

SWEETEST REVENGE

KALEB AND MONICA'S TALE

EDWINA FORT



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**FREE PREVIEW
NOT FOR SALE**



*Kaleb &
Monica's Tale*

FREE PAPERBACK
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PROLOGUE

MONICA

I sat on the basketball court bleachers forcing myself not to pull at the little skirt that barely covered my butt. I was going to lose my nerves. What I was attempting was so far past crazy I began to doubt myself.

Oh goodness! If I was caught my Nana would never see me again! My death would probably be bloody and painful! I couldn't do this! What was wrong with me? I was getting ready to get myself killed!

I stood clutching my book bag to my chest which had enough rock cocaine in it to get me sent to prison for a long time. But then a memory of my big brother by one year, Man-Man, surfaced. He was smiling down at me as he handed me one of Nana's honey buns that were stashed up high in her closet. She thought we didn't know about them. She busted us and he took all the blame. Boy, Nana tore him up!

I eased back down to the bleachers, remembering why I was doing this.

My brother was dead! Murdered!

And the man responsible was down there standing on the sideline, larger than life, watching his younger brother play in a four-on-four hood tournament. Although this event was big in the hood, and

Rasheed, his younger brother was something of a hood legend, being the biggest and most violent drug dealer on this side of town, the groupies were not here to see Rasheed.

No, they were all here to see Kaleb. If Rasheed was the prince around these parts, then Kaleb was the king, who rumor has it, was not only the power behind Rasheed, but also had his hands in everything from prime real estate to being the money behind several big named record labels here in the Chi. But what he was known for was The King and Sons' Classic Car Restoration Shop.

The story goes, their father, whose name was King, was this big-time drug dealer in his day. And to hide all the money he had coming in, he opened a classic car restoration shop in downtown Chicago. Anyway, the shop got so big it is said that it was bringing in just as much money, if not more than his dope empire. Needless to say, King did well with the business.

Kaleb however, has taken it to another level. Their shop had become the place to take your classic car amongst our people, and not just hood rich folks either. Big time rappers have shot their music videos at the shop. They rapped about driving their fresh whip off the lot. Hell, even the mayor joked about having to leave a press conference early, because he was going to pick up his '69 Cutlass that had been restored at The King and Sons'. They say the waiting list is like eight years out to even get a quote.

Hmm! Yeah, the women were not here like this to see Rasheed. He was a regular on the block. His older brother was not. So, whenever Kaleb was spotted in the neighborhood, folks surrounded him as if he was a king. And tonight, there was going to be a party at his place. So yeah, the chickens were out.

I looked around at all the women who were here dressed like I was, hoping to be picked by one of the party promoters, who believe it or not, were moving around the park handing invites to certain girls. Certain girls that looked like they were down for whatever. Pretty girls. Scantly dressed girls. And they were cheesing and smiling as if they had just won the damn lottery.

Silly women!

I on the other hand, was dressed like a whore because I was getting ready to bring down the untouchable. And trust me, being dressed in a mini-skirt that left most of my legs and thighs exposed, and a crop-top that exposed my stomach and hung low on one side exposing my shoulder was not easy. And to top it all off, I was not wearing a bra. I let my long locs fall to cover the side of my face.

I'm not going to lie. I was hiding behind them, letting my body do all the work for me.

Hell yeah, I was ashamed that I was using my body this way. I could only imagine what my Nana or big sister Stormy would say if they saw me dressed this way.

Come on, Mon! Remember, you're just playing a part. This is not real. It's acting. I told myself.

And like Madame Queen, the woman who had been my acting coach for the last ten years had always said, "To convince the world that you are a certain character, you must first convince yourself." Today, I was not Monica. Today, I was Toya, hoochie mama extraordinaire. A gold-digger, whose every dream would come true if only Kaleb, Drug Lord, King Pin, would just choose me to come to his big party tonight. And as I watched his goons continue to move around the crowd giving exclusive invites, I almost threw up in my mouth.

I just wanted this to be over. I had to get revenge for my brother. I could not let his death go without somebody paying for it. Then I can have peace. Then I can focus on graduating high school in a few months, and then on to Juilliard. I had been accepted there on a dance scholarship. My Nana was sad that I was going to be moving to New York, but she was thrilled about me being accepted at Juilliard. She herself has been one of the first black women to dance on Broadway behind the late, great, Ms. Janet Collins, who had in fact been the very first black prima ballerina of the Metropolitan Opera House. Her and my Nana were my role models.

I too wanted to dance on Broadway. Ever since I was a little girl, it had been my dream. Before Man-Man got turned out to the streets,

he would help me practice by lifting me high in the air, twirling me around in my little tutu. I had hoped that he would one day come back to us. That he would turn back into the Man-Man me and Nana loved instead of the gangster he was so determined to be. I used to tell Nana that it was just a phase, and he would snap out of it and be normal again.

But he never will. He will never do anything else, because he was dead. I angrily wiped away the tears that began to well up in my eyes.

No! I will not cry! I will not!

Instead, I will get revenge for my brother. And then I will leave town and become a prima ballerina like my grandmother.

I looked back down at the man who was responsible for the death of my brother, and pure hatred shot through my veins. He had messed with the wrong girl's brother. And if it was the last thing I do, tonight, he was going to pay for it!

However, later that night I found myself in a bit of trouble. Everything had gone so smoothly at first. While most of the girls at the park had been loud and obnoxious to get noticed, I had taken a different approach for two reasons. First and foremost, I was terrified and ashamed of showing off so much of my body! The last thing I wanted to do was to draw too many eyes. I just needed to draw the eyes of those that mattered, Kaleb's goons.

The second reason was something Madame Queen had always told me. "You don't have to be loud to be noticed. In fact, use your body language to speak. Speak with the arch in your back, the curve of your hand, the grace in your step, the swan-like dip in your neck. Let your grace speak for you. It is more noticeable than any voice."

And so I did. I sat there reading a book, not speaking to anyone. Every now and again I would flip my hair. When I reached for my water bottle next to me to take a sip, I curved my palm so that my long slender fingers gracefully lifted the bottle to my lips. When I drank, I sat straight up with just a slight arch to my back. I elongated my neck as the cool water ran down my throat, and then when I was done, I licked my lips.

Seconds later, I had my invite. I was handed a card with the address to Kaleb's Gold Coast penthouse condo by some guy that was very proud of his looks. I know this because every now and again he would stop and take a selfie of himself talking to someone, or shaking their hand or something. And he was proud of his car. He made sure everybody knew he was driving the candy red Lexus. Every now and again he would point his keys toward it and click a button to turn it on.

"Got to keep the air conditioner blowing, you know what I'm saying!" he would say to whoever was standing by him before laughing and looking around the park—probably trying to make sure everybody was watching him. Anyway. The clown handed me the card, and instructed me to give it to the guards in the downstairs lobby of Kaleb's condo.

"You need a ride boo?" he asked. I flinched.

"Oh no, I can get there. Thank you for the invite though!" As he made his way back down the bleachers, I breathed a sigh of relief.

Now that I was in, my plan was to fade to the background while I try to find a place to plant the drugs. I know you're wondering about the drugs. And to make a long story short, I found them in my brother's room. I know my brother sold this crap for Rasheed and Kaleb, so I figure I will just return their product and just maybe, make an anonymous call to the police, saying that a white woman was about to be murdered by a group of black thugs while at the same time making sure the drugs were somewhere that the police could see.

