water to eat and drink as I continued my tour. I was determined to leave my mark in his home, similar to what he'd left on me and mine .

On my way to the stairs, I saw a dining room, a guest suite, and an office. I made a note of them because I would return to them later. I continued to be in awe of what I found upstairs. There were four additional rooms, including a man cave, two bedrooms, and a primary bedroom. They were impeccably decorated, and everything was in its place.

Did his mother help him with the décor? She better have!

Now that my hands were occupied, I no longer made it a point to touch his things, that is, until I entered his domain. It smelled like him, and I was smiling now that I could invade his privacy just as he had mine. In the center sat a neatly made Alaskan King bed with plush tan bedding. I set my snack on the dresser and undressed. I unzipped my workout jacket and threw it to the floor, then shimmied out of my leggings. Underneath were a sports bra and undies. Once satisfied that none of my outside clothes were on, I walked over. As I did, I ran my hands across his bedding. Stephon had a balcony off his bedroom that I hadn't noticed. I walked to the door and looked down into his beautiful backyard and pool. After I'd taken in the view, I

finally dove into the bed. I giggled and kicked my feet as I sank into the center like I'd won a prize. I haphazardly wrapped myself in his down comforter and pillows, grabbing them under my nose to sniff. I exhaled and could no longer hold in my smile.

Jourdan, girl, you are acting like a straight-up stalker right now.

I couldn't help but envision myself in this bed every night, with him holding me and making love until I fell asleep. Stephon had created a space for me that engulfed me in comfort. He made me feel seen, safe, and secure, even in his bed, where the only traces of him were his scent. I finally stood and remade his bed. I gathered my leggings, jumped back into them, and threw my jacket back on. My next destination was the closet, where I found his suits and daily wardrobe. I ran my hand over the soft wool fabric, looking at the tags.

All designer.

I scoured his drawers. Pulling each open one by one. I found various watches, ties, underwear, and a drawer with guns and ammo. They were housed in a custom-fit mold with the barrels opposite each other. I picked one of them up, admiring the piece of steel and its weight in my hands. It was one of two twin brushed stainless steel with black grip Smith and Wesson M I no longer gave a damn. As I placed my hands on the handle, his mail caught my eye in a dish on the table. I grabbed the stack and proceeded out the door like I owned the place.

JoJo, let's go see a man about a horse or whatever the hell they say.

CHAPTER 18

Stephon

I glanced down at my smart watch when it buzzed with the alert. Jourdan had just walked out of my front door like she owned the place. About forty minutes earlier, I'd been watching her on my laptop. My lioness was walking around, marking her territory by leaving her scent all over everything she touched, including my bed. Then, there was a knock on my open door. I exited from my camera to give them my attention.

I was currently in a state of irritation. What I wanted to do was watch my Baby stalk around my home. I hadn't seen her in over a week. I missed her. I thought her romping around in my bed was going to break me. I was seconds away from leaving work and heading straight home. I'd never been more turned on than when she picked up my twins, handling the heavy-weighted calibers with ease. I had to close my laptop just as she walked into my bathroom.

My mind was floating in and out of the conversation I was currently having. Talia Cole, my receptionist, was sitting in my office, going on and on about an argument she'd had with Pierre. Those two truly got on my last fucking nerve when they worked together. Talia was a beautiful woman, and I could see why she had Pierre wound up. She was about the same age as Jourdan and sat on the other side of my desk in a hunter-green tight-ass dress. Her legs were crossed, and my eyes followed the curves up and over her breast.

I leaned forward, resting on the arms of the chair, trying to draw myself into whatever

the hell she was saying. It wasn't working, so I leaned back and brushed my hand down my face, nodding and smiling where I felt needed. Her hands were animated as she waved them around, trying to argue her point to me.

"It's ok. The next time I see his ass, I'm just going to pour my coffee all over one of the precious hard drives that he's always carrying around," she said and laughed loud at herself. I sighed, briefly closing my eyes and wishing this conversation would end. In the recesses of my mind, I heard heels clicking. When they stopped, my eyes popped open to see if I'd imagined the sound. For a minute, I thought I'd fallen asleep and was dreaming because Jourdan was standing in my doorway.

She wore a white, high-boat-neck, long-sleeved, fitted A-line mini dress. I internally scolded my mother for all the shit she'd recently taught me about women's fashion. I didn't give a damn about any of it, Jourdan could have been standing in front of me in a trash bag, and my mouth would have watered just the same. On her feet, she wore a set of strappy heels. As I guided my eyes up her long legs, admiring how the white on her bronze skin made her look ethereal, she walked toward me.

She reached me and leaned down, pecking my lips before pushing her fingers through my hair. I took over, grabbing her chin and pushing my tongue into her mouth, where we both fought for dominance in a heady kiss.

"Mmmh," Jourdan moaned.

"Ahem, shit!" I heard Talia say.

"I'm so sorry I got beside myself. I'm Jourdan Rockwell, Stephon's wife." Jourdan said as she reached across the desk to introduce herself to Talia. Jourdan's jealousy was making my dick hard once again. This was also the second time she'd claimed to be Mrs. Rockwell in the presence of another woman. I pulled her down on my lap so she could feel what she was doing to me. It only got worse when I realized that her

entire back was out. The dress was cut in a U down to her waist.

“Steph, oh my gosh, I’m trying to get like you when I grow up. I knew your slogan was to move in silence, but you took that to a new level. I’ve been working here this long and had no idea you were married. I’m Talia Cole, the receptionist here, and I will give you two some privacy. It was nice meeting you, Jourdan. Steph, I’ll holla,” she said as she stood to leave, pulling the door up on her exit.

“What are you doing here, Baby?”

“I can’t come and see my soon-to-be husband. That I haven’t seen in ten days, by the way,” she said with attitude .

“You knew where I was, right?” I asked, reading her expression to see if she would reveal that she’d been tracking me. Her face slightly grimaced.

“Don’t worry; I left it where you put it,” I said, then winked.

“If you missed me, Jourdan, all you had to do was say so. Because I missed you,” I said, kissing her exposed back.

“No, I didn’t miss you, Stephon. I came here to show you your website. It’s finished. I showed it to Jason yesterday, and I want your final approval before we move forward with Melanie Cain’s design and re-launch.” In true Jourdan fashion, she was pivoting the conversation. I noticed she did it when the heat was on her, and I let her because I thought it was cute.

“Show me,” I said as she opened my laptop, pecking away at the keyboard. She loaded up my new website and reviewed its changes and capabilities. She’d even added a place to enroll and pay for membership. I was ashamed that I’d let my website remain prehistoric throughout the years.

“I have plans for Rockwell Security’s website next,” she said. As she went on, my hands found their way to their favorite place. As she spoke, my hands skimmed her center. I quickly drew my hand back because my fingertips were met with the warmth of her bare pussy. Jourdan wasn’t wearing any panties.

She came here to seduce me.

She sneered at the fact that I’d removed my hand.

“Stephon, where in the hell have you been? Why haven’t I heard from you?” She asked. Her attitude had returned that quickly .

“The night you came into Porter’s, a man was there. Do you know someone named Julius Miller?”

“No, I’ve only heard his name the night I followed Burks, and he spoke with Pierre about setting up a meeting. Up until then, he wasn’t even on my radar. He was going to be next on my list, though, because Burks decided to kill himself.

“Oh, that’s what you’re calling your mistakes now!” Her eyes squinted as if I were about to be next on her list instead of Miller.

“Just tell me what the fuck I need to know, Stephon.” I reached into my desk drawer and pulled out the file I’d compiled all week on Miller. She took it and started to skim through it. I could have found what I wanted on Miller in one day, but I took the whole week. I was doing everything I could to give Jourdan the time I thought she needed to ensure that the proposed arrangement was what she wanted. Bringing my mind back to the file, I took a breath before I started to speak.

“Julius Miller was an OG dealer back in the day. He pushed weight out of New York. It wasn’t high volume because he could never establish a good connection with the

plug. He's currently trying to find his way back to the top and has been doing so for the last seven years. What did Burks say when you asked him?"

"He said that he didn't know my father."

"I think that Miller does."

"How would you know?" She asked. I urged her to stand. Then I walked over to the bookcase and opened it .

"Call it a hunch. Come with me real quick," I urged. Her movement was hesitant. I didn't like that shit. I needed her to trust me.

Jourdan

Stephon had just told me that he may have a lead on the people who were responsible for killing my father. He stood, telling me I should follow him into his kill dungeon. I didn't trust it. I wasn't sure at that moment that I could even trust him. Eventually, my need for vengeance broke through my uncertainty, and I followed Stephon down the stairs.

I'd only heard my brother talk about the spaces they had built for reasons like this, but I'd never been in one. Stephon waited for me to enter and closed the door behind me at the landing. My ears popped when the doors closed because it was deathly silent. It was precisely how I'd imagined. Cold and grim, being inside this space excited me so much that my nipples hardened. Stephon's head tilted to the side as he studied my demeanor. After his fill, he walked past me and led me to a door, slowly opening it. The room was the darkest black I'd ever seen, and smelled like blood. I knew that mercury-tainted smell anywhere.

Jourdan, be ready for anything.

If this was the end for me, I wasn't going down without a fight. The light flipped on, and I glanced over to find the source of the light. I was no longer in the room with Stephon. It was Rock. There was a chair in the far corner of the room. Stephon had thrown his suit jacket on it, which showcased the two guns he wore in his shoulder holster. Two more guns, making a quadruplet set with the ones I'd seen in his closet earlier today.

"Wake up," Rock said calmly, which still startled the man. He jumped at the bass in Rock's resonance. I didn't know how long he'd been here, but an empty package of bread and two empty water bottles were lying before him. There was also the blood I smelled smeared all around where he lay. He slowly set up, squinting his eyes. He looked broken and frail.

"Today is the day you get to leave. Are you ready to tell me everything you know?" Rock said, emphasizing the word 'everything.' The man nodded yes.

"You're not Rock," he shakily let out.

"Who said I wasn't? Is it because you don't see me sitting here in a mask? This mask," Rock said, pulling the mask from his back pocket. The man instantly recognized it and focused on Rock's eyes.

"Speak," Rock's voice boomed throughout the quiet space.

"Miller knows your mother from back in the day in New York. He told me to watch you because he knew you would never let him get close enough to her for him to have a conversation with her. On his last trip from New York to here, he saw you and your mother shopping for groceries. He wouldn't tell us why he needed to get close. He told us it was none of our business, so we left it alone." Rock digested the information before asking another question.

“How did you get hooked up with Miller? ”

“About seven years ago, he used to fly back and forth from Cali, LA. I was a corner boy then. He took me under his wing, said he saw something in me, and would take me to the top. I believed him because he had just secretly taken out the top over there, but was pissed when he wasn’t selected for the replacement. Some young niggas calling themselves One, Two and Three had taken over. Ever since he’s been on a war path trying to take them out, he could never pinpoint who they were,” he said, seemingly happy that he’d gotten out all the information he thought would set him free.

He glanced over to Rock for his verdict, but it wasn’t Rock who would give him his sentence. I walked over to where Rock was standing, pulled the gun from his right holster, pointed, and shot the nameless man twice to the chest and once to the head.

“Upstairs right the fuck now, Jourdan,” Rock said, he looked pissed. I traipsed past him, with him snatching the gun from my grasp. I scoffed, giving him as much brashness as he gave me. Once we reached the top, he closed the bookcase and stood with his back to it. He holstered his gun and threw his jacket onto the sofa in his office. His gaze was intense. He looked as though he wanted to kill me. I stood as far from him as possible, using his desk as a barrier between us. He went into the adjoining bathroom, where I could see him washing his hands. Then he came out and charged me.

“Who told you to do that shit?” He was so close to my face that his lips touched mine when he said it.

“I don’t need your permission, Stephon. You can’t tame me.” He leaned back slightly, letting his eyes hold me captive. I didn’t know how to read them.

“Fuck it!” He growled out.

My reaction was to fight. I tried and failed to get into my defensive stance. Rock was too fast, quickly taking my hands, grabbing them, and using them to spin me around, where he pinned them behind my back. Then my legs were kicked open, and I was roughly bent over with my face and chest pressed against the cold wood of his desk. My nipples were hard again, and I could feel the moisture pooling between my legs. I tried to push myself up, but the weight of him leaning over my back and the restraint on my hands held me immobile.

“Unh, unh, don’t fight; you’ll only make it worse unless that’s what you want. Let’s see.” He said as I felt his hand travel down my shoulder and side, skimming my breast. He continued gently feeling my back and over my ass, where he went halfway down my leg before coming back up, lifting my dress over it. My breathing became deep and fast. Then his hand drew back and smacked my ass hard. I could feel his dick pressed in between the seam. He stood and pulled his hand back again, hitting the same spot.

“Stephon,” I loudly belted out. My arousal was high, and I was sensitive all over. So sensitive that when he ran his fingers down my slit into my opening, I almost came. He pumped his fingers in and out, pushing them down into my G-spot with each succession.

“I don’t want to hear shit, JoJo. You had Steph, but now you fucking with Rock,” a chill ran down my spine. He took notice, and I felt his tongue trail from the bottom of my spine up to my neck, where he gently bit into my shoulder and sucked. I was still pinned down while he steadily circled my hardened clit with his fingers.

“You’re spoiled, Baby, but I’m going to give you everything you want; that’s what you came here for, right? To get this dick, right?” I could hear him behind me fumbling with his belt and zipper. Once it was released, he rested it on my ass. The anticipation of feeling him again caused his continual manipulations of my clit to throw me over the edge. He dove inside, stretching me beautifully and filling me to

the brim as I came.

“Yeeeeesssssss,” I moaned. I didn’t have time to recover because he immediately started stroking in and out of me at a hard, constant pace that was sliding the desk. I could feel every ridge and vein on his shaft as he fell into me.

“Let me hear you, Jourdan. Let Talia hear how I’m in here giving you all this good-ass dick. Brought your fine ass up in here looking like this with no fucking panties on. Take it!” he growled into my ear. I hadn’t noticed that the door was cracked and the blinds were wide open. Anyone walking by or in the office could hear what Rock was doing to me. He wasn’t letting up either. My mouth fell open, wanting to scream out in pleasure, but his strokes had taken my voice. When I thought I couldn’t take anymore, my leg was raised and lifted onto the desk. I was spread wider by his hand gripping the back of my thigh. His other was still binding mine. His heavy breathing and moans filtered into my ears .

“Mmmhmm, cat got your tongue, Lioness. You looked sexy as hell in my bed, and I wanted to come home and fuck you right where you stood when you were holding my piece. I wanted to squat down in front of you and put your sweet ass pussy in my mouth while you posed with them in your hands. I had to have you after your little performance downstairs,” he said breathlessly as he continued to give me relentless strokes.

