



THE EYES OF DESTINY

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Prologue

The sound of his heartbeat echoed in his ears. It was like a base drum, reverberating throughout his entity. The moment felt surreal yet familiar. Jasiah found himself at the wrong end of a gun—again. The dark barrel instantly sent him into a state of shock, confusion, regret, and pain as the night air kicked up dry leaves around them. But this time, he knew he couldn't remain silent. He couldn't just freeze.

As Jasiah peered into his girlfriend's hazel eyes, brimming with fear and anger, he felt his chest tightening. Fighting against his own fear, he decided to find his voice quickly as he knew it wasn't just his life at stake.

He quickly rationalized that whatever he did or said, his actions wouldn't be enough. He couldn't go back in time, just by ten minutes, and chose to just get in his car and leave instead of savoring in last-minute kisses from his girlfriend. He never had any intentions of taking heed of his mother's warnings about staying out in the city. He was only equipped to hand over one of his most prized possessions.

Stepping away from his Chevy Caprice on the dimly lit street, Jasiah yelled, "Here!" as he threw his car keys at the gunman.

Chapter 1: Strictly Business

Hypnotized by the alluring beauty of her eyes, Jasiah couldn't resist the urge to call out to her.

"Aye, girl!" he shouted from the window of his dark-tinted Bubble Chevy Caprice.

Startled, Destiny looked over her shoulder but realized his catcalling couldn't be aimed at her. Her mind swiveled with the thought of why someone like him would call her. He looked like a drug dealer from his car to his haircut and the herringbone gold chain dangling around his neck. Her intuition sparked, and she knew it would be a bad idea to engage.

Striding down the street, she crossed New Jersey Avenue, her eyes sunk into the cracks of the street, her mind lost in the fog of thoughts – suddenly, she felt a strong grip on her shoulder. She quickly twisted the wrist attached to the hand holding her shoulder. Her self-defense classes were paying off. As she turned back, she came face to face with the man from the car.

"God damn, girl," Jasiah grunted, stunned by her actions.

As her eyes lay on his face, she loosened her grip and backed away.

"Sorry," Destiny mumbled as she averted her eyes towards the bus arriving at a distance.

Jasiah massaged his wrist, needles of pain piercing through it. His pain soothed as he gazed into Destiny's hazel eyes, sparkling under the warmth of sunlight.

Destiny glanced at him. A large diamond earring, sparkling; a chain with an oversized diamond medallion was the cherry on top of his Solbiato shirt and baggy jeans. In one glance, she captured the entirety of Jasiah – to her, he was a carbon copy of the corner boys and her older brothers.

She imagined her boyfriend, Eric, beside this stranger. Eric, barely 5'10", stocky in frame with shoulder-length braids, was drastically different from the tall, muscular figure standing before her. But the thought that someone like Jasiah was interested in her flattered her.

"I'm Jasiah," Jasiah introduced himself with a smile etched on his face.

"Destiny," she replied.

"I can give you a ride if you want," Jasiah offered hastily.

"Thanks, but I'm good," Destiny declined, "Plus, I'm not what you want," she concluded for him as she looked down at her baggy Levi's 501s and an oversized Warner Brothers embroidered T-shirt.

"You gonna try to tell me what I want after I ran across the street to get assaulted by you, and I'm still standing here?" Jasiah laughed. "I always know what I want."

Destiny bit her bottom lip. It was something she did when she was lost in the plane of thoughts. But to Jasiah, it was sexy, blooming the flowers of hope in his heart.

"I have a boyfriend," Destiny informed him as she turned to enter the Metro bus once it pulled up.

"I didn't ask you all that, beautiful," Jasiah responded. Lost in the realms of his own determination, he boarded the bus behind Destiny before he knew it.

"I want your number," Jasiah declared.

Destiny turned back around, surprised to see Jasiah behind her, her hazel eyes widening.

"Token!" the bus driver yelled.

“Boy, you better get off this bus,” Destiny laughed.

“You, pay or exit,” the bus driver blared.

“Pipe down,” Jasiah dismissed the bus driver’s demands as he continued to look at Destiny. “Girl, give me your number.”

“I have a boyfriend,” Destiny repeated.

“Fuck him.”

“Now, is that the kind of girlfriend you want me to be to you?” Destiny asked with her head tilted to the side and her hand on her hip.

Jasiah laughed. Not because it was funny but because he was entertained by her spunk. “I’ll see you around, Destiny,” he concluded before exiting the bus from the rear door.

Jasiah was contemplating how he could pick up his little cousin, Lafayette, from school the next day to avail himself of another chance to see Destiny.

Lafayette had attested to the fact that Destiny was pretty, but she was still in her tomboy phase – which was a turn-off to him. Her style and demeanor pushed one to use their imagination as if her beauty was dependent on it, and Lafayette couldn’t believe his cousin wanted to pursue her.

“When we get to the crib, just figure out how you gonna get me her number,” Jasiah instructed his little cousin, his eyes focused on the road.

“What, Nigga?!” Lafayette could only imagine how many phone calls he would have to make to get her number.

As a last-ditch effort to avoid the task, Lafayette started to explain to Jasiah about Destiny’s family. “Teachers swear her older brothers and cousins ruined so many lives in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s. They were known throughout Dunbar as pushers. You don’t want to get caught up in that.”

“La, stop the bullshit and get the number,” was Jasiah’s response, his gaze piercing through Lafayette.