I know the white woman part was low. But hey, it will get the results I needed for this to go off as planned.

When I got to the penthouse, I was pleased to see that the place was packed, which was perfect. I found a seat in a dark corner where I could go unnoticed while I staked out the joint. Kaleb's penthouse was huge, I mean life of the rich and famous huge. I sat in what I assumed was the parlor, which was good, because it kept me close to the front door and it opened into the rest of the condo, giving me a great view of the sunken living room. You had to walk down a few

steps to go into it. Wait staff came in and out of the kitchen. There were a full bar and a DJ table. One whole side of his place was glass windows. Outside of them was a big pool area with an Olympic size pool. There was a full bar out there as well.

The other women that had been invited were doing their jobs fabulously. They were all dressed in tiny dresses and high heels. I kind of felt underdressed. Most of them had gone home and changed into something far more glamorous than what they had been wearing at the park earlier. I still wore the tiny jean skirt and crop top that I was going to burn on my grill after tonight. Oh well, I wasn't here to be noticed at this point.

I heard a girl scream by the pool. Some guy had snatched off her bikini top and tossed her in the water. Oh, my goodness! I held my breath, waiting for her to emerge from the water and yell, "Rape!" Except when she came up, it wasn't her bare breasts she was squalling about, it was her hair.

Em, Em, Em...

Welp! So, like I was saying with all that kind of activity going on, who would pay attention to little old me in a dark corner, right? Right.

Okay, so this is where things started going wrong. You see, I had planned on being out of this place by now. But neither Kaleb nor Rasheed was here, and timing was everything. I needed to plant the drugs at the right time and make my call. Hopefully when they find Man-Man's drugs they will go ahead and search the premises for more drugs. Now granted, from what I've researched on Kaleb, he's nobody's dummy. So chances are he won't have any drugs here at his house. But I bet he had a gun or two. Plus, Man-Man had enough drugs to put anybody away for a good while. I don't care how it happens, just as long as the bastard goes to jail. Him and his psychotic brother.

The guy that had given me the invite sat down on the wide circular chair next to me. I had to force myself not to stiffen at his nearness. I was playing the role of a whore after all.

“The book reader,” he said leaning in close to me. He had on so much cologne I almost choked. I smiled at him.

“Yep, I like to read,” I told him, wishing he would just get up and leave me be.

He held up his hand and one of the serving girls came over carrying a tray with two shot glasses of alcohol on it.

Oh crap! I was getting ready to panic.

“Thank you, baby,” he said to her as she put the glasses down on a table next to us. When she turned to leave, he smacked her on her butt. Goodness, what a savage!

“You drink Tequila, boo?” He turned to look at me while handing me one of the glasses. “It’s Patron; only the good stuff for the sexiest girl at the party.” Everything in me screamed for me to say, “No,” but I would draw too much attention to myself saying no to a drink. With a very forced smile on my face, I nodded.

“Oh, yeah, I like Patron,” I told him. He smiled before he turned his glass up and swallowed the contents in one swoop. Oh crap. I have never drunk a thing in my whole life. Oh crap! “I am playing a part,” I reminded myself, before I lifted the glass to my lips and duplicated his action.

I almost died! As the fiery liquid washed down my throat, I began to choke. It was taking everything within me to keep it down. Oh goodness! It was horrible! I’m pretty sure I just drank rubbing alcohol.

“You okay, boo?” The creep said, patting me on my back. I nodded.

“Yeah!” I croaked. “It’s just been a while.”

“Girl, the way you took that, it looks like it’s been never.” He frowned at me.

Even though it almost killed me, I forced myself to stop choking. The last thing I needed was for this guy to start asking questions. The less anybody knew about me here, the better. Tonight I was supposed to be a phantom.

The drink was beginning to warm me up on the inside. I took my

foot and scooted my backpack underneath the chair out of sight. The alarm system was going off inside my head and I didn't know why.

"So," he said, putting his arm on the chair behind me, "what's your name, boo?"

What is with this guy and the "boo" thang? I cleared my throat.

"Toya," I said, clearing my throat again. Something was wrong. I was beginning to feel warm on the inside, and my throat felt scratchy. It was probably just the shot. I guess that's what it was supposed to do. I mean why else would anybody drink such vile tasting stuff?

"Toya. Em, that's a pretty name, just like you." He put his hand on my thigh, and for the third time tonight I almost threw up.

"Thank you," I said, turning to look around at the other party goers. "Please leave!" I screamed in my head. I began to fan myself with my hand. Somebody must have turned on the heat, because it was really getting hot in here.

"I was thinking me and you can get out of here and go for a little drive in my Lexus." He winked at me, and oh my goodness! I could not stop the laughter that erupted from my mouth. I don't know why, but that wink coupled with his words was hilarious.

"What's so funny?" he asked.

"You, boo!" I told him, before I erupted into another fit of laughter. This dude was trash and so was his game. Dang, was I drunk? Why did I just find that so funny? Was it possible to get drunk off of one shot?

"Can you get drunk off of one shot?" I asked him. He smiled then, very wickedly.

"Yep, if it's Liquid Ex." I frowned at him.

"Is that Tequila?" He shook his head.

"Nope." Those alarm bells were getting louder.

"What is it then?"

"It's new... just hit the streets." My eyes widened. Oh no!

"Don't worry, baby. It's just a little something to help you loosen up a bit, that's all." He opened his mouth to say something else to me, but right then the front door opened and Rasheed walked in. Behind

him were several guys that I had seen standing with Kaleb. Either they were his main boys or maybe even his bodyguards. Behind them walked in Kaleb.

My breath stalled in my throat. I don't know if it was because of the drugs or just the general impact of seeing this man up close for the first time, but it felt as if I had been sucker punched right in the stomach. You see, I had not gotten a good look at his face earlier.

What a face!

He was extremely good looking, in a very rugged kind of way. He was good looking without even trying. He wore his beard low as if it hadn't been cut in a few days. However, his fade looked fresh as if it had been cut today. He didn't have a friendly face. You know the kind that welcomed people to approach you?

His face said loud and clear, "Don't mess with me, because I'm not in the mood." He frowned. In fact, he looked as if he was irritated with us all.

That, added with the fact that he was big, I mean *really* big. He wore a button-up shirt with the top three buttons opened that gave a sneak peek at the immense chest underneath it. The material hugged his arms just enough to see that they too were gigantic. He could probably snap me in half like a twig if he chose to. And him being dressed in all black—black jeans, black shirt, black Gaiter boots—only added to the fear I was feeling right now.

This fear I couldn't blame on the drugs. If anything, the drugs were keeping me from getting up and running for my life. I have a confession to make. I may have a slight problem of getting an idea in my head and running with it before I could think it all the way through. My Nana and Stormy say my little condition was probably going to get me in trouble one day. And I think that today just may be that day.

I am so stupid! Why did I just assume that Kaleb was going to be like Rasheed? Yeah, Rasheed scared a lot of people on the streets because he was a murdering thug. Him, I could have handled. But this force that was his older brother was a different story. He was...

dangerous. I felt way out of my element. He was above anything I had ever encountered. Power and experience just seemed to radiate from him. Everybody felt it. I could tell by the way they all stared at him with a look of awe on their faces.