“Shit, your pussy is so good, feels like home. I want this every night. You hear me, Baby. Every! Fucking! Night!” He said as he kissed and licked down my back again.

“Give me my shit JoJo; I want all of it, and make that shit extra wet for me,” he said.

“Rock,” I screamed his name and released a waterfall down my legs as he commanded. I could feel him releasing deep inside me as he continued to stroke until he couldn’t anymore.

“Fuck, Jourdan,” he said as he leaned over my back and turned my head so that he could suck my tongue into his mouth. He finally stood, releasing me from his pleasure prison, smacking me on the ass again as he walked to the bathroom. He cleaned himself, returning with the rag to do the same to me. After taking the rag back to the bathroom and straightening his clothes, he straightened his desk and rested on the edge. His legs were stretched out, and his feet were crossed at the ankles.

“Stephon,” I called out as I stood from his desk.

“Yeah, Baby.”

“Whose fucking makeup was that in your bathroom? ”

“Come here,” he said with a low baritone that vibrated through me. I walked over, and he opened his legs so I could stand in between them. He grabbed my chin so that my eyes were focused on his.

“You mean the same shade of makeup you use and all the same products in your bathroom?” he asked thoughtfully. I thought back to all the products I’d seen in his bathroom. I was so pissed that I hadn’t even noticed they were the exact products I used.

“And in the closet where you hung up your jacket, that’s your side, Jourdan.”

“I’m going to use the bathroom, and then I need you to come with me. We have an appointment,” I said as I entered the bathroom. I heard him snicker as I walked by. I gently closed the door, peed, and washed my hands. I stared into the mirror, knowing that what I was about to do was the right decision.

Let’s get this over with, JoJo.

“You ready?” He asked as I opened the door.

“As ready as I’ll ever be?” I spoke.

CHAPTER 19

Jourdan

I walked past Stephon's front desk to find it missing Talia. The place was empty.

"Stephon, where is everyone?"

"Lunch," he answered plainly.

"Oh my gosh, Stephon, you had me up in there performing for that girl, and you knew her ass wasn't out here," I said as I punched him in his bicep.

"Were you, though? Performing? Because it didn't feel like it when you were gushing down your leg," he said, smirking.

"Shut up, you knew what I meant."

"And keep your hands to yourself. I have about thirty desks around this office, and I don't have any problem disrespecting every one of my employee's personal spaces to teach your ass a lesson." I gasped.

"You wouldn't do that, Steph." He laughed .

"You want to find out?" he said, laughing again. We'd made it to his truck, and he stopped at the passenger door to help me climb in. Once I was secured, he rounded the front and hopped inside.

“So, where’s this appointment?”

“Cypress City courthouse, we have an hour before our appointment. I know you like to be early,” I said. He glanced at his watch and pulled out the lot. Instead of taking a right to take us to the courthouse, he took a left.

“Where are you going? The courthouse is that way,”

“If we’re doing this right now, I have to go home to grab my birth certificate, social, and a piece of mail.”

“No, you don’t. It’s right here,” I said, pulling the folder from my purse that I’d placed in his truck before I walked inside. He looked over at me, showing all thirty-two and those sexy ass dimples. I loved it when he gave me his smile. It made me melt inside.

“So that’s what your sneaky ass was doing at the house today. I’m glad to see my plan worked. Holding out brought your ass right into my office in a damn white wedding dress,” he said, laughing.

“Since you have it all figured out, who will be our witness then?”

“I figured we could pay some random off the street to come in and do that.”

“Baby, you must be out of your mind if you think I’m about to let some motherfucker I don’t even know put their name on my very legal and real ass documents. I’ll just call my mother,” he said.

“Stephon, no...” I looked over to find the phone to his ear. He’d already dialed and had her on the line .

“Hey, Ma. What you doing?” He said as he looked over at me, winking. I was desperately trying to get him to hang up the phone.

“Ok, so you’re already downtown. That’s perfect. Can you meet me at the courthouse? No, Ma. I’m not in any trouble. You know me better than that. Alright, I’ll see you when you get there. Love you, Mamá,” he said before he hung up the phone.

“Stephon, I can’t meet your mother like this. I’m wet. I smell like sex, and I’m not wearing any underwear.” He glanced at me like he would take me in his truck just because I reminded him.

“You should have thought about that before your ass came to my job, strong-arming me over my dick,” he said and laughed.

“It’s not just because of your dick, Stephon,” I said and rolled my eyes.

“Yeah, Ok. What’s my favorite color then?” he asked. I wanted to say black. I knew it was black. However, I couldn’t tell him I knew everything about him because I’d studied him as if he were one of my targets. I was also falling fast and quick and wasn’t about to tell him that either, so I followed his lead.

“Ok, it was the dick. Now take me home real quick so I can change.”

“Hell no. We’ll be late. You’re completely covered, and you look beautiful.”

“What about your cum that’s running out of me? You want me to meet your mother like that?”

“You are worried about the wrong shit. And hold that shit in because that’s where it belongs. Besides, my mother did not have X-ray vision the last time I checked. I

don't think," he laughed as if he'd thought of a time when she maybe knew something she shouldn't have.

"The only person who knows you aren't wearing any is me and you, right?" He'd sobered the jovial tone to a serious one.

"Yes, Stephon," I said with a stoic face and raised eyebrows.

"We good then," he said nonchalantly as he pulled into the parking deck. I thought about everything in my life that was about to change as we drove higher and higher around the deck until he finally found us a spot. Once he helped me out, I freshened up the best I could while he took off his holster. He entered a code into his lockbox behind the driver's seat. He meticulously placed his guns inside and put his suit jacket back on. He wore a black Tom Ford suit with a white button-down. Ironically enough, we looked like we'd planned this impromptu marriage.

I reached back and grabbed the folder before shutting the door. He walked in front of me, leading the way. When he felt I was too far behind, he reached his hand back for mine and dragged me to his side. We entered the elevator and pressed the button for the courthouse lobby. When the doors opened, he pushed me inside, backing me into the corner.

"I know you don't trust me fully, but my mother is going to love you, so relax," he said, pecking my lips. I nodded. He turned as the elevator stopped, alerting us of our arrival. The doors opened, and we walked into the grand entrance of the courthouse. They all seemed to be the same everywhere. Marble floors and colosseum-style columns, which extended up to the ceiling, were placed sporadically throughout .

All I could hear were my heels clicking on the floors. Then, it started to feel like I was alone in the hollow-sounding room. The last time I'd been inside a courthouse was when the judge had sentenced my mother's murderer. I tensed as I walked

further inside. All the unwanted memories came flooding back. I stopped and rooted in place. Stephon's forward movement jerked him backward. He placed his hands on the side of my head, letting his thumb caress my cheek.

"Baby, look at me. We don't have to do this," he said, his face written with worry and concern.

"No, it's not that; I just don't like courthouses. The last time I was in one was when..."

"Your mother," he said.

"I understand, Baby. If it's too much, we can leave and do this the traditional way," he continued.

"No, I want to do it," I said, trying to convey that nothing would stop me from doing this today. He nodded, then pecked my lips again. Stephon was so attentive. Within the hour, he would be legally mine.

Mine!

We walked inside, and he quickly located his mother. She'd already gone through security and was standing in the courthouse lobby. I was scared shitless. That anxiety was raised when we were asked to place all our belongings inside the bins and walk through the metal detectors.

"Stephon Angel," his mother said as she wrapped him in her arms .

Tsk. Angel?

If she only knew her son was akin to a demon, the way he just had me pinned to that

desk. He'd just ravished my body and stood in front of his mother like his dick didn't crawl inside of me and take possession.

I'm probably going to need an exorcism. Damn. Well, at least I didn't lie because it was definitely the dick. Do not get wet again, JoJo!

"Who is this beautiful young woman? Oh, and I love this dress. Where did you get it?" She asked, spinning me around in a circle.

"Hell, nah, Ma. This dress ain't for you. This is Jourdan, my..."

"Girlfriend, I'm Stephon's girlfriend," I blurted out. Stephon grimaced and turned to his mother, who now looked confused.

Shit why did I say that? Now she's going to think I'm a few screws loose.

"Ma, this is Jourdan, my fiancée and soon-to-be wife. And Jourdan, this is my mother, Adriana. We called you here today to be a witness so that we can have a civil wedding," he said to his mother. The confusion that had previously existed was replaced with excitement.

"Call me Adri until you feel comfortable enough to call me Ma. Stephon Angel, you do not run me! If Mama wants the dress, Mama will get it," she said sternly, effectively shutting Stephon down. I laughed because of his look. It said she would get this dress if he pushed hard enough.

"I know that's right, Mama!" I said, raising my hand to high-five her, which was swiftly returned.

"I like her! Oh, Nene, why didn't you tell me you were dating when I asked you weeks ago? This is awesome. Now I get to have my grandchildren."

“Ma, let us get married first,” Stephon groaned.

“Yes, yes, of course,” she said and clapped. She spoke with a heavy Puerto Rican accent that wasn’t present in Stephon’s voice. He spoke like he was straight up from New York, and it did things to me. Stephon’s mother was beautiful. There was no way that she had a thirty-nine-year-old. She didn’t look a day over it herself. She wore her hair in its natural curly state. It was a luscious, thick, and rich black, the same as Stephon’s, and hung down her back. To me, and I’m sure to others, she favored Jennifer Lopez; her complexion, however, was deeper. As I continued to study my fine, soon-to-be husband and his very fine mother, we were directed by the bailiff to the cashier’s office. There, we paid our ceremony fee and got a marriage license. Then we headed to the magistrate.

I glanced over at Stephon; he was calm, as if he had no qualms about the lifetime commitment we were about to enter. We were told to sit on the nearest bench and wait for our names to be called. The hallway was quiet. It was so quiet that my dark thoughts started to filter in. They began to fill the space in the hall just as the dust particles filled the air by the windows where the sunlight was pouring in. The sadness started to overtake me because I should be sharing this moment with my mother. My father should be walking me down the aisle to meet the man I knew he’d be proud to have me marry. My leg began to bounce, and my heel taps on the marble floors resonated through the hallway .

Brice and Tayla are going to kill me when they find out I’m doing this without them.

A hand on my leg stopped my movement. Calmness flew through my body and overtook me. I looked down at my leg, where the sunlight met it, expecting to find Stephon’s hand. However, it wasn’t; it was his mother’s. I looked back up to see that Stephon had stepped down the hallway to take a call. I hadn’t even realized that he’d left my side.

“Jourdan, the look in your eyes is one that I’ve experienced many times. It’s the look of a child experiencing a monumental moment and wishing to share it with her parents. My parents died when I was a teenager. Same as with Stephon’s father. I can’t replace them, but I can be a stand-in and be here for whatever you need. I may never know why you two are rushing to get married, but Stephon is happy and has brought you into our family. I want you to be the same. I intend to make you feel nothing but welcome. He’s not trusting, so if he loves you, so will I.” She smiled, and a tear rolled down my cheek at the gravity of her statement. I quickly wiped my tears before Stephon saw me and nodded to his mother.

“Thank you,” I said, leaning in to hug her, relishing the feeling of a mother’s touch that I hadn’t felt in years. I breathed in deeply, accepting that this man was made for me.

“You’re welcome, Mija. Now let’s get you married so I can have those grandbabies,” she said. I laughed, but she appeared very serious.

“Stop, Ma, I heard Stephon say, who had now knelt before me. He gently wiped my face where my tears had fallen. I wasn’t sure how he’d known, but he did. I nodded to him and smiled, and he showed me his dimples.

Those damn dimples will be the death of me!

“Rockwell,” the magistrate called out. We all stood and headed inside. We walked into the small office, which looked like a tiny courtroom, to find him with his head down, signing documents. When he lifted his head, he peered in recognition.

“Stephon, the Stephon Rockwell?” He said.

“Oh shit, what’s good, Kenny,” Stephon said as he dapped him up.

“Long time no see. I see somebody finally tied you down. I thought you would run through women forever.”

“How many women, Stephon?” I cut into the conversation.

“Kenny, my nigga,” Stephon’s voice lowered, signaling for Kenny to shut his damn mouth.

“Let me introduce you to my wife and mother. This is Jourdan, and my mother, Adriana. This is Kenny Smith. We went to college together. Now let’s hurry up and get this over with before she rips up that marriage license fooling with your ass,” they both laughed.

“Let’s get to it then. Please turn toward each other and hold hands. Repeat after me: I, Stephon Angel Rockwell, take you, Jourdan Nichelle Washington, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, to love and to cherish, from this day forward.” Stephon repeated the vowels and patiently waited for me to recite mine .

“I, Jourdan Nichelle Washington, take you, Stephon Angel Rockwell, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold, for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, to love and to cherish, from this day forward,” I spoke.

“At this time, we will exchange rings,” Magistrate Smith said. My face deflated, and my chin dropped to my chest. I hadn’t thought this through thoroughly. We didn’t have any rings. My face was lifted by a finger underneath my chin. Three rings, his and her wedding set, lit up inside a royal blue box he held. It was a platinum solitaire princess-cut diamond, approximately three carats, with diamonds surrounding the setting. The band was a simple platinum that matched his. He took them and slid them on my finger, which fit perfectly, and I did the same to him. I’d never smiled so big in my life.

“You may now kiss the bride,” the magistrate said. Stephon leaned in and gave me a quick peck before diving in.

“Stephon, you could at least wait until you both get home to start on my grandchildren,” his mother laughed. He groaned and gave me one last peck before whispering in my ear.

“Every night.”

“Let’s have a reception lunch so I can get to know my daughter,” his mother said.

“Stop fiddling with that dress, Jourdan,” Stephon’s mother said as I sat at her barstool. I’d been trying to offer my help for the last twenty minutes. She was making Mofongo. She’d told me that back home, they’d make it with crunchy pork skin, but since being in the US, she’d started using grilled chicken. She had this aura that pulled you in. Stephon had the same one. He’d caught me in his web, and I wasn’t trying to escape it. I was falling deeper into it.

I smiled as she bounced around the kitchen. Her home, like Stephon’s, was enormous. I felt it was too large for her to be living alone. I could imagine that every man she’d encountered was pulled in because she was an angel. As I looked around, I didn’t see any evidence of her having one. I still didn’t know why she’d named her son that because he for damn sure wasn’t. I giggled at the thought. She brought me out of my reverie when she continued.

“I know you didn’t get my son’s attention wearing a nun’s uniform,” she said.

“It was close, though, Ma. She was wearing a thick wool coat. She was walking around looking all uncomfortable with it on. Then, ‘boom,’ she took it off, and there wasn’t anything underneath,” he said without a hint of humor.