Eventually, Lafayette figured out a way to get Destiny’s number. Instead of the barriers he had anticipated, he got lucky, as getting her private line number only took three calls.

“See, I knew you were resourceful,” Jasiah commended his cousin as he stared at the number on a post-it while he twirled in his desk chair.

Destiny was seated at her stationary desk chair when the telephone rang. “It’s about time you called,” Destiny beamed into her cordless phone as she left her computer’s keyboard and flopped down on her bed.

“Oh? You been waiting?” The voice on the other line questioned, shocking Destiny. The voice, the accent – it was familiar to her, but she couldn’t immediately place the gentleman’s voice.

“Who is this?” Destiny questioned quickly, realizing her error.

“Jasiah,” he answered plainly. He was nervous and didn’t want to play many games on the phone, unwilling to take the risk of her hanging up on him and, even worse, blocking his number.

“How did you get my number?” Destiny grilled as she figured quickly that this would be a short conversation.

“A little determination will get you anything you want in life,” Jasiah stated, his voice wavering but reflecting confidence.

Quietness took over Destiny as she bit her bottom lip, trying to figure out how not to be rude.

“You still there?” Jasiah whispered amusingly.

“I’m here,” Destiny admitted.

“Evidently, you were waiting for someone else to call,” Jasiah tried to figure out some small talk, though he was drawing a blank on what to talk about.

“Evidently,” Destiny traced her initials on her desk. “Who gave you my number?”

“I’m resourceful,” Jasiah answered.

“I already told you. I’m not what you want,” Destiny sighed. “I’m not that type of girl.”

“Are you really trying to tell me I’m not what you want?” Jasiah questioned.

“I didn’t say that,” Destiny quickly responded but regretted it as uncertainty plagued her mind. “I told you I have a boyfriend.”

“I’m not trying to get to know him. I’m trying to get to know you,” Jasiah affirmed.

Caught by surprise, Destiny blushed and giggled.

“Why would you think I wouldn’t want to get to know you?” he questioned.

“You ever heard of the Peay family?” Destiny deflected.

“Naw,” Jasiah replied, even though his cousin had briefly warned him about her family’s reputation earlier.

Destiny was surprised. Most people in the area knew one of her family members – especially a cousin or uncle since they were scattered around the city.

“Where are you from?” she questioned.

“I’m from uptown.”

“Can’t be,” Destiny shook her head as if he could see her. “Everybody from uptown knows a Peay,” she stated. “What school did you go to?”

“I’m telling the truth. I’m from uptown. I know you know my cousin Lafayette,” Jasiah replied in haste as if he were in the interrogation room with Destiny asking the questions.

“That means nothing,” Destiny retorted. “Are you still in school?” she asked, trying to gauge how old Jasiah was.

“I go to Sidwell Friends,” Jasiah answered.

Destiny laughed, thinking he must be a dropout from Wilson who is trying to perpetrate and impress her.

“What’s so funny?” Jasiah asked, confused by Destiny’s sudden laughter.

“So, your drug dealer-looking ass went to school with Chelsea Clinton?” Destiny blurted out, “You know the president’s daughter?” sarcasm oozing out each word.

"I do," Jasiah answered honestly. "And what about me says that I'm a drug dealer?"

"The chain, the car... *you*," Destiny tapped her fingers on her desk as she became irritated. "I can't play these games with you. I already told you I have a boyfriend."

"Destiny, you're not attracted to me?" A hint of loss and sadness lingered in Jasiah's question.

"Boy, I don't know you."

"Well, get to know me."

"A nigga from Sidwell Friends wants to get to know me," she laughed. "I'm really not what you want."

Jasiah became a little frustrated. "You think I had my cousin track your number down so that I can—"

"Run game on me," Destiny finished his statement. "I know I looked real green when you saw me and all, but I'm not clueless."

"I could tell that by the way you twisted my damn wrist," Jasiah sneered. "Getting to know one another doesn't have to be that difficult, Destiny," he added.

"It doesn't," she agreed. "It's just that... that..." Destiny stuttered as she didn't want to be honest about her insecurities to a person whom she just met.

"Destiny, I just want to get to know you," Jasiah stated plainly and truthfully once again.

Destiny stood up and looked at the small mirror over her desk. *What did he see?* she thought as she ran her fingers over her ponytail, swirling her hair around her fingers.

"Don't think you can sweet talk me out of my drawers," Destiny stated firmly.

A hearty laugh echoed from the other side of the phone.

"Oh, you think it's funny?"

"I'm not worried about your drawers right now. I'm just hoping to say something that will keep you on the phone," Jasiah explained.

"That's gonna be impossible," Destiny responded as she looked at her incomplete paper due the next morning.

"How come?"

"Hamlet," she retorted, and quickly Jasiah understood.

Jasiah took a deep breath. "Listen to many, speak to few," he quoted Polonius, as he had done one in an adaptation of the play in his junior year.

"Now that quote has me a little more convinced that you go to Sidwell Friends... 'cause a regular nigga wouldn't have that memorized," Destiny laughed.

"I'm telling you the truth," Jasiah laughed with her. "I'm no drug dealer. I'm just a kid imitating the rappers I see on TV, not the drug dealers in the street," he admitted.

"Is that so?"

"It's terrible you stereotyped me like that. I'm just a fly-ass nigga," Jasiah self-proclaimed. "But I guess where you're from, I could fit that typecast."

"It is the norm," Destiny admitted.