And to top it all off, I had been drugged. Even as we were speaking, I could feel it making changes to my body, or at least how I felt about my body.

The shame I had felt earlier for exposing so much skin was gone. And although I know I was afraid right now, my brain wasn't sending the proper signals to my body, like... "Run!"

"Welcome home, Boss," the man who had been sitting on the couch next to me said, getting up to approach the group. His voice boomed over the music so that all of us that sat in the front parlor heard.

"Jamie, I don't need you to welcome me to my own home," Kaleb spoke sounding tired. His voice was deep and raspy.

"Sit your goofy a\$\$ down!" Rasheed said shoving Jamie in the head, causing a bunch of people to laugh. "Why do you keep this chump around?" he asked his brother. Kaleb chuckled, shaking his head a bit. As the men passed me, I prayed to Stormy's God, Yah, that I went unnoticed. My heart was beating so loud in my ear it was louder than the music. I wanted to fan myself because I was extremely hot now. I could feel beads of sweat pooling up on my temples, but I sat perfectly still as not to draw attention to myself.

But right as he passed, Kaleb looked down at me. At first his eyes just seemed to skim over me. I was just about to exhale when they flew back to me. And Oh! My! Goodness! He stopped dead in his tracks and turned to look at me fully. The heat had turned into an inferno! I was burning alive!

Please floor, just open and swallow me, this chair and my brother's drugs through you. I began to breathe heavily. At least it seemed like it to me. My chest rose and fell with each panic breath I took. *This was not the plan! This was not the plan!*

"You the shorty with the book," he said, and a quiver went

through me as his deep voice washed over me. I almost moaned. His voice felt so good. What the world was happening to me?

I just froze in fear. If Madame Queen could see me now, she would shake her head and say, “Well, you were born to be a dancer. This acting thing just comes in a strong second to that.” I opened my mouth to speak but nothing came out. I don’t know if it was the drugs in my system or just the power that seemed to ooze from him, but I felt terrified. Having his full attention was like having the attention of an oncoming, speeding Mac-truck. I bit my lip, more nervous than I’ve ever been in my life. His eyes lowered to my mouth.

“Boss, she ain’t nobody. I brought her here for me. *This* is what I have for you,” Jamie said turning to gesture towards two very voluptuous women dressed in brown bikinis that matched their brown oiled up bodies perfectly.

Dang! They looked like two bars of chocolate. The mouths of Rasheed and the other men that came in with him fell open as the women approached Kaleb. They both wore inviting smiles on their faces as their hungry eyes took in all that was Kaleb. Kaleb looked at them for a minute. His eyes slowly traveled up their bodies and back down again. I eased my hand down on the side of the chair and pushed the bag back to the wall so that it could not be seen at all. My heart was racing so fast I was finding it hard to breathe. I needed to get away from this force that was Kaleb.

I eased to my feet. While everybody’s attention was on the two chocolate drops, I would just ease myself out of this situation. With my head down, I quietly slipped away. I had taken five, maybe six steps when I felt a strong, warm hand come around my waist and palm my flat, bare stomach.

Oh! I closed my eyes as a feeling I had never felt before shot through me. Oh! What was happening? I think I was feeling pleasure; pure, intense pleasure. How could this be? How could I feel pleasure for a man I hated? He pressed his front so close to my back I could feel the outline of his strong body.

“Where you going, Shorty? I’m not finished talking to you,” he

spoke quietly, his lips brushing my ear as his deep voice and warm breath caressed my lobe. I closed my eyes and suppressed a moan that tried to escape my lips. It had to be the drugs. Oh no! That jerk slipped me a Mickey!

"I..." my voice quivered as I spoke. I cleared my throat. "I was just going to get some air, that's all," I told him.

"Good idea. Let's go together." He took my hand and began to pull me across the huge parlor. With panicked eyes, I looked back at Jamie. I would rather deal with him and his buffoonery over this power force any day.

"Boss, what's up?" Jamie yelled after us. Kaleb came to a stop. As he inhaled, his nostrils flared and the muscle ticked in his cheek. He didn't turn around. He just stood there for a few seconds, breathing angrily while staring straight ahead. Right then, two of the big goons that had come in the door with him, stood from where they had been sitting with a girl on their laps. Rasheed, who had been whispering something in one of the chocolate drop's ears, stopped and approached Jamie.

"Man, what the hell you just say?" he growled at Jamie, who now wore a look of terror on his face.

"Nothing. I just wanted to tell the boss to enjoy my treat to him." Kaleb grunted then continued walking. I was doomed. He led me through the crowd and up the sleek stairs that sat in full view of everyone. I let my hair fall to cover my face, so embarrassed. Everyone was looking at us. Some of the women looked as if they wanted to claw my eyes out. I wanted to beg someone to take my place. Please!

Two big men with guns sat in the open space that was at the top of the stairs.

"Boss," they said as we passed. Kaleb didn't speak. He just slightly nodded his head. We walked down a long, dark hallway, passing a few rooms to a pair of wooden double doors at the end of it. He opened one and pulled me through it.

And yes, he was pulling me because I was dragging my feet.

“Umm, I should go back to the party,” I told him, trying to pull my hand out of his. I couldn’t even pretend that I was not afraid, and yet the drugs were making me feel something else. I was trying to fight them, but the feeling was getting stronger and stronger.

“Naw, Ma. I ain’t in the mood for all that out there. It’s been a long week, and I just want to chill with you, okay?” I opened my mouth to say, “Not okay,” but then I got my first view of his room and my words just seemed to die away. Just like the rest of his place, his bedroom was humongous and very masculine. On his big bed was a very plush looking black comforter with matching pillows. All the furniture was made of mahogany wood.

His room smelled like him; a mix of his spicy cologne and soap, and maybe even laundry detergent. He walked to a pair of glass double doors that were across the room and opened them to a beautiful modest size balcony.

“Wow!” I said as I crossed the floor with feet that seemed to have a mind of their own. He had the most amazing view of the lake.

“Best place to get some air.” He spoke so close to my ear, I jumped. I didn’t hear him come up behind me. I walked away from him to the rail and looked out across the dark lake. The gentle breeze felt so good blowing against my warm skin. I held my head back and let the wind blow my locs around my body and face. It felt amazing. I closed my eyes and moaned as the wind caressed my skin that seemed to be inflamed ever since Kaleb first looked at me.

Giving in to the caress of the wind was all the drug needed to take over. I could no longer fight it. I wanted to feel good. I wanted to dance.

And as if on cue, the DJ began to play something slow and sensual. I lost track of reality. In my mind, I was dancing in the night, in the streets of Paris or across the sands of Arabia. I was slightly aware of Kaleb watching me. He felt like a king and I his harem girl, dancing for his pleasure.

He sat on the edge of his bed and watched me move through lowered lids. I can tell he liked what he saw because of the hungry

look on his face. Funny, his look didn't repulse me like it should. No, quite the opposite. It made me feel good, sexy, and empowered.

I went up on my toes and came down in a simple balance, which is a rocking sequence of three steps.

"You're a ballerina," he stated quietly as if he was speaking to himself. I stopped dancing and looked at him.

"You don't know me," I laughed. "I'm the phantom of the opera." One of his eyebrows lifted.

"The opera?" he asked, his deep voice washing over my body, causing everything within me to want something I had never wanted before. Well, at least not like *this*.