“Stephon! Why are you all up in our conversation and lying?” I asked. He was sitting in the living room watching TV. At least, I thought he was until he chimed in on our conversation.

“OK, I’m lying. She had on a Cat Woman costume underneath,” he said before laughing. He tried to be funny and reference what I was doing the night he saw me at Porter’s .

“I am so glad you run a successful security firm; those jokes, Baby, unh unh,” I said, shaking my head. His mother laughed behind me.

“Speaking of work. Ma, I’ve got a security conference coming up this weekend. It’s in New York. I need to head out tomorrow. I’m going to take Jourdan with me. Devin said to let him know if you need anything, and he will slide through. If it’s an emergency, Ma, please call me, and we’ll come right back,” he said. I glanced over my shoulder to find him staring at me. He shook his head, telling me not to say anything else.

What’s the deal with that? Does his mother not know who he really is?

We continued talking about everything, including Stephon. Then I felt him enter the space. His presence overwhelmed my senses as he came up behind me and kissed the back of my shoulder. He sat down and scooted his stool as close to me as possible. Grabbing my thigh like he always did, he jumped in on the conversation. My feelings about this arrangement had rapidly changed. Just earlier, when my mind told me not to trust him, my body instinctively followed. I no longer had control. I’d already fallen.

CHAPTER 20

Stephon

I lifted Jourdan's garage and pulled in. I left the door open and the truck running because I didn't expect to be here long. It was a little after ten. I entered, softly climbing the stairs, sure not to make a sound. The house was already dark, but I'd taken a mental inventory and memorized everything about Jourdan's house. I even knew that the fifth step creaked, so I skipped it.

An hour ago, I had left my firm's garage, where Trig, P, and I had cleaned up the basement. I showered and got into my empty bed, only to find myself throwing on a pair of basketball shorts and a tee and heading to get my wife.

My wife.

I couldn't believe that she'd strong-armed the situation. I knew it was hard for her because it had been hard for me. The trust wasn't quite there, but I would never give her any reason not to trust me. However, I wouldn't want things to be any other way because I knew it would come eventually .

Once I reached the top of the stairs, I stood in the doorway. Jourdan was buried under the covers, her face illuminated only by the moonlight. I walked over to her and slid my hands underneath her knees and arms, lifting her covered body out of the bed bridal style.

The real reason why I longed for her to be beside me was that I had to touch her in

some way. I hoped that my feelings about her flowed through the warmth of my hands or their caress. I wanted her to know, verbally and physically, that I couldn't be without her even for one night. Every time I touched her, an electric current pulsed through my body that invigorated me, and it was addictive. I needed it; I needed her. As the bedding fell and before she reached my chest, her hand slipped under the pillow, grabbing her gun to point it at my chin. After realizing it was me, she dropped the weapon into her lap. I hadn't even flinched.

"What are you doing, Stephon?"

"I'm taking you home where you belong, Baby. Did you really think I'd allow us to spend our first night married apart?"

"You can just sleep here," she whispered.

"Shhhh. You're ruining the moment. I'm trying to be on some romantic kidnapping shit, and you're talking about sleep here. Nah, I want you wrapped up in my sheets. I've been dreaming about it all day," I said, kissing her forehead. She melted further into my arms.

"I thought only Rock did the kidnapping."

"Yeah, I did that already, Baby. You see that big ass rock on your finger, don't you? Kidnapping hearts and pussies. That's what that shit represents. Her hand went back to her gun, where she wrapped her finger around the trigger and pressed it into my chest.

"Hearts and pussies?"

"Damn, Jourdan! You knew what I meant. Your heart and your pussy. Nobody but you," I said, laughing.

“Oh, ok. Who said you had my heart?” She said, dropping her gun again and nestling back into my embrace.

“For you, I have all the time in the world to wait for it.” After our wedding, we spent hours at my mother’s house. She cooked us a traditional Puerto Rican meal to celebrate our nuptials. Because of that, I knew she was tired, but I wouldn’t negotiate with her. I placed her inside the truck and buckled her in. Just as quickly as I’d come, we were gone. Locking up, backing out of her garage, and returning to our house.

Our house.

I glanced over to see that Jourdan had fallen back to sleep. I would let her get her nap in because she would need it. I had every intention of consummating my marriage tonight. I drove swiftly through the streets with my mind on a million things. One of which was this up-and-coming trip to New York. I couldn’t understand why, in the past few years, we kept having to deal with shit like this. We’d been quiet and out of the way, but now it seemed like someone was trying us every time we turned around. The shit was tiring, and I was seriously thinking about being done with it all.

When I finally turned onto the street, I hit the garage button. I pulled right in, parked, opened the door, and scooped Jourdan up the same way I had when I went to get her. I gently carried her to bed before returning to close the house. Standing at the bathroom sink, washing my hands, I studied my reflection in the mirror. I wanted to see if there was anything different. There wasn’t, at least, nothing I could see on the outside. All the changes had taken place inside. I couldn’t help but think of how much peace I felt with her being here. It was wild how one day, I was fine dying alone, and the next, I felt like I couldn’t live without her.

Before heading upstairs, I grabbed two water bottles from the fridge. Then, I turned right back around and got two Gatorades as well.

Gotta stay hydrated.

As I got closer to the bedroom, I heard the soft strums of a guitar. Jourdan admired the instrument while I stood inside the doorway. As long as she was happy, so was I.

“Is it tuned, right?”

“Yes, perfectly, and it’s beautiful. Thank you.” I’d seen that she had a guitar the Sunday after I let myself into her place. I was dying to know if she was any good. After I left, I bought her another one to have here. It was an all-black custom acoustic guitar with Mrs. Rockwell hand-painted underneath its coating. I’d only picked it up this afternoon after we’d separated from lunch. However, I’d ordered it with that inscription the day after I saw the one she already owned. Like her previous setup, I’d set it on a stand beside my window with a stool .

“You’re welcome, Beautiful. I showed you my hidden talent. Now show me yours,” I said as I sat on the side of the bed, urging her to play. She laughed.

“Is that what you’re calling eating me off the bone? She said, looking at me with a devilish smirk.

“Stop trying to get me to do it again and show me what you got, Baby,” I said, then winked and licked my lips.

“I haven’t played in a while; I may be a little rusty,” she said as she flicked the cords a few times, finding her strum. When she was content with the rhythm, she began.

“I am ready for love,” she sang, her guitar strums accompanying her. She was playing and singing India Arie. I was enamored as she got lost in her words. Her eyes closed, revealing her vulnerability. At the same time, I sat and got lost in her. I knew then that I would stop at nothing to make sure she was filled with nothing but light. If I

had to take all her darkness or be that darkness for her, I would, undoubtedly.

After she was done, I stood, took the guitar, and set it back on its stand. I parted her legs as I stood between them. Then I slowly lifted her chin, bringing her mouth to mine. I pecked a few times before I swiped my tongue across her lips, seeking access. When she allowed, I took possession, deepening the kiss. I felt her soft hands slip underneath my shirt, scorching my skin.

“It’s not hiding, Baby. It’s right here,” I said as I scooped her up, where she wrapped her legs around me. I placed her on the bed where I’d wanted her all along. I pulled away, looking down at the fabric that had risen her thighs. I took my bottom lip into my mouth before I let my hands travel from her knees up her thighs until I reached her pussy. I let the back of my hand trail softly over it, pushing my middle finger between her plump lips to graze her clit. My finger softly teased until her breathing stalled and her skin filled with goosebumps. I continued pushing the fabric up her body, caressing her nipples on my ascent until I had her completely naked. Where her hands were already placed on my body, she did the same, trailing them up my chest and pulling my shirt up and over, tossing it to the floor.

I leaned in, biting her lip, then sucked it into my mouth before I licked and split the seams to suck in her tongue again. The kiss was nasty and increased my need and arousal. I let my tongue travel down her chin and neck, leaving a wet trail before sucking to leave my mark.

“Mmm,” she moaned, pushing her fingers through my hair.

“Take it out, Baby,” I urged. Her hands slid back down my chest and into the waistband of my shorts and boxers, pushing them down enough for my dick to get free. Then she wrapped her soft hands around me and slowly pumped before looking back up for more instruction. I put my hands over hers as she guided them up and down my shaft before I stopped her, tossing her to the center of the bed. I eased out of

the rest of my clothes and met her in the center of the bed, hovering over her body. She instinctively opened her legs to receive me.

“Put it in for me,” I said, watching as she guided me to her entrance. With just the tip, I felt she was already soaked for me. I pushed in, feeling her tightness stretch around me. As I rested there, feeling her throbbing heat, I tried to gain my composure. I started to move slowly. Leaning over to her hardened nipples, I darted my tongue out and flicked it slowly before circling and sucking it into my mouth. When I let go, I admired the sheen and blew. She arched her back, pressing more of her breast into my mouth before I licked over to the other to do the same, all while I pumped into her. Being inside her was taking me to another place. A place that heightened all my senses and felt superior to any experience I’ve ever had.

“Stephon, you feel so good. I feel you all over me,” she sexily whined. I let her sexy mewl filter into my head, and then I proceeded to ruin her like she was ruining me. I spread her wide and placed her leg on my shoulder, steadily rocking and dipping into her pussy. I was deep inside her at this angle, making sure she felt every ridge and vein that she was causing to expand. She’d started to squirm, but I wouldn’t let up. I wanted her to make a mess all over me. I made sure to repeatedly hit the same spot over and over until her eyes began to close. Still stroking her, I reached under her leg to grab her throat.

“Look at me. That’s the only way I want you to feel when I’m inside you, Baby. So, show me how good I make you feel by cumming all over your dick.” I leaned forward, continuing my stroke, going in and out and filling her each time. I looked down to see my dick coated in her slickness as she became wetter with each deep thrust.

“Mmmmmhhh,” she moaned as she came hard, spasming around me .

“Yeah, that’s what I want,” I said as I stroked methodically to extend her orgasm.

“I can’t take it like this, Stephon,” she breathily moaned.

“You are, though, Baby. Look how greedy she is for me, taking me in, mmmh,” I moaned. I dropped her leg to flip her over.

“Put that ass in the air for me.” She followed my command by getting on all fours and arching her back perfectly.

“Shit,” I moaned as I dove back in. I increased my pace, getting more and more turned on by the ripple of her ass each time I reached her depths.

“Mmmhmm, stay just like that. You got my dick so wet, Baby.” I reached down and grabbed her neck, pulling her back into my body while I gave her relentless strokes.

“Who gone fuck you like me, huh? Made me wait all day to get this good ass pussy in my bed.”

“Aaaaahhhhh, nobody but you,” she cried out.

“You, sure?”

“Yeeess, I’m sure.”

“I know because that ring on your finger said it’s mine. Now, let it go for me. All of it, right fucking now,” I said, letting my breath tickle the side of her neck before I flattened my tongue to it and sucked.

“Stephon,” She screamed as she squirted down my legs. Her body fell to the bed, but I hadn’t pulled away. She was spent, but I wasn’t done. Pushing her legs together, I slowed down, grinding into her pussy. I wanted to get lost in it, in her .

“You’re it for me, Jourdan. Te amo hermosa. I’m ready for your love. All you have to do is give it to me. Mmmmh. You hear me, Baby?” I moaned into her ear as I gave her deep, slow strokes.

“Stephon,” she moaned as the tears rolled from her eyes.

“I got you, Baby. Let it go and cum with me,” I said as I felt her tighten around me more than she already was. When she started to come again, I did the same, growling out and releasing everything I had into her. I rolled off of her and gathered her into my arms. I wiped the remnants of her tears before kissing every place they had fallen.

“Hey, you want your Gatorade now or later?”

“What?... You brought Gatorades up here?”

“Why are you acting so surprised? We’re married now, Baby; I ain’t letting up. You’ll need those electrolytes because I’ve got at least one more round in me.” I said as I stood to get the drinks.

“Go ahead and drink that down so I can drink it right back out of you.” I finished mine before climbing back in bed and settling between her legs. I could feel myself rising at the feel of her body underneath me. I kissed her lips seductively and bit them gently, tugging them into my mouth. After I let my tongue explore her mouth, I traveled down her neck, sucking as I went while I sunk inside her again. She was ready for more, no matter how many times I filled her up, and I planned to fill every inch of her until we both tapped out. I flipped us over, putting her in a position to have her way with me. She slowly started to grind on my dick before lifting to the tip and sinking back down.

“Stephon,” she moaned .

“Shit. Mmmm. Yeah, Baby?”

“Your favorite color is black,” she said softly. I lifted her face to look into her eyes. We were communicating things that neither of us would say tonight, so I kissed her deeply to express my feelings.

“Tell me what else you know about me,” I said as I sat up and started to pump into her center from underneath.

“Your favorite meal is the Chicken Marsala from Two’s,” she whined as she rode, and I stroked up. We fucked each other until we brought each other to ecstasy again. We both fell apart, fully satiated and breathing wildly.

“Let’s get cleaned up and go to bed. Our flight leaves tomorrow afternoon,” I finally said. I changed the sheets while she started the shower. Jourdan was mine forever.

Shout out, my nigga Kenny.

CHAPTER 21

Jourdan

I thought I had trust issues, but Stephon had me beat. While I was loud and outspoken about how I felt, Stephon quietly made sure there was no way you could cross him. His security acumen was an added benefit. The man was scrupulous. We left my house an hour ago, and he'd checked every door and window before we left, as well as the cameras. When we returned home, he did the same.

Home.

Just that fast, I had claimed my new life and wasn't planning to look back. All I had to do now was convince my brother and Tayla to move to North Carolina. I hadn't even told him I'd gone through with his little proposal. My brother thought that if I married Stephon, it would keep me contained. What he failed to realize was now I was a lioness running wild with a damn lion behind me. I was ready to fuck shit up .

I waited for Mike to take us to the airport while Stephon took a few phone calls. We could have just driven one of our cars, but he didn't want to risk anyone fucking with them. His words. I hadn't seen Mike since the night I ambushed him. I was sure he wouldn't recognize me anyway because I looked different. At least, I was hoping. I'd snuck up to him and administered the ketamine before he'd even had a chance to fight. I was surprised that Stephon had let him keep his job.

"Baby, let's go. Mike is outside," Stephon said from behind me. I stood to grab my small carry-on bag. I didn't need much; I would get it there if I'd forgotten anything.

My father had always taught me to pack light when scouting a target. Anything unnecessary would slow me down. Stephon was also carrying a small bag. We were the same; maybe that's why my soul had attached to his.

We filed out of the house, with Stephon locking the door. He opened the door to the SUV and slid in behind me. We pulled off and were on our way. About fifteen minutes into our drive, Mike began to peer at me through the rearview mirror.

"Have we met before?" He asked, leaning his head to the side in question.