An awkward silence cultivated on the phone between the two of them. A seed of interest was sowed into Destiny's heart – the desire to know the truth sparked within her to confirm what Jasiah claimed to be.

"My family is legit," Jasiah blurted out.

"Do you have a circular driveway?" Destiny questioned with a keen interest; her tone filled with intrigue.

"I do," Jasiah admitted. "In Potomac, Maryland... it's more like a semicircle. But who cares?" he replied.

A surge of emotions whirled within Destiny as she told him to call her back in an hour. The spirit of curiosity flourished within her, and she was eager to find out how a young man imitating the hip-hop culture, dwelling in Potomac, ended up in the heart of the city that afternoon.

The sun shimmered brightly, illuminating the blank canvas of sky painted in azure; the wind breezed lightly, causing the newly fallen leaves to dance in waves as Destiny exited Dunbar High School. She was dressed professionally in fitted black slacks, a white collared blouse adorned with one of her father's black ties, and a cardigan, ready for her internship interview that she hoped would open doors for her in the future.

Jasiah watched her walk toward his car from the rearview window of his black Bubble Chevy Caprice and thought it was nice to see her in an outfit that complimented her petite frame. He sat inside his car, waiting nervously, wondering at what point he should go out to greet her.

Destiny's mind was captivated by nervousness, enchained in shackles of reasons.

First, there was her new friend, Jasiah, who was parked on the corner waiting for her. Second was Eric, her boyfriend. Though he was home with a stomach bug, she still feared getting into another boy's car. Lastly, her mind was drowning in nervousness because she remembered her parents' teachings; she knew better than to get into a car with a stranger.

Destiny held her breath, second-guessing herself, as she moved closer to the vehicle. She was liberated by the thought of Jasiah last night as she talked to him until the sun imbued the sky with its golden aura. A thread of trust had linked Destiny to Jasiah during their all-nighter. She tried to embrace that trust as she walked toward his car, each step brewing up a storm of doubts and questions in her mind. Manipulated by the strings of doubts, she stopped in stride, marking the beginning of a beeline.

Just as Destiny turned to ditch the ride and find her own way to downtown DC, her hazel eyes fixated on Jasiah's cousin, Lafayette, walking toward her.

"You walking sorta slow for a girl with a job interview downtown," he spoke, his tone sarcastic.

Glaring at him, Destiny quickly blurted, "Tell your cousin...never mind."

She turned her gaze toward the street, hope flickering in her eyes as she thought about whether it would be better to catch two buses or walk to the nearest train station.

"This boy cut his last two classes to be your chauffeur, and I cut mine to wait with him. You better bring your ass on," Lafayette erupted at Destiny's reluctance.

"Nigga, who the fuck you think you talking to?" Destiny replied quickly, her body now fuming with irritation as she continued, "I ain't ask you or your cousin for shit."

Surprise took over Lafayette's face; he hadn't imagined Destiny could be this blunt. Tension grew between them as Jasiah's footsteps oscillated as he approached them.

"Aye, what's the holdup?" Jasiah intervened, breaking the threads of tension.

The grip of doubt grew stronger around Destiny's heart as her eyes lay upon Jasiah, dressed in regular street attire. She instantly felt that she was being bamboozled. Seeing specks of doubt flickering in Destiny's eyes, Jasiah trod closer to her.

"What's wrong?" he asked, affection mingling in his voice.

"I thought you would be in uniform," Destiny admitted, meeting his gaze.

During their phone conversation, he told her he went to Sidwell Friends. Considering it was the most prestigious private school she had heard of, she imagined Jasiah would arrive in a uniform similar to what Will Smith wore in the *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*.

"They did away with uniforms a long time ago," Jasiah replied, unveiling a warm smile. "I can show you my school ID," he suggested, but figured there was something more, "What's the problem?"

Destiny took a deep breath; she couldn't express the thought to his face—she thought he might be a rapist. Manifesting resolve within her heart, unshackling her mind from the prison of presumptions, she whispered. "I just don't know if this is a good idea."

"Come on. I won't bite," Jasiah assured her, his voice soothing away her fears. His wide smile amplified his dimples, making Destiny smile as it embodied an aura of kindness. At that moment, Destiny admitted to herself that Jasiah was indeed handsome. But the weight of her doubts had her feet cemented to the pavement. She couldn't budge.

"I promise...La won't bite either," Jasiah pleaded as he looked back at his cousin, who now stood beside the passenger door in the distance. "Get your scrawny ass in the back!" he yelled as he simultaneously held out his hand to Destiny.

"Nigga..." Lafayette grunted as he moved to the back door.

Taking a deep breath, drowning her doubts in the pool of trust, Destiny took Jasiah's hand and allowed him to lead her to his car against her better judgment. Like a gentleman, he opened the passenger door for her, slightly bowing, inducing a sense of respect in her heart.

"Aye, Destiny, don't think you can keep talking to me like you did earlier either," Lafayette muttered from the backseat once they all were in the car.

"Whatever," Destiny shunned his remarks as she gazed at him through the side mirror while they made their way toward downtown.

Seeing the strings of tension entangling between Lafayette and Destiny, Jasiah intervened.

"You nervous about the interview?" he asked.

"I'm more nervous about being in the car with two boys I barely know," Destiny answered, imbuing honesty in her words.

"You don't have to worry about me," Lafayette interjected from the backseat. "I get mine. I don't have to take nothing by force."

"Excuse my cousin," Jasiah stated.