"And where is this opera?" I opened my arms wide.

"Here." His gaze lowered to my stomach and probably the underside of my breasts that I was revealing with my raised arms. He licked his lips, watching me like a wolf watched a small deer. I snatched my arms down and laughed.

"You look hungry," I told him. Slowly he nodded.

"I am, baby. I want to taste you so bad it's taking everything within me to keep my hands to myself right now." I closed my eyes as pure uncut pleasure shot through me at his words.

"How old are you?" he asked. I opened my eyes and looked at him.

"Eighteen."

"Damn, you're young," he said looking miserable. I giggled.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-nine. I'll be thirty in a few months." I shrugged my bare shoulder.

"Why does my age upset you?"

He shook his head. "I don't mess with young women. They get attached because I make them feel something they have never felt before. Next thing you know, they're in love and don't know how to go home when it's time."

I lifted one side of my mouth in a grin. "Baby, you ain't never got to worry about me falling in love with you. And as far as going home,

that sounds like a great idea. I'll just let myself out." I turned to head for the door. Damn, that was easy.

I had only gone a few steps before I found myself lifted off my feet and into a pair of strong arms. My startled breath whooshed out my body. I looked at him in shock. He smiled at me.

"I see you a sassy young lady. What's your name?" he asked, carrying me back to his bed. I was so befuddled by suddenly being in his arms that I opened my mouth and uttered the truth.

"Monica!" I closed my eyes as soon as my name escaped my lips. Damn it!

"Well, Monica, if I don't have to worry about you falling in love, then I want a taste."

When we got to the bed, he tossed me in it. I giggled, trying to fight my way out of the plush blanket. Before I could, he was on the bed. He wedged his big body between my legs and was holding himself up over me with one hand. His other hand was coming towards my face. I laid there paralyzed. I know I should be stopping him. My mind said I should. But my body... my body wanted to know how it felt to be touched by a man.

And I ain't gon' lie. The fact that this powerful man was looking at me like that... like I was something he craved... He lifted a finger to my lips and gently rubbed across my bottom lip.

"So soft," he whispered. "Can I taste you?"

Say, No! Say, No!

I slowly nodded. *What am I doing?* I thought, as he slowly lowered his head. When his lips first touched mine, it felt like electricity. I inhaled. He lifted his head, looking down at me. I touched my lips with fingers that shook as I stared up into his searching eyes. He had felt it too. His eyes fell on my lips and he lowered his head again, but this time when he took my mouth, he ravished.

Oh! Goodness! He was so hungry, I—

I clutched his shirt in my fist, trying to hold on for dear life.

"You taste so good... so sweet," he said low in my ear before his mouth was on my neck.

His big palm lay flat against my belly, feeling each quiver he caused to go off there. Slowly his hand lifted, and with it, my shirt. He broke his lips away from mine and looked down at my flesh he had just exposed. He moaned.

“Beautiful, baby,” he said, before he slowly lowered his head—

Okay, yeah. So, I’m going to do a little editing at this point. But for the sake of my story, I’m going to fill you in on a little more detail. At one point, at that very moment he made me a woman, a look of utter surprise crossed his face when I screamed out in pain.

“You’re a virgin?” he whispered. His surprise turned into confusion. His confusion turned into a look of utter... possession?

“You’re a virgin,” he whispered in my ear as he slowed down, and then very gently continued to awaken my body in a way that will forever ruin me to the touch of any other man.

Now, I want to say that after we finished I felt ashamed and got my clothes and left. But then I would be lying. We made love two more times before we both passed out in an exhausted sleep.

When I woke up, I was in bed alone. I sat up and looked around the dark room confused.

Where was I? For a moment, I was completely lost. And then the last few hours came back to me. And yes, for the fourth time that night, I felt as if I was going to be ill. I scrambled out of bed.

“What have I done?” I whispered as I quickly put my clothes back on. Oh, man! This was not good. This was not good! I stopped when I looked down at the condom wrapper on the floor.

One wrapper!

My hand flew to my mouth. Oh, goodness! One wrapper!

The last two times we made love had been unprotected.

No! No!

Okay. Get it together, Mon. You need to get out of here! Yes, that’s what I needed to do. I had to get out of here. Now was not the time to think of anything else outside of getting revenge for Man-Man and getting on with my life. I had to see this through. I had already botched it

something terrible. And I had to move quickly before that bastard came back.

I eased the bedroom door open, listening. It was quiet. It sounded as if the party had died down.

Okay, you can do this!

I took a deep breath, then walked out of the door and down the long hallway. I didn't even look at the men that were still in the opening before the stairs. I just quickly made my way down them. There were only a few stragglers still here. Kaleb stood with his back to me out in the pool area talking to a few guys. What a bastard. He was probably telling them he was ready for me to be out of his bed. I almost laughed out loud. You don't have to worry, Mister. After today, you ain't gon' never see me again.

I made my way back to the parlor. I could see that my bag was still under the chair I sat in earlier. Quickly, I pulled it out and carried it across the room to a closet that I had scouted out and figured would be the perfect place for the cops to find dope.

With hands that shook, I took out the drugs and stashed them on the top shelf. And then without looking back, I slipped out the front door.

An hour later, I stood outside with the small crowd that was forming and watched as the police came out with a handcuffed Kaleb as well as a few other people. Unfortunately, not Rasheed. But I was fine with that. Like Bob Marley said, "I shot the sheriff. I don't need to shoot the deputy." I pulled out one of Man-Man's Cuban cigars, his prized possession, that he had more than likely stolen. And as the police car that carried Kaleb rolled past me I lit it, and put it to my lips. When his angry eyes connected with mine, I winked at him with a smirk on my face.

Got you, bastard!



Chapter 1

I WANT MORE

MONICA

2 Years Later...

Life has a way of turning sharply and going in a different direction than where you were steering it. And no matter how hard you slam on the brakes and try to turn the wheel back the other way, your life continues down a road in which you never wanted it to go. I could say that I'm bitter. I could say that I'm kicking myself over and over for the mistakes I've made. But the truth is, I don't have time to dwell on the past, because my present day is very demanding and very needy. And it's my responsibility to feed her.

"Bye, baby. You be good for Nana," I said, taking my two-year-old daughter, Eve into my arms and hugging her tightly.

"I come too," she said, beginning to get herself worked up. I exhaled, putting her down on her feet. I hated working so much! I was a horrible mother! My baby missed me so much. It broke my heart each day I had to pry her little arms from around my legs.

"Not this time, baby. Mama got to go to work. When I come home I will bring you a freeze-pop back." She pressed herself up against my legs. She wasn't having it.

"Nooooo!" she started to whine in her little toddler voice. I held

back tears. I was under so much pressure I thought that throwing a tantrum sounded good right about now.

“Baby, please! Mama going to bring you the red one like you like,” I told her, my voice quivering slightly. How had I come to this? I had so many dreams. I wanted to do so many things. I never imagined I would be flipping burgers for a living, and when I wasn’t doing that, I was frying chicken down at Chucky’s Chicken Shack. I worked at The Burger Joint every day from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. Then, I came home to have lunch with my baby and Nana before I caught the bus to work at Chucky’s from 6:00 PM to midnight. This was my daily routine except on Wednesdays. That’s when I get a break and could do what I love. I picked up teaching Nana’s dance class down at the center since she hasn’t been feeling up to leaving the house these days.