"You might have Mike. She was at the firm's garage the day you passed out," Stephon said. I smacked my hand hard to the front of Stephon's chest; he laughed in return.

"I'm sorry, where are my husband's manners? I'm Jourdan Rockwell."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Rockwell. Yeah, I'm glad I passed out that night. Did y'all hear the news?" he asked .

"No, what news?" I quickly spoke up.

"Burks died that night. I should have been driving him. As you know, I was incapacitated. The authorities think it's foul play and that a woman may have been involved."

"Yeah, man, the women will get you every time," Stephon said. He was staring out the window, so when I hit him this time, it caught him off guard. He swiftly grabbed my leg at the thigh and pulled me over to him.

"You trying to get like Yoncé? Because I'm seconds away from telling Mike to roll up the partition. You're making me horny, and when I'm horny, I'm going to fuck,"

he whispered sternly into my ear.

“Steph, I didn’t know you were married; when did that happen?”

“He just saved you,” Steph whispered, kissing my face before answering Mike.

“Yesterday, actually. You know I don’t put all my business in the street. Over this one, though, I’m quick to let anyone know.”

“I feel that. Well, we’re here, have a safe trip, man. Call if you need me to be here for your return,” Mike said as Stephon helped me out of the SUV. I noticed Stephon was a lot like my brother in terms of modesty. Even though they both could afford private flights, we were currently taking a commercial one. I didn’t mind either way as long as I safely arrived at my destination.

It was Thursday, so the airport was busy. I groaned at the half-mile-long security checkpoint.

“Baby, relax. We’re not waiting in this line. Our flight had pre-check,” he said as he took my hand and navigated us through the crowd. We were only a few minutes early before boarding, which shocked me because Stephon liked to be super early. We barely sat down before the first class was called to board. We quickly found our seats before the stewardess came.

“Would you like a blanket, beverage, or snack to get you through your flight?” She asked, smiling all in Stephon’s face as though I weren’t sitting there. He had started to smile back before I interrupted.

“Yes, please; my husband and I would like a couple of packs of Biscoff cookies and Sprite.”

“Ahem, yes, of course, I’ll be right back.”

“Don’t be friendly with these hoes on this plane, Stephon. Ahem, my ass, she about to find herself knocked out like Mike in that bathroom back there.”

“Jourdan, that flight attendant was just doing her job.”

“Yeah, attending to her ho-ish desires on this flight. Keep smiling at her like that, and your ass will be joining her on her nap,” I said. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see all of Stephon’s teeth and those damn dimples before he busted out laughing. The stewardess returned with what I’d requested. She leaned down again and touched Stephon’s arm to get his attention. I didn’t miss when she lightly traced the vein in his forearm with her fingers as she waited for him to take the items .

This ho!

I leaned over and took them out of her hands, purposely scratching her with my ring. She winced and looked at where I’d drawn blood.

“Oh my gosh, I’m so sorry. Did I scratch you?” I said as I made a show of acting concerned. I stretched my hand out, showcasing my wedding ring and band for added effect.

“You know this man here, he just went overboard with the ring, but he knows I’m worth every dime. Isn’t that right, Babe?” I said, leaning in to kiss him. He wasted no time placing his lips on mine, letting his tongue take the lead.” He broke away after he’d had his fill.

“I love you,” he said. Goosebumps immediately spread over my entire body. His words caught me so off guard that my eyes widened. I didn’t know what to say. I wanted to say it back, but I just smiled. It was probably the biggest smile anyone had

seen since my father. He seemed amused by my expression and leaned over to give me one more peck on my lips. The stewardess scoffed and stomped off.

“Stephon, if a hoe puts her hand on you, break it,” I said, mocking his tone. He gave me another loud laugh before the flight attendants started their flight spiel. Shortly after, we were wheels up.

JFK airport was just as busy as CDU. I appreciated that we didn’t have to wait for luggage. We’d just picked up a rental and walked onto the deck to find its location. I’d walked ahead of Steph as he finished the transaction, but he wasn’t far behind. I occupied myself on my phone as I walked toward the sliding glass doors. When the door opened, I collided with a body. Looking up, I saw that it was a familiar face.

“Sincere, oh my gosh. It’s been forever. What are you doing on the East Coast?” I asked. I felt him behind me. I didn’t need to look to know he was there and that he was pissed. I could feel the heat radiating off his body. I glanced down to see that Sincere’s hand was still at my waist, where he grabbed me to stop me from falling.

Aw, Shit!

Stephon didn’t say a word as he squeezed Sincere’s hand so hard I could hear his bones cracking. Sincere let out a quick yelp before he suppressed his need to scream.

“Sincere, is it? Never put your hands on her in any capacity. I’ll be the one to catch her if she falls.” Sincere nodded, and Stephon, who towered over Sincere, gave him a pat on the back before letting go of his hand.

“It was good seeing you again, Jourdan,” he said before he continued through the sliding doors.

“How do you know him?” Stephon asked.

“I know Sincere from the neighborhood I grew up in. He works with Ice now. Right? Goes by Sin. He's one of the few faces that I've actually seen that I can put a name to. I didn't know he was on this coast, though. ”

“Hmph.”

“Hmph? What in the hell does that mean, Stephon?”

“He was transferred here. I don't know what he's up to, but I don't believe in coincidences. I think his ass works with Miller in some capacity. Aside from all that, I don't trust his ass. Now, let's get out of this airport. Breaking that nigga's hand made me hungry.”

“Shut up, no, it didn't. Your ass needs to have a seat on some lady's couch. Sometimes people will touch me for valid reasons, like me being ready to fall, Stephon,” I said and laughed.

“I'll book a double appointment then. Sometimes, people doing their jobs will have to ask me if I need anything,” he laughed. I immediately stopped, pushed him, and started to walk away.

“Touché Stephon, tou-fucking-ché.” I said sarcastically.

“You don't even know where or what car,” he yelled, still laughing at my expense. I would aimlessly walk all over this parking deck before telling him he was right again.

CHAPTER 22

Stephon

“Do you miss it?” Jourdan asked as she looked out the window at the hustle and bustle of New York.

“Nah. I have grown used to a slower-paced lifestyle. What about you? Do you miss California?”

“Sometimes, I miss my brother and Tay. Other than that, I appreciate the fresh start from being in NC. I like it there. If being honest, I think I always knew I wasn’t going back,” she said and shrugged. I could see the somberness she always tried to hide in her eyes.

“Good, ‘cause you’re stuck now, Baby. Ain’t no going back,” I said unsympathetically. She smiled and let out a small laugh before turning her head so I wouldn’t see it. I wasn’t laughing about it, though. I planned never to give her a reason to want to leave. After grabbing food, we headed to one of my houses here. It was located on the city's outskirts in Mount Vernon, about fifty minutes from Brooklyn. It wasn’t wise to travel with an arsenal. So, I had homes set throughout the US to keep them. I would get a hotel room in the city after we picked up everything we needed.

I drove slowly into the neighborhood where my home was located. When people typically thought about New York, they couldn’t imagine that there were quiet areas. However, that’s exactly where this house was. We’d finally arrived, and I parked in

the driveway of the all-brick rancher with a single garage. It was a quaint two-bedroom, two-bath home. I unlocked my phone, sorting through apps until I found the one to open the garage for our location.

After it lifted, I pulled in and closed it behind us. I got out of the car, rounding it to help Jourdan out. We entered the tiny house and were met with its staleness. I didn't know the last time I'd been here. It was clean, aside from the coating of dust that had settled on the tops of all the furniture. Jourdan opened a window while I walked through the house, ensuring everything was in place. Once satisfied, I plopped down on the couch, closing my eyes and throwing my head back on the cushion. I had a lot on my mind.

Last week, when Jourdan thought that I was blowing her off, I was sifting through everything I could find on Miller. She had been so eager that she didn't properly look through it, showcasing exactly why Brice was worried. It also worried me because she was half-assing everything she knew she should be doing, all in the name of vengeance. Leaving her back in Cypress while I came to New York wasn't an option. I didn't trust her to keep herself safe. If anything happened to her, my name would end up in the dictionary beside the fucking word executioner. If the underworld thought I was terrible now, who I would become would be nefarious.

The file I'd compiled of Miller included his properties, banking information, and known associates. That's how I pieced together the fact that he may have known Jourdan's father. There were even a few photos in the back with people I had no lead on other than them being from California. He'd done a damn good job of covering up his past. The meeting was supposed to take place on Saturday. I had no intention of meeting him as Rock or Stephon. I was here to get a more personal idea of who this man was. I wanted to know what time he usually ate and what he ate at that time. That was the reason that I'd arrived three days in advance.

Some way to spend my fucking honeymoon!

I felt Jourdan sit down beside me. She leaned into my body, laying her head on my chest. The next thing I felt was her leg that she'd thrown over mine, which was sprawled out.

"What's wrong?" She asked. I hesitated before answering because I wanted to give Jourdan the world. I would feel like a failure if she were upset about us not celebrating our nuptials.

"I'm low-key pissed that we're here instead of me seeing your naked body covered in white sand. Argh, Damn this motherfucker!" I groaned. His ass was killing my mood. Jourdan placed her hand on my chest and began drawing circles, calming me before she spoke.

"Is that all your ass was thinking about. "

"Jourdan, we are not going to sit here and act like you haven't seen yourself naked."

"I have, and?"

"And... you know why the hell I'm thinking about it then," I said and laughed.

"Are you upset, Jourdan? That we're here instead of on our honeymoon."

"Stephon, I just decided that I wanted to be married yesterday. I haven't even thought that far ahead. You know I'm excited about this trip. When I first started, my father and I used to conduct recon together. It's nice to have someone who also knows this lifestyle. I need someone with whom I can share it and who understands. That's you. Besides, it's your tight naked ass I'm trying to see covered in sand."

"I promise to take you when this is all over. And pause. You nasty," I said, laughing.

“Maybe so, but are we going to sit here all day, or are you going to show me the goods?”

“Oh, that’s all you had to say, Baby,” I said as I pretended to fumble with the button on my cargo pants. She slapped my hand away and quickly stood above me.

“Guns. Now. Stephon,” she said, staring down at me. I held her gaze. There was fire in her eyes. This woman didn’t give a damn about an exotic vacation. She was ready to fuck some shit up.

Damn, she ain’t nothing but good trouble.

I stood, brushing past her, heading toward the basement. Once I reached the door, I entered my code and opened it. I descended the narrow staircase with her trailing close behind me. Once I reached the bottom, I flicked on the lights. Starting from the left where I was standing, the lights came on, illuminating a display of weapons. Each section lit up one by one until the last display on my right was lit.

Jourdan pushed past me and stepped further into the room. She slowly spun around in a circle. She looked like a kid in a candy store. I was immensely turned on, but now wasn’t the time for that. I also couldn’t believe that Brice had done this to me. His ass knew his sister was like this, and he wanted me to take her off his hands.

“That motherfucker,” I quietly said and laughed.

“You said something?” Jourdan asked, peering over her shoulder. I shook my head. Then she went around the room, making her selections. She picked up two twin Smith & Wesson nine millimeters. Holding them in her hands and aiming them. Just then, I remembered the gift I’d bought her. It was folded and tucked under my jacket in the back of my pants. By the time she turned her aim towards me, I’d taken it out and held one side in each of my hands. It was a shoulder gun holster, just like the one

I wore.

“Stephon,” she said, running over to place her arms inside where I held it up. She adjusted it on her back and then holstered the guns inside. She leaned up to put a sweet kiss on my lips.

“Thank you, Baby,” she said giddily, and I was like putty, bending to her will. I picked up my twin guns and a Glock, which I placed in the back of my pants. Jourdan had placed an extra on her ankle underneath her jeans. The last thing I picked up was a knife, which I put inside the thigh pocket of my cargo pants.

“You ready to go to fucking work, Lioness?”

“Hell yeah. This is going to be so fun,” she said and smiled while rubbing her hands together like a menace.

Putty!

CHAPTER 23

Jourdan

It was approaching midnight, and a storm had just passed. Water was beaded up, covering all the windows. It had left a light sheen of water covering the streets, which the dimly lit lights reflected. I focused my attention on the steam that rose from the streets after the rain. I was directing my attention to everything except what I was supposed to because I was bored. Then, I began counting all the unattended cars that lined the streets. We blended in and parked a few cars from where Miller had entered the building. We'd followed him to one of his warehouses.

After we picked up our weapons at Stephon's property, he input Miller's face into a tracking software that I had never seen before. It was called Bio Scan. Devin and his brothers created it some years ago but never released it publicly. I assume Demi used it the night I called him to help with Burks. It was solely for their usage. The software allowed you to input a facial image, and it would pinpoint the person's exact location. It also allowed us to erase our image from our hotel and any city camera or location we'd followed Miller inside. Essentially, it would be like we were never here. We'd even checked into the hotel using fake IDs and credit cards that we'd used for all our purchases.

With the software, we've been able to follow him for the last two days. I knew I said this trip would be fun, but I wasn't having any fun right now. And this, for damn sure, wasn't the work I had in mind when he asked if I were ready. Reflecting on it, I never enjoyed reconnaissance at any point. My father had scolded me on many occasions for my impatience. I wanted to get in, take care of my business, and be on

my way. Anything longer than that was an inconvenience to me. And we were currently in a scenario where I was being inconvenienced.

Stephon, however, was in his element, sitting, waiting, and observing in the shadows. There wasn't a detail that he missed. I couldn't understand why we hadn't snuck into the building for a better look. All week, we'd been close range. However, tonight, all we'd done was sit in this car. Rock had told me that this was the night Pierre had set up for him to meet with Miller at this location. I also believed that he wasn't doing the things that he usually did to gather intel because he was with me.

He has to want to go inside that warehouse. Right?

As I sat in the backseat with my legs balanced on each seat, I thought about all the information I could be gathering if I wasn't being held captive in this damn car. I started to fan my legs repeatedly in my state of anxiety. I'd grown so upset at the whole ordeal that my body temperature had risen. So, I pulled the loose fabric of my cargo pants up to my knees. I was ready to pounce. I would surely lose it if I didn't get any action soon.

This version of Stephon or Rock, because I was sure that's who I'd been with the past few days, wasn't in the business of entertaining. He rarely talked, and when I did try to speak, I was quickly answered or cut short by him holding his finger to his mouth and signaling me to be quiet. The only thing that was keeping me from trying to maul him was the fact that he was rubbing the backs of his fingers up and down my calf.

JoJo, you ain't gone do shit.

My inner dialogue was right because I would follow this man's word no matter how much I didn't like it. Suddenly, his hand had stopped its mindless motion. I sat up to see why. Miller had exited and was standing amongst a group of men.

What in the hell are they talking about? I can't see or hear shit from here. Fuck This!