A blanket of silence cloaked the car until Lafayette asked, "Aye, Destiny, is what they say true?"

Destiny rolled her eyes; she knew what Lafayette was referring to but decided to play dumb to avoid the topic. "What they say about what?" she asked.

"That your brother killed a teacher at Cardoza."

"That was my cousin," Destiny corrected, "And it was a janitor who owed him some money."

"So, is your brother the one that robbed the Safeway at Hechinger Mall?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Destiny dissuaded hastily, even though she did know. Her brother had gotten away with the crime, and his deeds were now a tale for the streets. "But I do have a brother locked up for distro," she acknowledged. "A few cousins in for larceny and other nefarious crimes, if you must know."

"Nefarious? Oh, you two might be made for one another with these damn SAT words," Lafayette stated, impressed but somehow not embarrassed for his own lack of knowledge.

Both Jasiah and Destiny just shook their heads in unison.

"So, what they say is true?" Lafayette continued with his questions, "Your family the mob?"

Sighing at the unending streak of questions, she replied, "I just come from a big family." She looked over at Jasiah as she rubbed her fingers against her forehead.

"I ain't worried about none of that shit," Jasiah responded.

"I bet your stepdad represented somebody in her family," Lafayette continued, oddly interested in uncovering the mysteries of Destiny's family. "You heard of his stepdad? Roy Netaspand Esquire? He represents all the uptown dope boys. Ain't that where your family is from?"

"Your stepdad a criminal defense attorney?" Destiny looked over at Jasiah, her eyes now sparkling with the specks of interest as she ignored Lafayette's nagging comments.

Jasiah simply nodded in reply.

"So, is this a conflict of interest?" Lafayette laughed, mockery dripping from his tone.

"I never heard of him," Destiny stated as she turned her attention toward the window. She stared at the worksites with cranes they passed as Jasiah drove deeper into the downtown area. Destiny could see change coming to her city and secretly hoped she wouldn't be around long enough to see it.

"Then how do you know he's a criminal defense attorney?"

"What other type of lawyer would represent someone in my family, considering you assume they are all criminals?" Destiny retorted frustratedly. "Ain't like you talking about tax fraud offenses."

"Like I said, I'm not worried about none of that," Jasiah interjected as he pulled up in front of a tall building of glass. "Every family has its own problems. Don't mind, La, he's just curious."

Jasiah's gaze landed on Destiny again, swimming through her hair, noticing how long her hair was since she had half of it out.

"I'll be right here when you finish. Break a leg," he said, winking at her.

Bathing in the kindness emitting from Jasiah's words, his gestures, and his smile, tranquility swarmed her heart as she smiled and exited the car.

"I don't know why you want to fuck with her," Lafayette muttered as he got into the passenger seat. "She crazy just like the rest of her damn family. You got the baddest and richest bitches up Sidwell, and you worried about Destiny's ass? The best thing about that bitch is her eyes."

"She feisty," Jasiah shrugged, "I like it."

"Her family is like the mob, and she is a little princess," Lafayette warned.

"One minute you tell me she is a plain Jane at school, and now you're saying she's a mob princess," Jasiah laughed.

"She all of that!" Lafayette exclaimed, shaking his head. "I'm trying to tell you to stick with those snotty bitches at your school or from the country club or wherever you normally get them from."

Jasiah didn't respond. His mind lingered through the chasm of the past as he remembered what happened to him over the summer. Caged in that feeling, he wanted to stay clear of any girl from either of those places.

"Can we at least get something to drink while we wait?" Lafayette asked. "Might as well get some snacks from the hot dog stand since I know there won't be even a bag of chips back at the crib."

"When y'all going home?" Jasiah responded, reminding his cousin that he was a guest.

Lafayette stopped talking and shrugged his shoulders while Jasiah relished the moment of silence.

Three nights before, Lafayette decided he was old enough to defend his mother against his father's constant abuse. He had watched his father periodically manhandle his mother throughout his entire life from inside their LeDroit Park home. Sometimes, it was as minor as a shove aside. Other times, it was a slap in the face. The older Lafayette got, the more he tried to help defuse the situation and shield his mother, as he couldn't bear to see her being ridiculed like that.

But on a random Monday night, he mustered up enough courage to shove his father into a wall, building rage in his father as he threatened to kill him and his mother while waving his service revolver in the air. Scared, finding himself in a bind, he called Jasiah for help, and at 1 a.m., Jasiah and his mother picked Lafayette and his mother up to find refuge in their Potomac home. Since that night, Lafayette had been camping out in his big cousin Jasiah's room while his mother was trying to figure out her next move.

"I'ma walk to the stand on the corner. You want something?" Lafayette asked as he opened the car door.

"Naw, I'm good," Jasiah looked around for a legitimate parking space in the immediate area. He knew sooner or later he would have to move from the loading zone in front of the building. "I'ma buck a U and park over there," he pointed in the direction of a car moving from a metered parking space.

Lafayette had a bottle of water in his hand for Jasiah when they met up again. Lafayette always wondered why Jasiah never played music despite having an Alpine sound system with double din installed. He was always weirded out about it as he occasionally thought- *Who drives without music when they got such a cool system?*

"You mind?" Lafayette asked before he touched the radio, his mind craving a distraction from thinking about his home life.

"Go ahead," Jasiah replied as he pulled his notebook from the backseat and started to work on his chemistry homework. Time slipped by as he scribbled on his notebook; he had just finished the assignment when he averted his gaze toward the building and spotted Destiny standing in front of it. "I'll be back."