Oh God! What did I do to deserve this?

“Pease, Mama! Net me go wit you.” I squeezed my eyes shut.

You can’t give up! You can’t give up!

Your Nana and your baby girl are depending on you.

“Come on now, Eve,” Nana said while walking slowly through the kitchen door. It pained me to see her like this. All those years of dancing had taken a toll on her body. She once walked with the grace of a swan. For as long as I can remember, she instilled in me to glide instead of walk. Now she walked hunchbacked with a cane—arthritis being her constant tormenter.

Thank God for Stormy. She had gotten one of her friends SaafiYah to make a liniment for Nana and it worked like magic. But my Nana was too proud to keep asking for refills. She hated bugging Stormy more than anything because she had already done so much for us and the center. If not for her, both the boarding house and the center would have been long gone by now. Nana hated feeling like a burden. And so did I, which is why I worked the way I did. I had to make sure our bills were paid and that we could afford the little food we had.

“Mama!” Eve yelled out as Nana pulled her away from my leg.

“Go on, child. This baby will be okay. I’ll put one of her movies on...works every time.” I kissed my grandmother on her cheek.

“Thank you, Nana. I’ll bring home some burgers for lunch, and I’ll stop by the store to get some things to make chicken salad for dinner.” She nodded while holding back Eve, who was now in full tantrum mode.

“Mama love you, baby,” I said to my screaming little girl. I had to hurry and leave the house. Oh boy! That tore me up every day. As I stood at the bus stop waiting on the 14, I couldn’t help but reflect over my life and how drastically it had changed over the last couple of years; how drastically it had changed after that night.

I had been on top of the world back then. I had brought down the man responsible for my brother’s death. I had been accepted into Julliard. My grandmother had been so proud of me, and that was all that had mattered. My brother had brought her so much grief. I needed to do the opposite and reverse the damage her constant worrying about him had done to her. And for a moment I had, by being a straight-A-student and graduating as valedictorian of my class.

Oh yes! I had been on top of the world. But it crumbled right under my feet when my actions that night caught up with me. I walked across the stage three months pregnant. And of course, when I called my counselor at Julliard and explained the situation to her, in hopes that they would hold my scholarship, she pretty much told me, “Tough break,” and that they would be giving the scholarship to someone else. I begged her with everything I had, ensuring her that I could be a mom and a student at the same time. I’ll never forget what she told me.

“Monica, I’m really sorry. It’s just that there are so many young talented people waiting to fill that spot. And we have found that single parents cannot set aside the time needed to pass your courses. I am so sorry. You were so talented. It really is a waste.” So careless she was in flushing my dreams, my goals, and my aspirations down the toilet.

I struggled with my feelings toward the child I carried in my womb during pregnancy. This was my enemy's child. I debated whether or not to get an abortion. But then I thought of my mom and how hard she worked to take care of me and my brother. She could have aborted us. Like me, she had dreams of following in my grandmother's footsteps. Instead, she got pregnant with my brother, then me shortly afterward, and ended up dancing on a pole because she chose our lives over her dreams.

It wasn't this innocent baby's fault that I made some very dumb decisions. Why should she have to pay with her life? So, I chose to have my enemy's child, and it was the best thing I have ever done. I can't imagine my life without Eve. She's the smartest, prettiest baby in the world. And she wants to dance just like her mama. For a two-year-old, she was pretty good at it. I always took her to class with me on Wednesdays.

I didn't make it, but I was determined to make sure she does. If it's the last thing I do, I was going to see to it that she made it all the way to the top.

After leaving The Burger Joint, I took the bus to the grocery store and grabbed a few items—mainly salad. I felt horrible because money was so tight we ate a lot of burgers and fried chicken. But I made sure to serve veggies with every meal. When I got home, I made a chicken salad and put it in the fridge for their dinner, and a garden salad to go with our burgers. After putting Eve in her high chair, I plopped down in the chair across from hers and rested my head against my palm.

"You tired, baby?" Nana asked. I could hear the strain in her voice. She was so sick. I was so worried about her. I sat up straight in my chair.

"Heck naw! These little jobs ain't nothing," I lied.

Like Stormy was so fond of saying, I was as tired as a Hebrew slave—the ones that were in ancient Egypt and those that were here in America today. But my granny didn't need to know that.

“You a good girl, baby...taking care of your old grandma like you do.” She picked at her salad. I frowned at her.

“You not hungry?” I asked. She shook her head.

“I ain’t had much of an appetite as of late.”

“That’s it, Nana. I’m taking you to the County on Wednesday.” I put down my fork and handed Eve her sippy cup.

“Pss! Child, I ain’t going down to that county hospital to wait eighty years for some white man to pick and poke at me. I’m just fine.”

“Yeah, but you’re not just fine. At least let Stormy’s friend, SaafiYah come and see you.” She waved her hand.

“Mon, I’m old. *This* is what old age looks like. We don’t need to bother Stormy and her family no mo’.” She stirred some honey into her tea. “Shew, that man of hers already coming out of his pocket to feed the kids now that the damn government done got rid of our lunch program.” She began to cough, reaching for her napkin.

“You have any idea how much that cost?” she continued when she could speak again.

“If not for Stormy and Solomon, this house that my husband built for me with his bare hands would be gone. They paid the taxes on this place for the next ten years. I can’t keep asking those folks for stuff.” She began coughing again because she was getting herself worked up.

“Okay, Nana—Just calm down. We don’t have to ask them for no mo’ money. I make enough to handle things around here.” I lied again. My Nana’s precious home was deteriorating around us. Everything was wrong with it. It needed a new roof, pipes, and floors. I didn’t even know where to begin. I had gotten a book on plumbing from the library and was trying to do some of the work myself. I wasn’t making much progress though.

Leaving out for my second job was always easier because I would give Eve a bag of animal crackers when it was time. That, plus Sesame Street made for a clean getaway, free of tantrums. I exhaled when I got off the bus in front of Chucky’s. Chucky paid in cash. The

pay wasn't bad either. It was two-hundred and fifty dollars a week, which was awesome. However, Chucky was an old pimp or something and thought he was God's gift to women.

"Monica, bring yo' fine a\$\$ in here and make me some money!" he said as soon as I came into the kitchen.

Dang! It was going to be a long night.

I locked the doors as soon as twelve o'clock hit. Twenty minutes later, I was at the bus stop. I hated being out this late. This was such a bad neighborhood. And the only folks out this hour were either high, drunk or both. I tightened my grip on my book bag straps. None of these bastards better try to mess with me tonight, because my feet hurt bad and I wasn't in the mood. They were going to get cussed out for real.

A black Cadillac truck with darkly tinted windows pulled up in front of me, cutting off my view from the rest of the street. Oh! I really wasn't in the mood for this. I tossed my long locs over my shoulder and craned my neck to see if the bus was coming. I'm telling you, this fool better be ready to take, "No," for an answer. No, I didn't *have* a man. And no, I didn't *need* a man. And *hell* no, I wasn't looking for a friend. The back door opened and a giant of a man stepped out.