Before Rock's commands could effectively stop me, I opened the back door quietly and began to creep over to where they were. I knew if I heard him, I would stop, so I quickly maneuvered out of earshot. Rock's quiet yells faded behind me as I snuck across the street.

Stephon

"Jourdan! Jourdan, wait, there's ..." Before I could call out to tell her that Miller's men were on the roofs looking out for danger, a bullet had flown towards where she was alerting the group of men. They all heard the gunshots, stopping their conversations to take cover behind the vehicles. She stopped and ducked behind a car, drawing one of her weapons.

"FUCK!" I yelled as I dropped my mask and jumped out of the car. I crossed my arms across my chest to draw my guns and aimed at the rooftops. I needed to drop some of the men targeting her from above. One of the men had ducked down, and when his head popped up, I shot, hitting my target between the eyes, with his body falling back behind his barrier. I did the same with one more. Miller, who had been kneeling on the side of one of the cars, shooting intermittently, stood up to run.

Please don't chase him. Please don't chase him. Shit!

Jourdan took off in the direction that he'd gone, dropping bodies as she went. For an older man, Miller was fast. I quickly took off behind them, moving at the same speed. My heart beat out of my chest the entire time she ran before me. She was exposed and still had not seen the men standing guard on the rooftops. They were aiming right at her. She ran so fast that they couldn't get a good shot off. They hadn't seen me yet, but she was too far ahead, and my knee wasn't built for this rigor.

I was pushing myself and it to the limit. With each stride, I felt the pain radiate from my knee and throughout my entire leg. Then it seized, and I was forced to stop. I tried and failed to pick up my knee to continue my pursuit, but it didn't happen.

Fuck! Not right now. Not right now .

I quickly focused on pushing all the pain I was feeling to the back of my mind. Once I had control of it, I aimed my gun, hoping that the bullet would travel the distance it needed to hit the men. I fired two quick shots, watching the men fall from sight. Then I took off; my steps faltered at first. There was a noticeable difference in my stride because I was in so much pain; however, it was enough to give me a second wind.

As Miller reached the end of the street from the alley we'd run, he turned and let off several shots in Jourdan's direction. A car barreled down the street, screeching to a stop, then Miller jumped in. Jourdan had drawn the twin to her Smith around New York, they were a dime a dozen. I also couldn't show my face because he'd been watching me over whatever shit he had going on with my mother.

I messed up tonight because he'd seen me, Rock as One. What really fucked me up was the fact that he'd also seen Jourdan and that she'd almost been shot. The only silver lining was that I don't think he knew who she was in the underworld or that she was the daughter of Brian Washington. At least, I hoped. What he knew for sure was that she was with me, and that was a problem.

"FUCK! FUCK! FUCK!" I yelled, slapping my hand against the steering wheel as I drove. I took a deep breath, trying to calm myself down.

"Why haven't you been telling me everything, Rock?"

"Telling you everything?" I questioned and scoffed.

“That’s what I asked!”

“Because I made a mistake,” I said .

“Oh, so bringing me along was a fucking mistake. This is what I do!” She yelled.

“No, the mistake was believing that you would use the skill set that I know you possess to do the job correctly!” I yelled back.

“The mistake was that I trusted you not to let your damn emotions cloud your judgment.” My chest was rising and falling as I took in deep breaths to control my anger. I didn’t get the shit. She claimed to want to avenge her father’s death, but she was acting like she wanted to join him.

“You almost got shot, Jourdan! Please explain to me why didn’t you see those motherfuckers on the roof? Huh? You’re my damn wife now, Jourdan. It’s my job to protect you.”

“I don’t need you to protect me,” she yelled.

“Did I ask you what you needed? I don’t expect you to ask; you’ll never have to. And that goes for anything.” I said as I glanced over to the passenger seat to see her with a pissed look on her face. I waited for her to answer, but she had none because she knew I was right.

“See, your problem is that you think it’s you against the fucking world. I’m not standing behind you, Jourdan; I’m standing beside you because it’s ‘us’ against the world. A few months ago, I was content with the way things were. But then you came along and flipped my world upside down in a good way. I fucking need you, Jourdan. I can’t have something happen to you. I just can’t. So, Baby, if you want to burn it all down today, I’ll pour the gasoline while you throw the match. We have to be smart

about the shit, Baby. You have to fucking trust me. ”

The rest of the ride back to our hotel was spent in silence. I thought again about how I had believed Brice had been a little officious when talking about Jourdan’s behavior regarding her father. I’d seen how she reacted once she thought she would get answers. I didn’t like it. She was now my world, and I loved her, regardless of whether she felt the same about me. I had to end this before she got herself killed. Which meant I was about to be on one.

CHAPTER 24

Jourdan

I had fucked up. Stephon was pissed. He was right. I knew better and had been trained to be the best, but I hadn't acted like it. I was usually keen and picked up on things that felt out of place, but I hadn't seen the men on the roofs. I hadn't been on my game since I'd convinced myself that my father had been purposely moved off the board. It was an inference that I wouldn't change. However, I needed to be who I was trained to be, rather than this irrational version of myself. I also needed to lean into the trust I had for him wholly. I was one of the most sought-after hit women in the world, and I was acting like the young, inexperienced Jourdan who'd gone into that hotel room after Trip Callahan.

Damn! Do better, Jourdan!

I stared out the window until we returned to the hotel parking lot. It wasn't a five-star hotel; it probably wasn't even a three. It was small and had no more than sixty rooms. However, it was clean and conveniently located near where we needed to be. I'm sure Stephon had chosen this one because I was with him, but I'd stayed in worse, so it didn't bother me. It came with the job most of the time. Once we parked, Stephon rounded the car to let me out.

Well, Jourdan, this is a good sign. Right?

As I undid my seatbelt, I noticed that Stephon still had his head on a swivel. He reached down to grab my hand, allowing me the space to exit. When he closed the

door, he never let go of my hand. Stephon was pulling me along quickly and as close to his body as he could get me. The concierge was at the desk like every other time we'd entered the hotel at this hour. It was quiet, but I could hear her chewing gum loudly. Her phone held all her attention until Stephon walked by. She looked up, making it a point to speak to him.

"Mr. Phillips, welcome back," she chided in a sultry voice, using the name we'd chosen as our cover. She leaned over to push her breasts forward in the shirt she had half unbuttoned.

Am I invisible? Why is every woman we encounter playing with their life like this?

Stephon gave her a quick head nod, not even looking her way. I instead gave her an icy glare that said; I will cut you if you don't get your damn lust in check.

"And Mrs. Phillips," she followed as if I were an afterthought. It was one thing to look at him. I didn't care about that because I wasn't insecure, but these women were disrespectful. Unfortunately for them, playing dirty would get them nowhere because I would bathe in mud .

As we stood in front of the sole elevator, Stephon impatiently tapped the elevator button. I couldn't imagine what was taking the rickety machine so long to arrive. At this hour, there shouldn't have been many stops that it needed to make. I glanced up to see if I could get a read on Stephon's headspace.

Shit!

I'd seen him with this look several times, but I was on the other end of his deadly glare this time. Instead of giving him my usual attitude, I turned and ducked my head when the elevator doors finally opened and walked inside. When I entered, I tried and failed to stand in the opposite corner of Stephon. Within seconds of the doors closing,

he stepped in front of me, crowding my space and pushing his body into mine. I was caged in. Then he leaned his head down, taking several deep breaths and blowing them out. He let them caress my skin before speaking directly into my ear.

“It’s cute that you think this little bit of space you tried to create will stop me from punishing you.” My body temperature rose as I thought about the punishment that came with the look that Stephon was giving me. He gently kissed my lips, a stark contrast to the words he’d just spoken.

Should I run? I should run. Girl, you know he’s just going to find your ass. Then your punishment will be worse.

I was a glutton for punishment because as soon as the door opened, I started to make a run for it. Stephon’s reflexes were too fast because he caught my arm, snatching me back into his body, where he whispered into my ear again .

“Don’t even fucking think about it. You’re going to go in that room, shower, and then lay your beautiful ass on that bed. Then I’m going to shower. When I get out, I’m going to fuck all that recklessness out of you until your body tells me you’ve had enough,” I hissed a breath. Stephon had somehow managed to rent every room on this floor for security reasons. He wanted them empty, and because of that, it was also quiet. I walked out of his embrace and entered using my keycard. The room was small, housing only a queen bed and a single armchair. I flipped on the lights, walked straight to the bathroom, which was also efficient in size, and started the shower.

JoJo, you just let that man talk to you like that? Yes!

By the time I’d washed my entire body for the second time, the door opened. Stephon entered and leaned his against the small bathroom counter, watching me. I was sure I was out of my mind because his behavior turned me on. I stepped out of the shower, leaving it on for him, and draped the robe around me. When I brushed past Stephon,

he wrapped his arm around my middle, pulling me back.

“On the bed, Jourdan,” he said as he seductively bore his low-lidded eyes into mine, searching for any defiance. Fortunately for me, he missed it because I nodded but had no intention of getting on that bed yet. Instead, I sat in the chair facing the bathroom door and waited. The door opened finally, and Stephon stepped out. His hair was still slick with moisture, and so was his body. It was a work of art. He reached his arm behind his head with another towel to dry his neck, showcasing his thick biceps. The water droplets slid down his beautifully tattooed body, starting at his neck. Then they traveled his chiseled chest and over his rock-hard abs until they met the fresh white towel secured around his waist.

He was already hard and ready for me. The towel was doing a damn good job of restraining the bulge that threatened to break free.

“I’m sorry, Stephon, about tonight. I don’t want you to try to tame me. I’m afraid that you will. I know that sounds wild because you’re only trying to help. It just feels like you’re trying to stand in my way of getting answers, which is why I acted out.” I said timidly.

“Acted out, huh. I took a bullet because you acted out. Then there’s that word tame. You keep saying that, Baby, but your way is not the ‘only’ way. Also, any other time, taming you is the last thing I want to do. I want you beside me, wild and on your worst fucking behavior. Right now, I intend to tame. Now get over here and show me how sorry you are,” he said as he looked at me with his bedroom eyes, heavier than minutes before.

I stood and started my walk.

“No, get on your fucking knees on all fours. I want you on the prowl.” He said, lowering his voice to an octave that made my pussy purr. I dropped down and started

to crawl one leg in front of the other, making sure that my ass was arched in the air. With each slow crawl toward him, I made sure my hips swayed as I stared into his eyes. He licked his lips and dropped his hand to grab and squeeze his hard dick .

When I reached him, I hopped to a squat before him, swatting his hand away, undoing his towel, and letting it fall to the floor. My mouth watered at the thickness and veins that covered it. Taking it into my hands, I felt his hardness and stroked it. When I looked into his eyes, they were painted with his desire for me.

“Don’t play with it, Jourdan; eat that shit up, Baby,” he growled.

Grabbing the front of his thighs, I let my hands roam over the taut muscles that formed them before letting them explore up and over his abs. Next, they traced the lines that led to my prize. I took my tongue and licked up the vein that lined his shaft. Once I reached the top, I swirled my tongue around the tip, tasting his pre-cum before I covered him with my mouth.

“Ummmm,” I hummed as I widened my mouth, feeling it stretch as I took him to the back of the throat. I paused there, swallowing him down until he let out a groan in pleasure.

“Shit,” he said as he looked down at me with his bottom lip in his mouth. It spurred me on. I wrapped both hands around his shaft and spit, coating his dick with slickness before smacking his heaviness on my tongue. I took him into my mouth again and began to bob steadily. I looked into his eyes to see him still watching me, pleasuring him intently.

“Make me gag on it, Baby,” I said. Then he took the sides of my face into his hands and began to thrust into my mouth. The noises of him pumping and me gagging filled the room as the moisture dribbled from my mouth and pooled between my legs. I needed to touch myself while he had his way with my mouth. I reached in between

my legs to feel my slickness, using it to circle my clit.

“Oh my Damn Jourdan, you’re so fucking nasty, and I love that shit, mmmh,” he moaned, letting his mouth hang open as he continued to fuck my mouth.

“Cum in my mouth,” I coaxed as I took my other hand and wrapped it around his dick, stroking up and down while I suctioned him harder.

“Fuck!” He huffed as his chest rose and fell. I came on my fingers as I felt him tighten, and his knees buckled. He shot his cum down my throat, with me swallowing every drop. He led me over to the bed and sat, turning me around.

“Touch your fucking toes.” He said as he roughly bent me over in the position he wanted me in. As soon as I locked my hands around my ankles, Stephon dove between my ass and sucked my pussy into his mouth.

“Damn, you always eat my pussy so good.”

“Shut the hell up,” he said as he feverishly slurped and licked into my center and up to my forbidden hole. Once he had it slick with moisture, he inserted his thumb and began to stroke. He was trying to eat me whole. I let out a loud grunt when I felt his tongue pump into me and swirl around my opening. Then he replaced it with the fingers of his other hand while his tongue still went to work. When he sucked my clit into his mouth again, I came, squirting where he drank what he could as the rest ran down his beard and chin .

He stood me up, lifted and threw me to the center of the bed. In seconds, he was on top of me with my legs thrown over his shoulders. He pushed inside in one swift motion and began to punish my pussy.

“Did you think wrapping your beautiful mouth around me and trying to take my soul

was going to save you? Unh Unh, Baby,” he said as he drove into me. His pumps were delicious, and I felt every vein and ridge in my tunnel that I’d felt in my mouth. He was putting me through the mattress with a smirk that told me he knew exactly what he was doing to me.

“I feel you squeezing me; put that shit to work, Baby. Give it the fuck to me now,” he moaned, hitting the spot that drove me wild. I squirted again. He dropped back down between my legs and sucked my sensitive clit back into his mouth. He was ruining me.

“Aaahhhhh shit!” I came again hard in only minutes, but he wasn’t done with me. I was flipped over and put on all fours as he swiftly dove back in.

“Stephon, what are you doing to me?” I asked through a heavy moan.

“Taming you,” he growled through fast, feverish pumps into my center. I felt delirious as my body willingly took everything he had to give because it felt so fucking good; he felt so fucking good.

“Are you going to do what you did tonight again?” He asked as his hand drew back and gave a hard smack to my ass. I didn’t answer, so he increased his tempo. He was hitting the spot he’d committed to memory and knew from every angle .

“I can’t fucking hear you, Baby. Are you going to do that shit again?” The smack that followed opened my floodgates as I squirted again, collapsing onto the bed. He flipped me over again and sank in.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I won’t do it again. Mmmmmhh.” He leaned down, covering my mouth and swallowing my moan, kissing me nastily. I could taste myself all over his tongue.

“I know, mmmh,” he cockily said.

“Shit, your pussy is so damn good. I can’t live without this shit, Baby. I need it, I need you. I need you to always be by my side until the day we die, and if we die, we’re doing that shit together, you hear me?” I felt him start to tremble on top of me.