Jaywalking through traffic, Jasiah joined Destiny in front of the building and asked. "So, how did it go?"

“I think I did well,” she smiled, “There weren’t any Black people on the panel, which kind of made me nervous.”

“Don’t let that spook you,” Jasiah uttered, emitting confidence. “I’m sure they were captivated by you the same way I am.”

Destiny looked away with her eyes lowered as she wasn’t prepared for Jasiah to compliment her out of nowhere.

“I’m starting to think you are a Casanova,” she joked.

Jasiah just smiled in return and asked, “You want to take a walk? We have a little time before my meter is up.”

“Sure,” Destiny wasn’t eager to enter the vehicle with Lafayette again. His presence aggravated her. She couldn’t believe his audacity in questioning her about her family. They had not said more than ten words to one another in the three years they were in school together. She grew even more infuriated to know that people were gossiping about her family in the school.

At Dunbar, the teachers were continuously referring to the Rayful Edmond era, when a crack kingpin terrorized the community. Their stories of Rayful and his crew depicted teenage pregnancy, deaths, disfigurements, and imprisonment in an attempt to deter students away from crime. She wondered if they referred to the Peay Family in the same cautionary tale fashion when she was not around.

Jasiah stated, “Don’t worry about my cousin. He’s going through a tough time right now and is just trying to avoid talking about himself.”

Destiny looked at Jasiah and, with a smirk, replied, “I thought he was just an asshole.”

“Well...that too,” Jasiah affirmed as he laughed. “I just want to tell you that you look cute...a little businesswoman-like or whatever,” he molded his feelings into words as he bumped into her intentionally, wanting to be as close to her as possible.

A smile blossomed on Destiny’s face as she thanked him. Just in that instance of closeness, she could smell his cologne—a masquerade of scents: Citrus, mixed with sandalwood and musk, hypnotized her mind, blooming the emotions of intrigue in her while evaporating the beads of her anxiety.

Looking up at Jasiah, Destiny noticed little waves in his hair. She reached up to touch the top of his head without hesitation. When the white girls did it at his school, he was offended, feeling like a spectacle in front of them. But right now, it was soothing, instilling tranquility in him, the way he felt when his mother used to rub the top of his head as a young child – pure affection. As Jasiah relished in her touch, Destiny savored touching him. When their eyes met, she stopped abruptly, like a kid with their hand caught in the cookie jar. As Destiny retreated, she picked up the faint smell of Kemi oil from her hand. Jasiah secretly wished that she had not stopped. Gazing into Destiny’s honeycomb eyes, he felt like Destiny was finally seeing him for who he was. In the moment, he felt seen.

“What do you know about Kemi oil?” she questioned, rubbing her hands together to diminish some of the oil in her palm.

“I am still Black, you know.”

“I know, but are there beauty supply stores in Potomac?”

Jasiah erupted in laughter as he answered, “They sell it at CVS.”

Destiny shook her head at her own ignorance, still intrigued about the neat set of waves on top of his head.

“How often do you brush your hair?” Destiny questioned as she ran her fingers across the length of his head one more time.

“A lot,” Jasiah responded. “I had to restrain myself from doing it while I drove you here so you wouldn’t think I was conceited.”

Destiny laughed. “Thank you for that.”

As they turned the corner on 16th Street, Jasiah pointed out that his stepfather’s law firm was just a few blocks away. Destiny smiled as he spoke of his summer internship there, which he hated, even though traces of envy sprouted in her hearing of his circumstances. He was given an opportunity just like the one she had just interviewed for.

“So, when you gonna let me really take you out?” Jasiah asked, his emotions leaking out the more he spent time with her.

Destiny shook her head, avoiding the question, and answered vaguely, “I really think you’re nice and nothing like I expected.”

“Is that good or bad?” Jasiah asked impatiently.

“Good,” Destiny smiled at him. “I’m just talking about my very first impression.... Who knew they made spoiled rich kids like you?”

Jasiah shrugged. “Well, circumstances are just in my favor.”

“Just because you’re not a drug dealer doesn’t mean I don’t have a boyfriend,” Destiny reminded him of her original hesitancy in giving him the time of day the previous day when they met.

“Just because you have a boyfriend, it doesn’t mean we can’t get to know one another,” Jasiah pointed out. “I wouldn’t have had Lafayette hunt your number down for me if I wasn’t serious about getting to know you.”

Destiny was flattered by his tenacity, but she didn’t want to show it. “Why don’t you have a girlfriend?” Destiny bluntly questioned.

“Cause it’s over,” Jasiah stated simply.

“Cause it’s over?” Destiny repeated after him, unsatisfied by his answer. “So, it’s just that simple?”

“My mother told me to always give the abbreviated version,” Jasiah shrugged.

“My mother told me,” Destiny playfully imitated his proper English.

“What you want me to say? My muhva?” Jasiah immediately knew what she was doing because he had listened to his cousin make fun of him for the majority of his life for how he spoke. Though Jasiah felt like he was a chameleon in verbiage, sometimes his prep-school voice did shine through.

“Yes,” she nodded. “You over here sounding like Waymon Tinsdale III,” Destiny gave him a *Strictly Business* movie reference that made Jasiah burst into laughter.

“I’m not that bad now,” Jasiah rejected the notion.

“It’s okay, I’ll be your Natalie,” she winked at him, feeling relieved that the boy she had rejected at a bus stop the previous day had a sense of humor.