I was so caught up in trying to comprehend just how big he was that I didn't notice the two men quickly approaching me from behind. By the time I saw them it was too late. They moved so fast I could barely catch my breath. I opened my mouth to scream, but a rag was quickly stuffed in it before they roughly wrapped duct tape around my mouth and head, it pulled viciously at my locs. I went to swing, but the big guy caught my hand and turned me so that both were behind my back then quickly secured a plastic tie around them, pulling it tight. I screamed into the rag from the pain, but it did no good. My mouth was tied so tightly that only a muffled scream came out. In front of me stood the two men that snuck up on me. I saw now that they had been in separate vehicles. I was trying to see if I recognized them from around the hood. If you saw one thug, you'd seen them all. I kicked out at the one that

wore his hat cocked to the right. My gym shoe caught him right in the shin.

“Bi***!” He hissed before he punched me in my mouth. I flinched from the pain while trying to fight unconsciousness.

“What the hell you doing?” the big guy said, shoving the man away from me.

“This bi*** kicked me!” he snapped, shoving the big guy’s hand off him.

“Let’s go. We don’t have time for this!” another man yelled from the front seat of the Cadillac truck.

Then everything went black as one of them put a dark sack over my head. The breath was slammed out of me when someone put their shoulder in my stomach before lifting me. I went wild, trying to wiggle out their grasp. But seconds later, I was being put into what I was sure was a trunk. I brought my legs up to try to keep the trunk from closing. Someone roughly grabbed my legs, bringing them together, before tying my ankles together with another plastic tie. Then they threw my legs down and slammed the trunk.

Oh! My! God! I was being kidnapped! My heart pounded so hard in my chest—I was having a hard time breathing. I had never been so afraid in my life. I was getting ready to die or worse! I was getting ready to be raped or sold into slavery! Nana was always watching the news. She was just saying yesterday that there had been an increase in black women and girls being kidnapped and sold as sex slaves. Oh, no! Oh, no! I was getting ready to be sold as a sex slave! And then a thought crossed my mind that made me freeze in terror.

Organ harvesting!

Nana said that they were kidnapping black people for their organs as well. Tears came to my eyes. I was screaming so much my throat got sore. I could feel my wrists being scrapped raw from where I pulled against the plastic tie trying to break it. I didn’t care about the pain. I just wanted to be free. I thought about Eve and Nana—They needed me! I could not die! Who would take care of them if I died?

We drove for about thirty to forty-five minutes before the car

came to a stop. I was so scared I was shaking. I still couldn't breathe and my busted lip felt swollen and sore. The trunk opened, and I was roughly lifted out of it and stood upon my feet. My teeth began to chatter. Dear Yah, help me! I prayed to Stormy's God because she said that he had saved her life. So maybe he could save mine right now!

The bag was yanked off my head. I blinked, trying to take in my surroundings. Judging by the tools and smells of oil and gasoline, I was in a warehouse or a garage. It was full of classic cars. I continued scanning the place while trying to catch my breath until my eyes landed on the face that haunted my dreams. I sharply inhaled, feeling as if the wind had been completely knocked out of me.

Dear Yah! It was Kaleb!

He smiled wickedly at me from where he stood surrounded by his men. The giant that had stepped out of the Cadillac was next to him. Amazingly, although the man was clearly bigger than him, his girth was not enough to overshadow Kaleb's might. Just like the first time I saw him, power seemed to radiate from him. He wore it well. There was no question who was king here. Dressed in all black again, he sported jeans and a t-shirt that lay on his muscled chest just right; showing that he was very well built underneath his clothes. And like the first time I saw him, he wore a pair of black boots on his feet. Unlike the first time, he now sported a full beard on his handsome face.

So many questions raced through my mind at this moment.

When had he gotten out?

How had he gotten out?

The last I heard, he had been facing twenty years for tax evasion or something like that. It was a little unnerving that none of the drug charges stuck. Still, I was thrilled to learn that they had found something to get him on... and for twenty years. That made it all worth it for me. Of course, I heard that through the grapevine. Not that I didn't do all I could to get better information. It's just that some were hard to come by, even when calling and pretending to be an attorney interested in the case.

His eyes slowly raked down my body. He lifted his hand and someone yanked the tape from behind my head. I closed my eyes, flinching as the tape was snatched off my sore mouth, my wound being reopened in the process. The man from the front seat came around and took the cloth out of my mouth. I sucked in my bottom lip to feel how much damage had been done to it. Oh! Yeah, it was definitely busted. I looked at the punk who hit me, and for a moment, anger took over my fear. However, the fear quickly rushed back in when Kaleb began to move towards me. His eyes narrowed on my lips.

He lifted my face with his finger, looking at my busted lip.

“Who hit you?” he asked quietly. His deep voice was so deadly. I was so scared with him being so close to me... and touching me, that for the life of me I could not speak. He turned around and looked at his men.

“Who hit her?” His deep voice filled the huge garage. The thug that hit me stepped up.

“I-I did, K,” his voice shook a little. Kaleb looked at him for a minute before he held his head back and laughed. It was something about that laugh that was bone chilling. And I wasn’t the only one who thought so either, because all his men, except for the giant, began to fidget—especially the guy who hit me.

“K, she kicked me!” The man said trying to explain his actions.

“Aww... She kicked you?” Kaleb cooed as if he was talking to a small child. He slowly walked towards the now very nervous man, who began to frantically look around at the other men for help.

“Kaleb. Man, I’m sor...” he began. But before he could finish, Kaleb moved quickly, grabbing two mammoth-sized wrenches from a nearby table. What he did with them next caused me to open my mouth with a scream frozen in my throat as I stared in horror. He brought one wrench up with a mighty blow, catching the man with such force underneath his chin he flew up in the air, before he came down with the other wrench on top of his head, causing his dead body to crash to the floor with his head split open from the impact.

Kaleb threw both wrenches down on the lifeless body, hard.

“Kick *that*, punk!” he said to the body, shaking his head.

And it was right then that I realized that I was dealing with a cold-blooded killer. When he looked back at me, that scream escaped. I turned and tried to run, remembering too late that my ankles were tied. Another scream escaped my throat as I tipped over, getting ready to hit the floor. Because my hands were still tied behind my back, I couldn’t bring them out to try and stop my fall.

The giant reached out and grabbed my arm, preventing my fall, but leaving me slightly suspended in the air from where I still tipped forward.

“Where you going, baby? I was just getting ready to invite you to dinner,” Kaleb said, coming to stand in front of me. He wrapped one arm around my waist and snatched me up against him. The breath slammed out of me from the impact of our bodies suddenly coming in contact.

“Surely you won’t be so rude as to leave without first having dinner or even saying goodbye.” The anger that came from his eyes was real. Oh, my goodness! What had I done, getting entangled with this maniac? I licked my dry lips and winced when my tongue came across my wound. His eyes followed before he slowly lifted me up his big body, bringing my mouth close enough for him to gently kiss my wound. A quiver shot through my body...I sucked in my breath, taken off guard by my body’s response to his soft caress.

“I’m sorry about that,” he whispered before he gently kissed it one more time. “A man that hit a woman ain’t sh**...” I could tell that he meant what he said.

“Even a treacherous woman—that will give a man her virginity, to set him up, and get him thrown into prison,” he continued just as quietly, still holding me close. I opened my mouth to say something to defend myself. I thought about lying and acting as if I had no idea what he was talking about, but then I remembered what I had just witnessed. He had brutally killed a man, yet as easily as one would put on a pair of shoes.