“Yes, I hear you, mmmh.” When he finally came, so did I, allowing him to take everything I had.

CHAPTER 25

Stephon

My eyes popped open in the darkness. When they focused, I glanced at the clock to see that it was approaching three a.m.

Something isn't right.

My eyes scanned the room, trying to pinpoint if something was off or if someone was inside. After being sure there wasn't, I began listening to the sounds around me. The thermostat kicked on the heat, and Jourdan, lying on my chest, began to stir. I was certain that the noise and the sudden shift in my heartbeat and breathing had woken her.

"Stephon, what's wrong?" She rushed out.

"Shhhhh."

"We're not doing this shit again; tell me what's going on," she said as she started to sit up. I gripped her tighter to my chest, stopping her movement. I listened again. There shouldn't have been anyone on this floor, but I heard the slight sound of footsteps .

No one should be working at this hour.

"Stephon, what the...." Jourdan started to speak, but I pushed her to the floor just as

the door was kicked open. The light that filtered in temporarily blinded me. I reached behind me under the pillow and took out my gun that I'd attached a silencer to before going to bed, letting off a shot that went straight through the head of the man who kicked our door in. I flipped over the bed, crouching beside Jourdan as we waited to see if he was alone. As another man entered the door, my eyes and ears perked up in the darkness. His fate was the same as the first. I rounded the bed to make my way to the door, placing my back on the wall beside the frame.

An armed man reached inside with his gun pointed; he was scared to enter fully. I pulled him in by the wrist, flexing it until it broke, and he dropped the gun to the floor. When I had his body inside, I put him in a headlock, squeezing until I heard his neck snap. He fell at my feet along with the other two men. I let another bullet go to make sure he was dead.

"Jourdan, you good, Baby?" I asked. She popped up from behind the bed and aimed her gun straight at me.

What the fuck?

My face balled up, and I put my hands up in confusion. Then she squeezed the trigger. The bullet whizzed past me, dropping the last man who stood behind me with the chamber pointed at my head.

"Stephon, did you think I was about to shoot you?" I was embarrassed to answer, but I did so truthfully.

"Hell yeah. I mean for a lil' second. Your ass has a few screws loose, Baby. I didn't know what the hell was about to happen. Let's talk about this shit later. We need to get the fuck out of here. Get all our shit. I'm about to start wiping everything down. We need to be out in ten minutes." I peeped out the door, making sure there was no one else. I dragged both men's bodies inside the door, closing it while we did a partial

clean-up of prints and hair. I would have to call my guys here to come in and do the rest. I probably should have had them watching Miller all along. However, this was a personal situation that I didn't trust anyone to handle, only us.

"You really thought that I was going to shoot you? I thought you said you trusted me," Jourdan asked teasingly as we cruised down the streets of my old neighborhood. We were in Brooklyn, headed to my mother's old brownstone. It was the only safe space I knew of until we could get some rest and head home.

"You still on that, Jourdan?" I said and smirked

"Baby, the answer is yes, I do, without question." As I responded, a text came through. I glanced down at my encrypted phone to read it.

Cleanup

Here. Handling it now .

It was from my cleanup crew, telling me that they'd arrived at the hotel. I tucked the phone back into the cup holder and continued down the street until I found a spot. It was a typical New York-style brownstone, a staple in the city. It had been easy for my mother to sell the three-story dwelling.

"When was the last time you were here?" Jourdan asked.

"I haven't been here in years, not since I repurchased it. When we left New York, my mother sold it and used the money to help us start fresh in Cypress. Of course, that money went quickly before I had to step in. So, I would say about seven years ago. My realtor, Jason Saunders, who is licensed to sell in several states, caught wind that the previous owner was selling. I repurchased the property and put it in my mother's name. She doesn't even know that she still owns it."

“That’s so sweet, but why haven’t you told her?”

“Shit, I don’t even know. Probably because I feel like she won’t give a damn. My mother never talked about New York after we left, ever,” I told Jourdan. I helped her out of the car and walked the block to the house. I fished out my key ring before we reached the stairs. This was probably the only house I owned in which I hadn’t added a keypad. I believed nostalgia made me keep it in its original state.

We walked up the brownstone stairs, and I used the key to open the foyer door.

“I knew y’all lived like the Huxtables,” I heard Jourdan say under her breath as she looked out and down the street at the rows of houses on each side .

“Is that what you think?” I responded, laughing at her statement.

“I mean, we were doing all right when we lived here. My father was a Construction Manager, and my mother was an inner-city Social Worker. We didn’t always live like this, though.

“What in the hell is this?” I whispered into the small room. I found the floor littered with mail. I kneeled and scooped up the multiple envelopes. Under the moonlight, I held one up to read its addressee. It was from a local accounting firm, addressed to my mother. I ripped open the mail to see it was a twenty-five-thousand-dollar check. I read further and saw that the payee was Julius Miller.

“What in the fuck,” I said aloud as Jourdan took the mail from my hands, reading it. I ripped through the other envelopes, finding the same amount in each one, paid every quarter. There was a total of seven hundred thousand dollars. I’m assuming the accountant had sent them here when he searched and found her name listed as the owner.

I stood, brushing my hands over my curls.

“Jourdan Baby, I’m so confused right now,” I said, taking a deep breath.

“You said beside you, right? We can figure this out together. You got me, and I got you. Let’s go inside.”

“Baby, Miller has this address in some capacity. I’m tired as shit, and I don’t feel like shooting any more motherfuckers tonight. ”

“Well, it’s a good thing you got me because I can do this all day,” she said, taking her hands and acting like they were two guns. She squeezed her imaginary triggers twice for added effect.

“And I got two real ones, too,” she said again as she wrapped her hands around her body, placing them on the guns that rested under her arms in the holster.

My baby.

She smiled as she did it, but I could see in her eyes that she was serious.

“Bring your ass on. I had the place furnished. It’s too bad I can’t show you the room I used to knock down all my high school shorties,” I smiled, but the look Jourdan gave me back was deadly. I laughed again. We walked inside to find my Mother’s Brownstone in the same condition as my house in Mount Vernon. It was clean but covered in a light coating of dust.

“I’m just messing with you, Jourdan. Adriana Rockwell would have tackled me harder than a three-hundred-pound linebacker had she even thought I had girls in here.” I said as I walked around the house, turning on the lights. It was a mind fuck because I wanted to see the house the way it used to be. However, it was just

furnished. It was missing the cozy, homey feel that my mother always seemed to bring to all her homes, including mine.

“See, that’s why I love your mother,” she said and smiled. I gave Jourdan a tour of my childhood home and threw in a couple of stories about the times I spent with my father. I missed him; my time away from this home and all my life’s changes had pushed the pain to a place that wasn’t easily accessible. In that revelation, I truly understood why she acted as she did. If something other than a freak work accident had taken my father up out of here, I could see myself taking the same rash path to avenge him. For that same reason, I knew she wouldn’t have returned to Cali even if we hadn’t crossed paths.

With all these new thoughts running through my mind, I was desperate to shut the world out. After getting some rest to reset, I was heading back to North Carolina and Cypress Crest. My mother owed me some answers.

CHAPTER 26

Stephon

I couldn't have been fun on our way back from New York. I hadn't said a word the entire flight. We'd woken up, locked up my mother's brownstone, and driven straight to the airport. We were boarding and returning home after turning in the rental and grabbing breakfast. I was hoping the flight would help clear my head. Jourdan slept nearly the entire time. While she did, I'd thought of every scenario of why Miller would send my mother such large sums of money every three months. None of what I concocted made sense. The craziest story in my mind was that my mother was a damn queenpin and that Miller was paying her his cut every month.

Steph, you're tripping. That's wild. Besides, if she were, you'd fucking know. Not to mention, she hates drug dealers.

"Jourdan, wake up, Baby. We're here." I said as I gently shook Jourdan to wake her up. Our flight had just landed, and it was time to deboard .

"Damn that was fast. How long have I been asleep?" She asked while she came to. I wanted to tell her nearly the whole trip, but didn't want to alarm her. She came across as the type who didn't like to sleep much, fearing she might miss something. And I know she would've wanted to keep her eyes on all the flight attendants.

Nosey ass!

"Not long," I said, chuckling at my last thought. Her hands reached the ceiling as she

stretched her body as best she could.

“I know your damn neck is stiff. After that performance last night.”

“If mine is stiff, then so is yours,” she said as she swiftly punched me in my dick, then proceeded to stick her middle finger in my face. It wasn’t enough to hurt, but I still felt the sting while I laughed it off.

“And I would do it again, too. Let your ass act up like that again. You’re pushing it right now. Come on, Mike is waiting,” I said and smacked her ass hard through her jeans. Our little back and forth gave me the break I needed to take my mind off all the bullshit momentarily. We went through the process of getting off the plane, and because we had no luggage, we went through it quickly.

Outside, I saw that Mike had already pulled to the curb, so I guided Jourdan over and placed her in before sliding in beside her.

“Aye, Mike, take us home. I need to pick up my truck.” He nodded through the rearview before pulling off. As we left the airport clearing, all of Cypress’s trees began to reappear. A plane appeared over them in its takeoff, and I wished it could take my mind with its ascent. After a while, all the cars on the road and everything we passed became blurry as I zoned out.

“The trip was good, I suppose. I’m not sure how much work you two got done, though,” he said as he laughed and gestured down to Jourdan lying on my shoulder.

Is she sleeping again?

A light snore could be heard coming from her mouth. I hadn’t realized that she’d fallen asleep again. I tightened my grip around her shoulder and kissed her forehead.

“Yeah, you know how those conferences go. You gotta find something to do between each seminar, right?” I said, and he laughed. Mike got us back to my house in record time. When I woke Jourdan up this time, I ensured she was good.

“Jourdan, wake up,” I said with concern as she stirred.

“You’ve been sleeping a lot. Are you good? Are you feeling okay?”

“Yeah, I feel fine. I’m just exhausted. Did I mention that I hate traveling? You should see me when I switch time zones.”

“I’m not coming in; I’m going straight to my mother’s house. Go inside and get some rest until I come back.” I spoke.

“No. I’m going with you,” she hastily returned.

“You sure?” I asked as I took her chin to study her face.

“Yes, Stephon, now let’s go,” she returned.

Somewhere on the drive to my mother’s, I’d found too much bravado. I’d hyped myself up so much for answers, I barged straight into my mother’s house without the typical bell ring. Adding to my newfound bravery, I brashly yelled out for my mother as I walked through her house looking for her. I also noticed that, once again, she’d rearranged the damn furniture.

Her ass is hardheaded.

“Maaa, Maaaa.” I yelled again.

“Little boy, I know damn well you didn’t come into my house yelling like you have

no sense. Now tell me what the hell has you on the verge of going to the hospital because I'm about to send you there," she said. I took several deep breaths. I turned and searched for Jourdan and saw that she had sat on the couch. A voice behind my mother made me turn my head swiftly and draw my weapon. It was a voice I'd committed to memory.

"Adri, is everything ok?" He asked. It was Julius Miller. While we'd slept he must have caught a flight straight here just to fuck with me. He had waltzed into the room with an air of confidence. I was already teetering on the edge, and he made me jump off the cliff. In my rage, I must have missed the foreign car parked by the curb.

"Miller, I don't know what business you have with my mother, but you need to get the fuck out right now," I said. I pulled back the safety to ensure he understood. He hadn't flinched as he held my menacing gaze with one of his own. I was trying to hold back, Rock, the drug-dealing killer I'd kept hidden from my mother .

"Adri, I will call you later," he said as he leaned down to kiss her cheek twice, one landing too close to her mouth for my liking. Then he walked coolly away, smirking at the inner rage he'd caused me to have.

"Stephon Angel, what in the hell has gotten into you?" I didn't speak again until I heard the door close. I tucked my gun and finally gave my mother my attention.

"Tell me how in the hell you know Julius Miller," I asked. My mother stalled as if she didn't want to answer me.

"Take a seat, Stephon."

"No, Ma. I'm good standing. Now answer the damn question." I was pushing it, but I was gone off the deep end.

“I know Julius from back in New York; he was friends with your father and me.”

“Ma,” I said tersely. She was trying to drag this conversation, and I was ready to get to it.

“When I first moved here from Puerto Rico, I met two men. One was Julius, and the other was your father, Sean. They were best friends. I fell quickly for Julius, and your father became one of my best friends. We all spent a lot of time together. However, Julius wouldn’t be with us as often. One night, I found him selling drugs on the corner when he missed our planned date. I had to go looking. He’d hidden it well up until then. I had no idea. Your father also told me that he sold on the same night, just not as much as Julius. Julius wanted to take over. That was all he talked about after I found out. He wanted us to get rich together. I wanted no parts .

I never told you, but your grandparents died in the drug game, and I didn’t want to suffer the same fate. That was the sole reason I came here. I needed to get away from it all. I was not about to be dragged back into a world I never asked to be in, not even for love.

When I told Julius I wasn’t happy with his lifestyle choices, he ended our relationship. Sean was there like the friend that he’d been the entire time. He was attentive and cared for me in ways that Julius never had. We were falling in love with each other. Sean even managed to escape that lifestyle, and we started to build a life together. Happily.

Julius was so caught up in the streets that he let me go. There were no issues with Sean stepping in to take his place. Julius didn’t care about me like I thought. At least at the time, I believed so,” she said. I handed her the stack of checks still in the envelopes.

“What are these? You’re talking, but you’re not saying anything. Why in the hell has

Julius Miller been sending you money, and for how long?" She took the checks, looking down at them. She looked back up with a pained expression on her face.

"He had been sending me money every three months after your father died. I repeatedly told him I didn't want it, but he refused to stop sending them. When you received your scholarship, I used your father's life insurance and the money from the house sale to follow you to North Carolina. I didn't want any of his drug money, and I thought I ran far enough away until I saw him at the mayor's ball. It was the first time I'd seen him since I left New York. Why are these addressed to the brownstone?" She asked .

"I bought the place back seven years ago. I never said anything because you never wanted to talk about our time there," I said as I paced back and forth. Everything she said, except where I fit in, made sense.

"Ma, I understand all of that, but what in the fuck does that man want with me. Did you know that he had been following me?"

"Stephon, I see you're upset, but I'm still your mother, and you'll talk to me as such." Her voice had morphed into the tone she used when I'd pushed her limits.

"Ma," I groaned.

"Answer the damn questions, Ma, now!" I yelled with my voice booming around the room. It was so loud that my mother jumped.

"Maybe I should let you two have this conversation in private. Stephon, I'm going to sit in the truck," Jourdan said and stood. Until then, I had forgotten that she was in the room.