“That’s what I’m looking forward to,” Jasiah admitted with a smile.

Chapter 2: Invitations

Faint sounds of various televisions playing around the overcrowded house reverberated in the room as Destiny brushed her fingers against the dent in the wall of Eric's room – right above his bed. She could hear the sound of Jeopardy from the downstairs television and cartoons playing from Eric's sisters' room as she fell into a light trance.

Subconsciously, Destiny recalled the day she and Eric were on the verge of a breakup when she had popped up unannounced and caught a girl at his house. Tracing the fist-sized hole with her fingers, she remembered Eric, in frustration, punching the wall as he insisted that he couldn't lose her.

Entangled in the mess of the past, her mind couldn't focus on the scholarship essay about laws affecting her community. The words weren't flowing as the distractions around her grew louder with the off-beat music coming from Eric's headphones. Frustrated and annoyed that she couldn't make progress with her essay, she started doodling on her paper.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The sound of three slow gunshots from what she gathered as a revolver broke her out of her trance as she thought, *who's shooting this early?*

Sighing to alleviate some of the agitation growing within her, she averted her eyes to the back of Eric's head as he penned something in a journal while sitting on the floor. A surge of emotions whirled within her.

For some reason, the sight of Eric started to sprout disappointment in her heart. Destiny frowned as her gaze landed on his bushy cornrows, her ears trying to catch what song he was listening to, but to no avail.

Frustratedly, she knocked his headphones off his ear.

"Did you hear those gunshots?" she questioned.

"Naw..." Eric stared back at her, and the signs of irritation were clear on his face. "What's up?"

"You don't have any homework you could be doing instead of this?" Destiny asked, subconsciously pouring the frustration she felt into her words.

"This is homework," Eric responded in a firm tone. "Mr. Kofi challenged us to present on the African diaspora in a creative way, so I'm preparing for that."

"Oh," Destiny responded just as her pager went off. It was Jasiah.

"Who that?" Eric asked as he climbed on the bed with Destiny.

"My cousin," she lied quickly as she threw her pager to the side and felt Eric climbing on top of her. He lightly brushed his lips against hers and darted his tongue in briefly.

"How was work today?" Eric asked as he rubbed his nose against hers. Destiny smiled as they shared an Eskimo kiss.

"It was fine," Destiny answered as she felt Eric's broad shoulders and gazed into his eyes. "Just some filing and doing my homework."

She reached up for another kiss, shrugging away the shreds of doubts that had begun to bloom in her heart recently.

Slowly, their bodies became entangled, lost in the moment between one another just as sirens entered the symphony of sounds permeating the wall of Eric's room. The possibility of someone being harmed from the gunshots Destiny heard before never crossed either of their minds as Eric nestled between Destiny's legs and started to dry hump her.

The friction between them aroused Eric, and he groped Destiny's breast from under her shirt. He reached under her bra and teased her nipples. Destiny moaned lightly at the sensation, only arousing Eric further.

Suddenly, a loud knock on the bedroom door untangled them from each other. The knock was like a bell telling two fighters to go to their respective corners. Both Destiny and Eric looked at the clock. It was 8 p.m., which meant Eric's older brother, who happened to be his roommate, was home from work.

"Is that Dex?" Destiny asked, specks of irritation lingering in her voice.

"Yeahhh...probably," Eric assumed, with frustration evident on his face.

"Well, that's my cue to get out of here," Destiny said as she sat up and began to gather her things. Eric jumped up from the bed to adjust himself before he opened the bedroom door.

"What's up!" Dex spoke nonchalantly, addressing both Destiny and his brother at the same time as he entered, filling up the room with the smell of motor oil.

"What's up!" they responded in unison.

"You ain't gotta leave because of me. I'm headed right back out," Dex stated as he started to strip from his Metro uniform.

"Naw, it's a weeknight. I gotta get home anyway," Destiny replied as she closed her book bag, feeling relieved that she didn't have to hear Eric eventually plead for her virginity. Destiny repeatedly had made it clear that she wouldn't allow him to take her virginity in the twin-size bed that he slept in head-to-toe with his nephew most nights. But that didn't stop him from trying.

She slipped into her Nike Air Force Ones and stood to leave.

"A'ight, but you coming to the block party this weekend?" Dex inquired.

"I guess," Destiny looked at Eric, her gaze emotionless as it was the first she had heard about a block party.

Averting his eyes from Destiny's stare, Eric grabbed her backpack and carried it without saying a word. Destiny grabbed her pager and followed Eric toward the front door, saying goodbye to his family members, even though tension was building between them with each step.

"Block party, huh? Were you even planning on telling me about it?" Destiny interrogated but suppressed her emotions, keeping her tone breezy.

Caught off-guard, Eric turned his attention toward Destiny, nervously skimming his hands through his cornrows. His lips opened to speak, but the words betrayed him. After being in the relationship for almost a year, Destiny could read through Eric's body language like an open book.

Is he secretly seeing that other girl again? Why can't he tell me if there's someone else? - Thoughts flooded Destiny's mind as she sighed defeatedly, unwilling to entertain the pressure of such thought while she had her own discretions with Jasiah.

"Look, Eric, I ain't in the habit of being where I'm not welcome," Destiny uttered, her eyes averting from Eric toward the red and blue lights at a distance, confirming that she had indeed heard gunshots

moments earlier. The sight of the parked police car and ambulance at a distance also confirmed that danger was always near. Destiny silently prayed that she would soon find her way out of the city alive as she looked back at Eric.