“I...” I began, but I was so scared I couldn’t think of what to follow that with. I’m sorry, perhaps?

“You... what?” he asked as his eyes raked over my face. I felt as if he could see into my soul.

“Come on... beautiful little liar. Surely you can bring something through those treacherous lips of yours.” I was shaking so bad I think my teeth were chattering.

“Have dinner with me.” He spoke softly, his hungry gaze still on my mouth.

“I don’t want to,” I managed to get out barely over a whisper. His gaze left my mouth and slowly traveled up my face to my eyes before going to my hair, my nose, and my neck. The way he looked at me made me remember that night... how he had touched my body... how he had kissed my body. It made me remember how he had taken me over and over—awaking my body to the pleasure of a man’s touch without mercy. It made me remember how I had begged him to let me rest because I felt as if I would die if he caused my body to shatter one more time. Only for him to show me that...no...I would not die.

“I insist,” he spoke suddenly before letting my body slide down his until my feet were once again planted on the floor. Then he squatted down right in front of me. My breath froze in my throat because his face was so close to my center. I closed my eyes, too afraid to look down to see what he was doing. Was he going to rape me? Oh, my goodness! Was he going to rape me in front of all his men?

But seconds later, I felt the tie give way around my ankle. I exhaled. He stood looking down at me as he used the knife he had used on the tie around my ankles to cut the one around my wrists. The way he watched me as he did it let me know he was aware of my thoughts.

There was activity going on around us, but I couldn’t look away from his gaze. I rubbed my sore wrists. He took a few steps back and I blinked twice, seeming to come from under whatever power his gaze had just had over me. I looked around and saw several wait staff setting up a table for two. His men were gone. I frowned turning

where I stood. They were all gone and had taken the body of the guy who had hit me with them. There was no evidence that he had ever been there... not one drop of blood.

What the world?!

My gaze flew back to Kaleb who stood there smiling at me as if he could hear my thoughts. Oh, man! I had to get away from him. He held too much power over me.

I had convinced myself that the only reason that night had happened the way that it did was because I had been drugged, and if it were not for the drugs, I would have never given myself to him. But now I know that I had lied to myself. When he held me in his arms, and his gaze...he had the power to make everything else just disappear.

"Please, sit," he said holding out one of the chairs at the beautiful table for me. I stood there wondering what I should do. I looked around. The big garage was now empty. It was just me and him. Where had the wait staff gone? I bit my lip and flinched from the pain. Goodness! I forget it was damaged, but I was so nervous I didn't know what to do.

"Come on, sweetheart. Have a seat." He spoke softly, but there was something in his voice that said his patience was wearing thin. I inhaled and slowly walked to the chair. After I sat, he gave my chair a little push up to the table. Then he reached past me, taking the metal dome off my plate before he turned and handed it to a waiter that seemed to just appear out of nowhere. Then he walked around and took his seat in the chair across from mine. The table wasn't that big. So when he sat, I felt his long legs open to the side of both of mine.

"I don't know about you, but I'm starving." He removed the dome from his dinner and handed it to the server. Another server came to the table with a bottle of wine and poured us both a glass. Another came and placed a glass of brown liquor on the table by Kaleb's wine.

"Would you like something else besides the wine? I'm a cognac man myself," he said as he picked up his fork and knife and began to

cut into his steak. The server stood waiting for my answer. I shook my head.

“No, thank you.” My voice was hoarse from all the screaming I had done tonight. The server nodded and disappeared as quietly as he came. I looked across the table at Kaleb with my hands in my lap.

“Aren’t you going to eat?” he asked, putting a piece of steak in his mouth with his fork. I shook my head.

“I’m not hungry.”

“Did you eat some chicken?” he asked with a grin on his face, his gaze falling to my Chucky’s Chicken Shack shirt. Wow, look at that. The killer had jokes.

And let me tell you, had I not just witnessed him kill a man effortlessly with two big King Kong sized wrenches, I would have given him a piece of my mind for teasing me about my job. I nodded instead.

“Yeah, I ate chicken.” I saw no need to pretend that I was happy to be here. He paused in eating to look at me with those dark eyes of his. I tried not to squirm underneath his gaze. When he looked at me like that, it made me feel aware... that yes, I was sitting here in my Chucky’s Chicken Shack uniform and that it had been a while since I touched up my locs, and I probably looked as haggard as I felt.

“You sure?” he asked. “These are Mama Rita’s steaks.” Oh, man! For the first time, I looked down at my plate. Mama Rita’s? Everybody in the hood knew about Mama Rita’s steaks. It’s just that you had to be hood rich to buy one. Right then, my stomach let out a crazy growl.

Well damn, thanks, stomach.

“I guess I could have a little taste,” I told him picking up my knife and fork. You see, I had a Mama Rita’s steak once. Stormy had treated me to lunch at Mama Rita’s restaurant, and I promise, it was the best thing I ever tasted in my life. The knife slid smoothly through the meat. I cut a small piece and using my fork, put it between my lips, careful not to touch the sore one.

Oh! It just melted in my mouth.

“Mmm!” I don’t know if I moaned out loud or to myself, but dang! This steak was fire! You can taste the char-broiled, buttered, garlicky goodness in every bite. I cut another piece. I don’t know the last time I ate something so tasty. He joked about me eating chicken, but it was the truth. I ate fried chicken every day.

I cut another piece and lifted the steak to my mouth. Right then, I looked across the table and froze when I saw him staring back at me. The look on his face was all kinds of inappropriateness.

“What?” I asked, before putting the steak in my mouth.

“I see you found your appetite.” I shrugged, cutting another piece of steak. Who was I trying to impress? Who knows when I’ll get another Mama Rita’s steak?

“Only a fool will let a Mama Rita’s steak go to waste,” I told him around a mouth full of steak. He nodded.

“You ain’t lying. For two years, I sat in prison counting the days to my release, for two things: one of which was a Mama Rita’s steak.” Something in his voice made me lose my appetite. Here it is. We have come to the turning point of our meeting. I lay my knife and fork down on the table before picking up my napkin and gently wiping my mouth. Carefully, I placed it on the table and after taking a deep breath, I looked over at him. He too had stopped eating, and his angry gaze washed over me like an inferno.

“And the other?” I asked. He grinned slightly, and it gave me chills.

“Well, you see, the other thing I wanted more than I wanted this here steak... the other thing I dreamed about every night.” He paused for just a moment before he continued. “I couldn’t wait until I was free...so that I can get my hands on you.” Pure rage came from his eyes at that moment, I did what came natural, which was to run. Quickly I stood. But just as quickly, he grabbed my wrist, pulling me back down and halfway across the table so that our lips were almost touching. My wine and water glasses crashed to the floor. I winced from where he was grabbing my sore wrist.

He turned to look at my wrist and for the first time noticed they

were red from where the tie had rubbed them raw. Slowly, he brought my wrist to his mouth and softly kissed where it hurt. I almost moaned. Every time his lips touched me my body had a startling response. Then he turned and looked back into my eyes, his angry gaze reminding me that he was a killer.

“You took two years from my life. Why?” he growled through clenched teeth. I flinched from the force of his anger.

“What did I do to you? Who sent you after me?” The muscled ticked furiously in his cheek. Tears came to my eyes. I was so taken back by his anger the only thing I could do was cry.