"Jourdan sit your beautiful ass down," I said in a forceful tone. I didn't mean for it to

be, but I knew I needed her in the room. Something told me that I would not like what my mother was about to say, and I needed her here to ground me.

“Julius thinks he is your father, Stephon. I don’t even know how he found out that he could be. I never told him I was pregnant, but Sean and I started sleeping together the same night we’d broken up. When Sean and I found out, I decided you were Sean’s, and he died believing so. Sean signed your birth certificate, and I never said anything else about it, but deep down, I knew there was no way you could be his. Julius found me at the ball, telling me he knew you were his. Saying some bullshit about how we can finally be the family he knows we can be and that he’s changed. He came here today to persuade me to tell you. I don’t even know how he knows where I live,” she said.

I stopped dead in my tracks. Suddenly, I found myself outside my body, looking in. Out of everything that she’d just said, all I heard was that Miller was my father.

“Let me get this right. You were out there in those Brooklyn streets being a hoe with two niggas, and now I’m just supposed to accept that the man who I’ve called my father my whole life isn’t and never was. You were just going to take it to the grave that my whole life was a damn lie because you don’t want to face your fucking demons.” The strong breaths I was heaving were interrupted by a swift and hard smack across my face. I was on the verge of blacking out until I felt a hand lock with mine while another rested on my shoulder.

“Stephon, I think it’s time for us to go. You and your mother need some time,” Jourdan said as she tried to push me from where I was standing. However, her attempts were unsuccessful because I was rooted in place. As I stared into the eyes of the woman in front of me, the thought that rose to the surface was that I didn’t know who in the hell this woman was.

Jourdan somehow pushed me toward the door. I stared over my shoulder the entire

time until I was standing on the other side. I could faintly hear Jourdan in the background .

“Mrs. Rockwell, I’ll call you when he’s calmed down. You know I will. You get some rest, too. Today was a lot for both of you. I’ll call you, and you can tell me about that other man from the ball,” she said as the door closed. I didn’t know the woman on the other side. Hell, I didn’t even know who I was at the moment.

CHAPTER 27

Jourdan

Stephon wasn't himself, and I didn't blame him. If my mother had thrown something on me like that at that age, I would be acting the same. At any age, really. Here I was, thinking she was a good ol' Clair Huxtable, and Mama Rockwell was damn Jenny from the block, or I should say Adriana from the block. I was shocked to hear she'd been with both men, but I wasn't mad at it. Even though I currently wanted him dead, it didn't take away from the fact that Julius was fine, and from the pictures of Sean that I've seen spread around both of their homes, so was he. Then, there was the man from the Mayor's Ball, Marshall Declan.

Damn! Ok Mama!

Stephon was currently in his home gym, lifting until failure on every set. He came in, went straight there, and hadn't come out since.

I was sitting in the living room, watching him on an iPad that contained a feed from all his cameras. Every so often, he would stare off. For the last few minutes, he sat there hunched over, his elbows on his knees, and a towel thrown over his head. I wanted to help him. I needed to get back on my game and formulate a plan.

Sure, I wanted to know who killed my father, but it would have to wait. Stephon had been right; I needed to return to what my father had taught me. The first thing was that I needed Miller back in North Carolina. I could do one of two things.

First, I could call Pierre and tell him to pass along the information to Miller, telling him that Stephon wanted to meet. The problem was that Pierre didn't know me and had no reason to trust my word. Second, I could call Tayla and put a hit in the system on him in New York. My concern was that he might not make it before I could get Stephon the answers he needed.

I stood to head into Stephon's office. Once there, I plopped down on his oversized office chair and spun from side to side until I decided to do both. I opened Stephon's computer and entered my birthdate. I still couldn't believe he'd granted me access to his entire life. I pulled up the Bio Scan application and entered Miller's face. The results revealed that he was still in New York.

I picked up my secure line and dialed Tayla. She answered on the third ring. I didn't like to text like Stephon and my brother did. It didn't work for me; I preferred calls.

"Hello," she answered.

"Hey girl, you busy?"

"No, I actually just came in from work."

"Look, I need a favor."

"Ok, I'm listening," she hesitantly said .

"I need you to commission a hit."

"JoJo, what is this all about? Does this have anything to do with your father?"

"Damn it, Tayla. Why does it always have to be the third degree? Why can't you do this for me because I asked?" I yelled. I didn't mean for it to come out so

aggressively, but I was truly tired of the back-and-forth. This one time, I needed someone to have my back so that I could have Stephon's in the ways he'd been doing for me.

"Fine, what's the name?" she said exasperated. I could hear her rapidly tapping keyboard keys in the background.

"Julius Miller, make the bounty a half mil. Current location: New York. I just sent the photo." She pecked away at the keys a few more times before confirming.

"Ok, it's done."

"Thank you, Tay. This means a lot. I love you." I said, taking a deep breath.

"Love you too, JoJo," she said as she hung up the phone.

Next, I needed to pull up Stephon's encrypted phone. It took me a few minutes, but I was able to locate Pierre's contact information. From there, I texted him.

Contact Miller and inform him that we need to meet here in North Carolina. Also, let him know there's a bounty on his head, and if he can make it out alive, you'll contact him with a meet-up. Do it now.

P

Yup

I sat back in the chair, gloating about my plan and hoping like hell that it worked. Then Stephon came waltzing in, holding up his burner phone. He looked tired. I could see the stress around his usually bright eyes.

“Come here,” I said as I stood and motioned for Stephon to sit where I just had so that I could sit in his lap.

“Jourdan, Baby, what are you in here doing?” he asked, still waving his phone around.

“First, how are you feeling?” I said, taking his face into my hands.

“I don’t fucking know. I do know that I need to call my mother and apologize. I have no right to judge her for the life she led before me when I’m still hiding my current one from her. I gotta have an end game, Baby. I’m getting too old for this shit. Even with everything that she told me tonight, I know with certainty that that nigga is not my fucking father and never will be, blood be damned. I’m a Rockwell through and through,” he said with confidence.

“So, are you ok with this, Marshall Declan, man she was with at the ball?” I asked

“That’s another thing. We just had this conversation not too long ago about me wanting her to date because she hasn’t since my father died. She was trying to get on me about not telling her I was dating, and she was doing the same thing. He’s Chanel’s father. Devin’s wife, Chanel.” I gasped.

“That man was her father. Damn! ”

“Jourdan, don’t end up back on punishment.”

“What? That man is fine,” I said, holding my hands, palm side up, shrugging.

“Tsk, go ahead on with that. Now tell me what you’ve been up to. I saw your message to P,” he said, effectively directing the conversation back to me.

“You were right, Steph. I wasn’t being the best version of myself. I want to be better, do better for you,” I said and sighed.

“Don’t do it for me, Jourdan. Do it for you because you’re the second best,” he deadpanned. I took my elbow and reared it into his stomach. His loud laugh filled the room, and I was happy he was smiling.

“Ok, so I put a hit out on Miller in New York, which will cause him to travel here. Then I texted P to tell him the information you read in the text. Miller will move cautiously with the hit, and with caution comes predictability. I want him to be afraid to leave his safe house. Once he’s there, we’ll ambush him wherever that is in Cypress. You get your answers then... We eliminate his ass,” I said, pointing my finger guns and then bringing them to my mouth to blow as if they were smoking.

“I’m sure that if I look at the Bio Scan right now, Miller will be in the air.” I pulled up the application, and as I suspected, the dot was speeding across Pennsylvania.

“You just have it all figured out, huh?”

“I’m not number one for nothing,” I said, winking. He let out another loud laugh, showing me his dimples. I ran my fingers through his beard and up his face until my fingers ran through his hair.

“Mmmh, I love you, Baby.” He groaned. It was the third time he’d said it, and just like the first, I was afraid to return the sentiment. He was the perfect man for me, and I couldn’t tell him I loved him. It was right on the tip of my tongue; I just couldn’t push it out.

What in the hell is wrong with me?

“Stephon, let’s go shower,” I said. He stood with me, his arms wrapped around my

body.

“While we shower, we can discuss our plan.”

“Baby, right now, the last fucking thing I’m thinking about is a plan.”

“How about we talk about it after our shower, then?”

“How about we don’t talk at all?” He said as he adjusted me and threw me over his shoulder.

“But.” He gave me a hard smack to my ass that was in the air.

“No talking, Baby.”

CHAPTER 28

Stephon

I had been standing on my mother's porch for five minutes. I was genuinely afraid to go in. She had smacked the fire out of me yesterday. However, I wasn't going to let what happened yesterday fester. How my father suddenly left this world taught me not to do that. I wasn't leaving until we talked this shit out.

After I got the courage to go inside, I rang the bell and used my key. As soon as I crossed the threshold, my mother's house shoe flew at my head and made contact. The other did the same before I could even realize what was happening.

"Damn, Ma." She had met me at the door.

"Watch it, Stephon," she said, picking the shoe up, ready to strike again if I said something wrong.

"Can we talk?"

"Yes, of course. I didn't expect to see you this soon. You were angry with me yesterday, and I dropped some heavy information on you. Let's have a seat this time," she said as I followed her to the couch. I sat on the edge of the sofa, and so did she. The room felt just as heavy as yesterday when I rushed in. We sat in an uncomfortable silence before I started to talk.

"First, I'm sorry, Ma. I shouldn't have spoken to you like that. Let me also say that

my father is and will forever be Sean Rockwell,” I said.

“Apology accepted, and I agree. I’m unsure what his sudden interest in you is, but I don’t like it. I’ve been racking my brain trying to figure it out.”

“I wouldn’t worry about that, Ma. Please do me a favor, though; go cash those checks.”

“I don’t want that man’s money. He’s going to think I owe him something,” she said, looking at me in horror.

“I wouldn’t worry about that either. We are not leaving money on the table. Besides, I’m positive you won’t hear from him again,” I said, staring into her eyes.

“Sometimes, Stephon, I see someone else when you look at me. I saw it yesterday, too. I know you’re not exactly the angel I named you to be, and I don’t want to know about everything you’re into. I know I won’t like whatever it is, so never tell me. Just...Just be careful, little boy. That’s all I ask,” she said and sighed. I nodded.

“You want to tell me what’s happening with you and Declan?”

“We’re only friends,” she said and blushed.

“Yeah, nah, friends don’t kiss like that, Ma.” She looked off again as if thinking about him. I shuddered at the thought.

“When did you see that? I swear, you see too much! ”

“I saw you at the ball acting like no one was in the room but you two.”

She sure knows how to pick them. That nigga used to push weight too.

“You know what? You can deadass get out of my house now,” she said. I laughed because she would never use NY slang over her Puerto Rican ones. I had to meet Jourdan, so her kicking me out was perfect timing. We both stood, and I headed towards the door.

“If you’re happy, I’m happy, Ma. I won’t stand in the way. Unless that old nigga hurts you, then he’s going to have to meet my twins.”

“Stephon, get the hell out,” she said as she opened the door and pushed me out. I reached down and hugged her.

“I love you, Mamá.”

“Nene, I love you too.”

I stood in the doorway of the bathroom, watching Jourdan. She hadn’t realized that I was standing there. She jumped when she spotted my reflection in the mirror.

“Damnit, Stephon, you almost got shot. How do you do that?”

“Baby, you’re not going to shoot me,” I stated as I pressed up behind her. She was wearing another silky robe, and I wondered what was underneath .

“You wanna find out? Keep sneaking your ass in here unannounced,” she said through her laugh. While she was laughing, I was licking and kissing down the exposed parts of her neck, but I knew I needed to stop. So, I abruptly drew back because one moan from her and she would be bent over this counter.

I was supposed to be reviewing our plan for Miller. We’d finally talked about it, and I was letting her take the reins on this one. However, I was thorough and wanted to look at it from every angle. In the back of my mind, I felt like I was missing

something.

“I just came up to let you know I was back and will be ready when you are. I’ll be in the office,” I said, kissing her shoulder before leaving. Today would be the last day we would stake out Miller’s safe house. We wanted to ensure he hadn’t changed his routine or security detail since the hit was still out. I sat in my office chair, powered up my laptop, and began pulling up information and camera feeds. I had gotten so engrossed in what I was doing that I hadn’t noticed Jourdan come in.

I looked up to see that she wasn’t ready at all. Instead, she stood beside my desk wearing a black lace lingerie set. I started at her toes, which were painted white, and scanned up her legs, which went on for days. I continued my gaze up her body to where her hardened nipples nearly pierced through the lace. I leaned back into my chair to get a complete fill of her.

“Now, who’s sneaking up on who?” I remarked as she seductively walked around the desk to stand before me. She slid the computer and documents to the side before perching where they once were. If her objective was to seduce and distract me, she’d done a damn good job because my mouth watered. So much so that when she propped her legs onto the arms of my chair and spread them wide, I had no issues following her command.

“Eat,” she said. I sat up and ran my hands up her legs until I reached her pussy. Instead of sliding her panties off. I spread her lips through the fabric, using them to hold her open. As her nipples were, her hardened clit peeked through the fabric. With it calling me, I leaned in and covered it with my mouth, wetting the lace. The moan I was hesitant to hear was all I wanted to hear now as I slowly wound my tongue around the material, using it to caress her bud.

“Mmmm, Steph,” She moaned as my licks intensified. I wanted the seat of her panties full of her essence, and I wasn’t going to stop until I could see it seeping out.

“Mmmhmm,” I hummed, letting the vibration from my gratification flow onto her clit. In between my licks and laps, I stopped to suck, causing her to scream out my name again. I looked up to see the pleasure written all over her face as the room filled with the sounds of me enjoying her sweet pussy. I could feel her coating my beard before she grabbed my head and came through the lace and into my mouth.

“Up,” she said in that sultry voice that drove me wild. She wrapped her hands around my neck, pulling my face to hers where she connected our mouths and sucked her taste off my tongue. Our typical roles had reversed, and she was taking the control she had always fought for. I eagerly let her have it as I stood with my erection, trying to fight through my sweats and briefs. She dipped her hands into the bands and slid them down just enough for me to get free. Then she slid her soaked panties to the side, took my head, and coated it in her juices before lining me up.

“In,” she commanded, and I obeyed by slowly sliding into her tunnel, watching my thickness stretch her open until I was fully seated. She gasped, and her head fell back in ecstasy as I started to stroke. I couldn’t help but watch as she coated every inch of my dick in her cream as I slid in and out slowly.

“Damn, Baby, your pussy does something to me,” I whispered before I wrapped my fingers around her neck and squeezed with the perfect pressure. I made sure to hit her spot. I pulled her head back up so that I could enjoy her sex faces. Her mouth hung open in a beautiful display of ecstasy.

“Stephon,” she whined. Turning me on even more than her coming and taking what she wanted from me.