“It’s not like that, Destiny. I just planned on kicking it with my boys. We were gonna chill at the block party for a while, then hit Pentagon City for a movie,” Eric claimed as he opened the car door for Destiny.

“So, basically, you had no plans to see me this weekend?” Destiny replied as she sat in Eric’s mother’s 1996 Nissan 300ZX hatchback, which felt like a shield on the breezy September evening.

“Come on, Destiny, don’t do this. We going to the mall tomorrow, right? Don’t Friday count as the weekend?” Eric shut the door behind Destiny and began to tread toward the driver’s side. “It shouldn’t be a problem that I want to spend a day with my boys,” Eric continued when he entered on the driver’s side, pleading his case.

“It’s whatever,” Destiny sat back, unfazed by his excuses, and cracked her window to allow the cool night breeze to brush against her face.

“I know you don’t have an attitude.” Eric reached over to try to tickle Destiny, trying to distract her mind from the sudden tension before he pulled off.

“Stop,” Destiny whined. “Stop it.” She moved away. “Stop now, Eric,” Destiny popped his hand. “I gotta get home, so just drive.”

Amidst Eric’s little games, Destiny’s pager went off again. She ignored it, figuring it was either her father or Jasiah.

“That’s probably your dad,” Eric assumed as he pulled off.

“Yep,” Destiny readily agreed as she turned the radio up, unwilling to listen to Eric’s probable lies further.

They drove off, but anxiety built up in Destiny as they grew closer to the emergency lights. The yellow and black crime scene tape blocked their normal route to her house. Still, both Eric and Destiny could see the devastation behind the tape before being directed by the police to turn right. The blood-stained porch steps on a row house, the crying family members, the handcuffed young man in the back of a squad car. The scene was too familiar and made Destiny’s heart long for a change of scenery.

“Damn,” was the only word that escaped Eric’s mouth as he drove away. Destiny continued looking out the window as the peace-inducing light of the moon flickered in her eyes. Her thoughts wandered to how Jasiah might be able to look at the same sky as her, but their surroundings were totally different. A smile crept across Destiny’s face as she thought of Jasiah and their late-night conversations about their futures. Compared to her new friend, Eric had no aspirations of going to college or leaving their hometown. Her mind was still strangled by Jasiah’s fleeting memories, and she realized how she craved to see him, considering it had been a month since they had seen one another when he drove her to the interview. For the past month, he had become a reliable friend who lived in her phone.

Destiny exited the car without saying goodbye to Eric, distracted by thoughts of Jasiah. Eric watched her walk away, silently not wanting their evening to end on such a bad note.

“Damn, it’s like that?” Eric called out from the car window.

Destiny didn’t turn around to acknowledge him. She wanted him to feel the disconnection she was feeling between the two of them.

“Really, Destiny... you’re that mad?”

Destiny took a deep breath as she placed her key into the security screen door, then turned to say, "Thanks for the ride, Eric... I'll talk to you later."

Eric drove off.

Destiny rolled her eyes as she turned around to enter her home. She was greeted by a house full of relatives for a Thursday night football game. The roars and cheers erupted from the living room. It wasn't uncommon to see her father surrounded by his son and nephews. Their home was always lively during football season. Destiny glanced at the big screen television to see what opponent of the Redskins made it worthy of people coming out on a weekday – it was the Cowboys.

"Ahh, where you been?" one of her cousins, Ron, quickly inquired as Destiny dropped her bookbag at the door and quickly started to greet everyone with a kiss on the cheek and a half hug.

"With that lil' nigga, where else," her father grumbled.

Faint chuckles emerged from the crowd. Destiny rolled her eyes as she traveled upstairs.

"I thought you got off work at 6?" her mother, Gail Peay, stated from her perch on her king-size four-poster bed. She looked regal in her robe and turban as she combed through one of her latest home décor magazines.

"I did," Destiny sighed. "I just hung out with Eric for a little while afterward," she admitted.

"You better not fall behind messing with that nappy-headed boy," Mrs. Peay stared at her daughter in the eyes. "You know you have three choices coming up, so use yo' time wisely," her mother's southern accent rearing its head as she spoke.

"Ma, we're focused, don't worry," Destiny assured her mother.

"I'm telling you, Destiny. You're going to college, in the military, or you gonna get a little poo putt job. But you're *not* going to sit around here after graduation while I go to work every day," Mrs. Peay continued with her lecture.

"Ma, I'm focused," Destiny tried to sway her mother's worries.

Destiny sat on the rug and started playing with her twin nephews, who lived with them, unfazed by her mother's comments as she felt confident that she was doing everything needed to attend college in the Fall of 2000.

"Your phone been ringing while you were out," Mrs. Peay informed her daughter after a few moments of silence between them.

Immediately, Destiny thought of Jasiah's pages. "A'ight, Ma," Destiny kissed her nephews on the cheeks. "I have a scholarship packet due tomorrow." She got up and made a beeline toward her room to see what Jasiah wanted so badly.

"Damn, Girl, you tough to get ahold of today. I thought something happened to you," a playful yet soothing voice resonated from the other side of the phone.

"Boy, what is the matter?" Destiny questioned as she sat at the desk.

"Straight to the point as usual, huh?... I wanted to ask if you wanna go to dance with me?" he asked.