“Answer me, damn it!” he yelled at me.

“You killed my brother!” I yelled at the top of my lungs. A look of shock crossed his face. He loosened his grip on my wrist and I snatched away from him, falling back into my chair. He sat back in his chair frowning at me.

“Who is your brother?”

“Man-Man,” I told him rubbing my wrist.

“Man-Man?” He looked confused. Right then, pure hatred washed over me. This bastard!

This bastard didn't even have the decency to remember my brother! I stood angrily.

“Sit down, Monica!” he said heatedly.

“No! I'm leaving. We're done here.” He moved then, bringing his fist down so hard on the table that almost everything on it crashed to the ground.

“Sit down!” he roared.

I ain't gon' lie. He just scared the hell out of me. I sat, looking up at him with wide eyes.

“We are not done until I say we are.” Each word he spoke was accompanied by a finger jab on the already weakened table.

“You are responsible for me losing two years of my life rotting in jail. The only reason you ain't dead now is because I want something from you in exchange for the time that I lost.” I swallowed, my throat suddenly going dry.

“What do you want?” My question was barely over a whisper. He sat back in his chair, resting his elbows on its arms while crossing his hands in front of his mouth. He looked off into the distance and chuckled.

“For so long I fought a battle in my head debating if you were even real.” His deep penetrating gaze came back to me. “You see, your lips had been the sweetest I had ever tasted. What are the odds of sipping such nectar right before my world begins to crash in around me?” His finger slowly rubbed across his bottom lip as he spoke.

“A lot of things have changed in my life over the last two years, but one thing has not. In fact, it has only grown with each passing day.”

I swallowed again, “What’s that?” I asked but was terrified of the answer. He moved suddenly, sitting up in his chair and coming to the edge of it, bringing him closer. He leaned on the table.

“My hunger for that nectar.” He grinned so wickedly my breath got caught somewhere between my throat and my lips. His eyes lowered to them.

“I...want...more...” He spaced those three words, emphasizing each syllable.

“You took two years of my life. In exchange, I want two years of yours. You will be at my beck and call. I work hard and I need someone to look after my basic needs.”

“Basic needs?”

That devious grin grew on his face. “You know, a good meal, a nice warm body in my nice warm bed, and full access to that sweet nectar.” I frowned at him.

“It sounds to me like you need to find yourself a wife.” I intentionally used the “W” word. Madame Queen said that was the quickest way to get a man to run for the door. Yet that grin was still there on his face. It had not faltered.

“You know what? You’re right. That’s exactly what you’ll be for the next two years.” My mouth dropped open. Umm, that was not the way he was supposed to respond.

“Man, you tripping!” I told him. “I got responsibilities. I got bills. I can’t just drop everything and cater to you!” I didn’t care if I was talking recklessly. At this point, I didn’t care if he picked up one of those giant wrenches and split my head open the way he had done that poor bastard earlier.

“Yes, you can. And you will. You’re done at the Chicken Joint and the Burger Shack, at least for the next two years. However, if you do a good job and be a good girl for daddy, I’ll leave you straight so you won’t have to go back to work again if you don’t choose to.”

I narrowed my eyes at him. “It’s the Chicken Shack and Burger Joint!” I corrected him, not caring if I sounded petty. He chuckled.

“It doesn’t matter.”

This Mutha Foster! How damn dare he talk to me like I’m some whore! First, he kills my brother...then acts like he doesn’t remember. He seduces me and gets me pregnant—destroying all my dreams of dancing on Broadway. He gets his punk self out of jail eighteen years early. He kidnaps me and then turns around and demands I be his paid whore for the next two years.

“And if I say no?” I asked. He chuckled again.

“Oh, that’s simple. I destroy you and all those you hold dear.” I nodded. Yep, I pretty much knew he was going to say something like that.

“Okay. Well, what choice do I have?” I told him. But you see, I had already started planning. No, I couldn’t beat him strength-wise. The man was a brute. And no, I didn’t have an army to go to war with him. I had something far deadlier. You see if nothing else I am astute. And astute people always find a way to fight back.

He narrowed his eyes at me.

“Do you know why I approached you that night at the party?” he asked. His question caused me to pause. It is something I have been wondering about for two years. For the life of me, I couldn’t figure it out. I by no means was the star of the party. In fact, I hid so deep in the corner I was surprised he had seen me at all. I shook my head.

“I saw you at the park, and although you put on a fine show, that

isn't what I noticed about you." He leaned close again. His deep gaze doing that thing it did, making me feel as if he could see... me.

"I saw your fear. I saw that you were uncomfortable dressed the way you were. I could smell your innocence. I knew that you were unlike any other girl there, and I had to see for myself. I had to see if you were as innocently sweet as you looked." He sat back in his chair.

"I see your brain working, Mon. You have got it in your mind that you're going to fight me." He smiled. "I welcome the challenge, sweetheart." He stood and crossed the space between us. Bending down, he wrapped one arm around my waist, pulling me up out the chair.

"But you should know, I will not be denied what I have come to crave." His eyes fell to my lips and he dipped his head and kissed me gently, being very careful of my hurt lip. I did groan then, I couldn't help it.

"Come on. Let's get you home." Panic shot through me.

Home!

Eve was at home. Oh, my goodness! I couldn't let him find out about Eve! Oh God! Why hadn't I thought about this till now? If he found out about Eve, he would have even more control over me. He looked down at me, reading me like a book. Damn, I needed to be on the lookout for that trait of his. He was good at it.

"Umm, I don't need you to take me home. I can just take the bus." I was trying to sound normal and not let my panic bleed through. He looked at me for a minute before he chuckled.

"Yeah, right," was all he said, still chuckling as he took my hand and began to lead me to the only car there that wasn't a classic. In fact, it wasn't a car at all. It was a Land Rover. He opened the passenger door and I got in. My mind raced, searching for a way out as he walked around the truck and got into the driver's side. My mind raced as we drove. It was racing so much—I didn't realize he had not once asked me where I lived. Yet here we were, pulling up in front of my house.

Now that I thought about it, he knew a lot about me, including where I worked. He killed the engine.

“Can I ask you something?” I said without turning to look at him. I stared straight ahead.

“Yep,” he sat back in his seat.

“How come you know where I live and where I work?” he didn’t say anything. I turned to look at him then, his intense gaze penetrating through the darkness of the truck. He grinned at me in the wicked way he does.

“I know everything about you,” he spoke quietly. I looked at him, schooling my features, being very careful not to give away my hand. He didn’t know everything about me. I knew for a fact he was unaware of Eve. If he had known of her, this night would have gone completely different.

“Hmm,” I reached for the doorknob, but I had one more question before I left. “How did you get out?” I knew my question was borderline rude, but I didn’t care.

“Out of prison, you mean?” I nodded. He smiled.

“I had a damn good lawyer.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Author Edwina Fort is a writer who writes with a passion and purpose. She was born and raised in Chicago, but now resides in the South. Although she is new to many, this author has been writing for many years and has given her unique style of writing away freely at no cost to those who would receive. Her passion for writing came about at an early age and developed into what it is today based on her experience and life lessons. With her stories, she wants to redefine all that we've been taught to believe and shed light on our truths and potential. Writing is her calling and she wants to share that gift with you through the pages of her work. Each book will take you on a memorable journey you will find hard to forget.