“Yeah, I know. Are you going to cum for me? Cum for me. Cum on my dick, Baby,” I said as I felt her tighten around me. She looped her legs around my waist, making sure I had nowhere to go. Her orgasm triggered mine, and I stroked until I emptied deep inside her while taking her mouth to swallow her moans. I placed my forehead

to hers as we breathed each other in while we came down from our high.

“You, happy now, my spoiled Baby?” I asked.

“Yes, very. Thank you,” she breathlessly said.

“You’re welcome. I’ll give you whatever you want. I should be thanking you because, damn!” I said as I looked down at her beautiful body, still covered in her sexy lingerie .

“Let’s get cleaned up so we can go to work. I’m this close to saying fuck it all.” She laughed at my statement.

“You’re laughing until your ass is up in the refrigerator drinking up all the Gatorade, and we haven’t done shit we were supposed to be doing today,” I said as I finally pulled out and tucked myself back into my sweats.

“Stephon!” She exclaimed, amusement written all over her face.

“Matter of fact, go put some damn clothes on before you find out,” I said, smacking her ass and urging her to leave. She turned her head and smiled before walking out of the room, her hips swaying with each step.

Fucking trouble!

CHAPTER 29

Jourdan

It had been three days since we put the hit out on Miller. As anticipated, he hadn't left his safe house since his arrival. It was a small brick rancher with a basement that sat on a quiet street. Three streetlights lined the entire street, providing us with the perfect cover of darkness. When Stephon and I weren't physically present to watch the house, we were tuned into a feed that tapped into every surrounding security and doorbell camera, as well as the city's.

We'd decided that we needed to go ahead and strike before he decided to switch his routine. He sent a man out every night around seven thirty to get him dinner. He typically returned after about thirty minutes. Like clockwork, we watched as the man exited the safe house and entered his car. While I sat looping the feed on the shitty security feed that they'd set up so that whoever was operating the station inside wouldn't notice. Rock snuck up behind the man and wrapped his arm around him from behind, snapping his neck. As his body slumped, Rock threw him in the car and backed out of the driveway.

From that point, we had thirty minutes to get inside and handle the situation before any of his men realized that something was wrong. After about five minutes, Rock clicked in the earpiece; it was Morse code. I knew he had run back to the house from wherever he'd left the car, but I couldn't find him in the shadows, even though I was straining my eyes to see him.

Rock would go in first and take out the men. Then, I would come in from either the

basement or the back door, depending on Miller's location in the house. After about three minutes, Rock had sent me the code, letting me know that I should come in through the basement because Miller was in the living room.

I quickly exited the car, which was a few blocks away, and ran through the shadows until I reached the basement door. I clicked the earpiece so that Rock and I could time our entry. Once he gave me the go, I would enter. Through the tiny rectangular window, I saw that two men were on the couch, their attention focused on a basketball game that was playing. They would be easy to handle. I sidled up to the side of the house until I went down the slight slope that led to the basement door.

A series of clicks came through the earpiece, and I quickly picked the freshly replaced lock. I had to be careful not to make too much noise, new or old; it wouldn't have kept me from getting in. After a few seconds, I quietly turned the knob and walked in. Both men's eyes ballooned in shock. Before they could reach for their weapons, I'd fired two quick shots to their heads .

The wiz of the bullet through the silencer must have alerted another man I hadn't seen. He walked from the back in a daze, looking as though he had been asleep moments before. When he noticed the two men dead on the couch, he reached for his weapon. It was in the back of his jeans. His moments were too slow as I charged him, pulling his reaching arm and cracking it at the elbow. With that same arm, I used it as leverage to pull him down, where his stomach met my knee hard on impact. He kneeled over in pain at the ribs I'd just cracked. While he was down, I let off three more shots, leaving his fate the same as the others. Checking each room in the basement and ensuring there was no one else, I quietly went up the stairs, where I heard Rock talking to Miller.

Stephon

"I figured it was only a matter of time until you showed up. I'm sure you have

questions you want to ask me before you kill me. Or try to kill me.” Miller said as I stood before him. It was good that he already knew his fate because he wasn’t leaving here alive. I stood before him as Rock, wearing all black with my mask pulled down over my face. I scoffed at his overconfidence.

I didn’t even have to try hard to get in because the dumbass I’d taken out before entering had left the door unlocked. I was offended when I twisted the knob and walked right in. They’d made this too fucking easy for me. It also let me know that he was probably waiting for me. I drew Smith and Wesson and immediately shot the first man I saw. His thud to the floor had brought out everyone in the house, to my luck, to where I stood just inside the door. I dropped every one of the five men before they could even react. As I stood listening for movement, I could hear the same noises I had just created coming from the basement.

Moments later, Miller appeared from the back, hands up and stepping over the men I’d laid before his feet. I knew we were good at what we did, but this shit seemed too fucking easy. It confirmed that he knew we were coming. Men like Miller always had insurance plans. I didn’t know if it would come today or return to haunt me later. I holstered one of my weapons and walked over to him, where I held him at gunpoint while I searched his person. Satisfied that he had nothing to defend himself with, I walked us through the rest of the house, checking for anyone else who wanted to die. I led us back to the living room, where I stood with my back towards the front door. I usually would never do that, but I needed to see Lioness when she came out of the basement.

“You’re not going to check the basement?” He asked knowingly. I ignored his question and asked one of my own.

“What did you want with One, Two, and Three?” I asked, growing impatient. I weighed the importance of his answers on a scale against his death. Ultimately, the answers held more weight.

“At first, it was only to find the people responsible for killing my son. His name was Isaac, your brother. I wasn’t shocked that Miller knew who I was, so I rolled up my mask, urging him to continue. I didn’t know what he was talking about .

“He was killed in Fields Boro trying to set up a hit against you all at a bar called the Trap Room. I was told that his killer had two guns that he wore. One under each arm that you still wear today. You stopped wearing them as a proxy but started back when you took over. Hmph,” he said. I thought back to that night when I’d killed the guy as he came through the door of that office. I let the pang of hurt pass through my heart. However, I didn’t have time to reconcile with the fact that the man I killed that night was my blood. I wasn’t a monster, but I pushed the knowledge of what I’d done to the recesses of my mind where all my other dark memories went to reside.

“You killed your son! My brother, as you claim. You sent a cat into a den of vicious dogs and thought he would come out unscathed. You should’ve come yourself. That’s pussy shit!” He continued with his spiel as if he hadn’t heard me.

“Don’t worry, I didn’t tell anyone of your identity. Either of you, now that there are only two.”

“What do you want then?”

“There was something about you the night I saw you at Porters. You looked like someone I knew, or maybe it was the guns. That jogged my memory. I wanted to know more about you, so I began to look. Then I saw you with Adri at the grocery store one night while I was here. From there, I knew you belonged to me. I always knew, even though she thought she’d hidden it. I had Issac by another woman I messed around with on your mother, so I let Sean claim you. She was too good for me, so I let her go. You don't seem surprised that I'm your father. I take it your mother told you,” he spoke.

“That’s because you’re not my fucking father, but get on with it,” I bluntly stated. He grunted at my response.

“Semantics. That’s something we can work on, son.”

Hmph. So he does the drugs he sells, too. Because he’s out of his fucking mind.

“ Anyway, my focus was still drawn to you for reasons I couldn't name. I kept coming up empty until New York. I was supposed to be meeting One. However, there he was, masked up, protecting a woman who chased me down an alley. Then, my concierge at the hotel, Mr. Phillips, confirmed that my son and One were the same after she gave me your description. Don’t worry, I handled that for you, too.

I want the crown by any means. You already have it, which means we could be the power family I always wanted us to be. Adriana was the one who got away. To know that we created the nigga who is at the top made me want her even more. When we first got together, it ripped me apart to see that she wanted nothing to do with me. Then I found out she allowed you to run the streets, so maybe there’s still a chance for me. She is still fine as hell,” he said, glancing off as if thinking of her looks.

Hmph, let’s add delusional.

“My mother doesn’t know what I do, and I will never tell her.”

“You and I can do it together and leave her out. What she doesn’t know won’t hurt her, right?” He said .

“Yeah, nah. That will never fucking happen.” As I said that, thinking that I’d gotten all the information I needed, Jourdan crept up behind Miller, shifting to his side to put her gun to his temple. He slightly turned his head to get a good look at her.

“Ahh. The wife. Congratulations, by the way. I looked her up, too. After all, she was shooting at me in the middle of the street,” he said as he continued to turn his head as much as she would allow to take her in.

“The beautiful daughter of Brian Washington, also known as The Lioness. That tidbit was hard to find, but it wasn’t hard to figure out that you sanctioned my hit,” he said. When the conversation was about me, Jourdan was the epitome of poise, but when Miller spoke her father’s name, I saw her resolve crumble. I needed her emotions to stay out of it. Especially when she’d been doing so well not to hold on to the grief that consumed her. Miller was holding a verbal grenade and had just pulled the pin.

“How do you know my father?” She asked.

“I worked under him in California. His time needed to end, so I made it happen,” he coolly said.

“You...You murdered my father,” I heard the crack in Jourdan’s voice.

Please stay with me, Baby.

It was enough for Miller to notice, and when he did, he took Jourdan, wrapping his arm around her neck and holding her gun to her head. I saw fucking red. He had my heart in his hands, and if he took her out, he’d better hope he could find a way to take me out too. But I wasn’t about to let either happen .

Jourdan, do you trust me, Baby?”

“Yes, without question, I love you, Stephon,” she said. When the words left her mouth, I flicked my wrist, making my throwing knife slide into my palm from under my shirt where it was tucked. Before he’d even realized, I’d thrown the knife; it was piercing through his wrist. Jourdan’s gun fell right back into her hands. When it did,

she took her fist and punched straight up under his chin forcefully, causing his head to rear back. When it snapped back into place, I quickly pulled out and shot him in the head. When his body dropped, Jourdan let off two shots to his chest.

I rushed over to her, where she fell into my arms, sobbing and crying tears that I knew she'd been holding in since the day her father died.

“Is it over, Stephon?”

“Yeah, it's over, Baby. Shhh. I got you. I will always have you.” I spoke into her ear.

“What about you? That was your father, and he said you also killed your brother.”

“I'm good, Baby. I didn't know those people. The family I choose is thicker than blood. And that family is over everything, including you and Brice,” I said as I held her face.

“Did you just tell me you loved me?” I asked as she looked up and smiled.

“I did.” In that moment, nothing that had happened before her telling me mattered.

“I love you, too,” I said, pecking her lips .

“I'm not cleaning this up. Let's go,” I said as I began to walk off; she didn't immediately follow.

“That's your daddy, Steph,” I shook my head.

“Too soon, Jourdan, too fucking soon. I can't believe your ass just said that.” I began to walk away. I looked back at her and shook my head again.

Jourdan Nichelle Rockwell.

Stephon

Three Months Later

I was ready to see my wife on the beach, covered in that white sand I promised her. We were scheduled to be on the plane in five hours to start our honeymoon officially. This time, we were set to fly private. She wanted to go to Fiji, so I rented a private villa for the week. I planned to turn her every which way but loose the moment her toes hit the sand.

We had just wrapped up the remodel on my gym locations and relaunched the website. Jourdan had also updated the websites of my security firm and coffee shop. She said that they were both shitty and weren't making me a dime. Those were her exact words. I wasn't going to argue; I let her do her thing.

"Jourdan, where you at, Baby?" I yelled throughout the house from the top of the stairs until she answered .

"I'm in the office, " she yelled back. I came downstairs and entered the office to find her at my desk. Jourdan officially moved all her things the week after we got married. I didn't give her too much of a choice; in no scenario was I ever sleeping alone. After that ring went on her finger, her life was mine, and vice versa. She'd decided to keep the house, hoping Brice would move into it.

"What are you doing in here anyway?" I asked as I reached out my hand to pull her up. I gripped her chin and brought her face to mine as I leaned down and kissed her. It only took a moment for us to get hot and heavy. I broke away from the kiss, giving

her a few more pecks before I pulled her down into my lap. I rested my hand on her stomach as she sat.

“I was just in here looking through your old photo albums. I only need to see one picture of you in a football uniform from behind.”

“I’m beginning to think that you might have a kink or obsession with that,” I said and laughed.

“Can you put some on for me?” She looked at me in excitement. I shook my head at her fetish, but eventually nodded yes. I would give her whatever she asked for. She flipped through the album until she came across a picture of me and the woman I had dated before her.

Aww shit!

She hung on the page for a few minutes, studying the image before flipping to the next.

Whew!

Then she flipped the page right back .

“Who is she?”

“That’s my ex-girlfriend Eve,” I said.

“Hmph.”

“Jourdan,” I said, laughing.

“What? I just asked you what her name was. That’s it.”

“Jourdan Rockwell. Leave that woman alone. I don’t want nobody but you, Baby.” I took the book, closed it, and set it aside. The last thing I needed was for Jourdan to go on another mission, as she called them, to bother a woman I hadn’t thought about in years. And I knew she would do it. Because so would I. We were overly possessive of each other.

“Let’s run upstairs real quick.” I bent her head to the side and began to trace my tongue in circles around her neck. Next, my hands found a place between her legs. I pushed her panties to the side and dipped two fingers inside her pussy underneath the skirt she wore. My other hand grabbed the underside of her breast and flicked my finger across her nipple. It pebbled under the fabric of her t-shirt.

“What’s this?” she asked as I continued to coax an orgasm from her. I saw she was looking at the folder with all the information I’d compiled on Miller. I must have thrown it in with the albums when I brought it home. Now I was pissed that I’d even brought it home at all.

Jourdan sat up and began going through the file.

“Baby, I’m about two seconds from bending you over this desk.” I didn’t care how long she looked at it that nigga was dead, and he wasn’t coming back. I was glad it was all over, and I could give her and her brother the closure they needed to move on.

I lifted her and bent her over the desk, lifting her skirt and pulling her panties down her legs. That day, I showed her the folder in my office; she hadn’t thumbed through it thoroughly. In the back were a series of photos I’d dug up from his past that I couldn’t put faces to. The very last photo in the folder Jourdan stopped on. She removed the picture, then stood from my grasp, closing the folder. She tilted her head to the side, studying the picture. It was of Miller. He wasn’t alone in the picture. He was with a woman and a newborn infant.

“Stephon,” she whispered in a non-sensual tone I wasn’t expecting.

“Jourdan, what’s wrong?” I asked. I could feel her body tensing as I stood behind her, looking over her shoulder. I didn’t like it. If something was wrong, I wanted to fix it immediately. That quickly, I felt myself going to that dark place that would end in bloodshed for anyone who was the cause of her unrest.

“We need to go to LA...Tonight.”

“Baby, talk. Now!” I growled out.

“Miller wasn’t the only person involved in my father’s death. I know the people in this picture. It’s...

To be continued...