"A dance?" Destiny questioned with a hint of disbelief in her voice.

"Come on, I'll have you home before curfew. I promise."

"When is this dance?"

“Saturday.”

“Ha!” Destiny laughed. “Who turned down the handsome Jasiah Sheffield?”

“I wasn’t gonna go,” he admitted. “But I got crowned homecoming king at tonight’s game, and I can’t go to the dance alone. A king needs his queen.”

Destiny wondered if he realized what he had said, but at that moment, she didn’t want to remind him that she was not *his*.

“Is that right?” Destiny blushed, “I know there is an ex-girlfriend waiting in the wing for you to ask her out,” Destiny continued as she moved to her bed, astonished that he had just asked her out again.

“Destiny, no one can compare to you.”

“And yet, you haven’t seen me in a month,” Destiny pointed out.

“I have been respecting your wishes,” he reminded her. “And I know it’s a lot handling school, applying to colleges, scholarships, and a job.”

“You’re just waiting in the wing?” Destiny shook her head.

“The wait is over,” Jasiah stated loudly as if he were making an announcement.

“I did not say ‘Yes’.”

“You know you want to see me as much as I want to see you,” Jasiah responded confidently, his voice carrying the scent of affection.

“Jasiah, you know I have a boyfriend,” as Destiny gave her a common statement, Jasiah said the words with her in a mocking tone.

They both laughed.

“Destiny, come on. I’ll pick you up. We will have dinner and go to the dance. That’s it,” Jasiah pressed on.

“Jasiah, this is late notice, and I don’t have anything to wear. My hair’s a mess, too.”

“You look beautiful as you are. But you still do have a day,” he insisted. “Look, ditch work tomorrow. I’ll pick you up, take you to the mall, get you straight.”

“Jasiah...” Destiny whined, her voice fading out as the barriers of restraint began to shatter within her.

“Destiny, please?” Jasiah was determined to spend time with her in person. He had been patient about seeing Destiny face-to-face because they talked almost daily over the phone.

“Jasiah, my father is gonna—”

“Your father will love me,” Jasiah cut her off. “Leave that part to me.”

Destiny had always wondered how people on the other side of the spectrum lived. She pondered a strategy. She could ditch work, go shopping with Jasiah, and make it home in time for Eric to pick her up to hang out at the mall that evening.

“Destiny, my mom is so excited for me to get homecoming king. This would be epic. Just come,” Jasiah tried to convince Destiny, flourishing the emotions he felt for her.

“Hold on,” Destiny told Jasiah.

“Don’t leave me on hold forever,” Jasiah warned. “You know you get distracted.”

Destiny laughed. "Boy, put me on speaker phone and don't hang up. I'll be back."

Destiny left her cordless in her room and walked toward her mother's room to talk to her.

"Ma, can I go out this weekend?" Destiny asked.

Her mother looked up from her *House Beautiful* magazine and asked, "What you mean go out?"

"To a dance," Destiny answered honestly.

"Girl, give up the details. With whom and where? How much is this going to cost me?" her mother looked at her.

Destiny bit her bottom lip, realizing that, apparently, she hadn't gathered enough details from Jasiah. "Hold on."

Destiny strolled back to the phone hurriedly, emotions of excitement and curiosity broiling up in her with each step she took. Hastily, she reached for the phone to ask Jasiah for the details.

"Jasiah!" Destiny yelled as she could hear him playing what she assumed was *Mortal Combat* on his Nintendo 360.

Simultaneously, as if on cue, her father walked up the steps and asked, "Who the hell is Jasiah?"

"My friend," Destiny replied.

Her father stared at Destiny like she was crazy, "Another lil' nigga? Really, Destiny?"

"Daddy," Destiny whined and decided this was it – the moment when she disclosed the friend who had lived in her phone for nearly a month. "Jasiah goes to Sidwell Friends and just asked me to join him for his homecoming dance."

Her father just stared at her silently, waiting for her to spill more information.

"It's on this Saturday. Can I go?" Destiny pressed on.

"He on the phone?" Mr. Peay asked.

"Yes."

"Hang up the goddamn phone, Destiny, and explain." Mr. Peay demanded, traces of anger swelling up in his demeanor.

Destiny hung up abruptly without uttering another word.

"I know you ain't on no hoe shit," Mr. Peay stated without blinking an eye.

"What?" Destiny looked at her father like he was crazy.

"Didn't you just have one muthafuckah drop you off? What's the deal with this other Jesse or whatever?" He came closer to his daughter.

"Jasiah, dad—" Destiny corrected in a hushed voice, her fingers dwindling with each other.

Footsteps echoed through the small hall, and suddenly, Destiny's mother appeared in the doorway as well. "What's going on here, Ray?"

"Destiny got another lil' nigga," Mr. Peay answered his wife. Directing his eyes back at Destiny, he continued, "I thought your boyfriend's name was Eric."

Destiny took a deep breath, realizing it was now or never, and tried to figure out how to tell her father that Jasiah was just a friend and make it sound believable.

"Destiny, do you hear your father talking to you?" Mrs. Peay chimed in, slamming her hands on her hips.

"Ma, Jasiah is just a friend. He won homecoming king and asked me to join him on his homecoming dance with him," Destiny responded, "He goes to Sidwell Friends. I was about to ask him the details of the location when Daddy interrupted."

"But I thought your boyfriend was named Eric!" Mr. Peay repeated.

"Yes, that's my *boyfriend's* name. Jasiah is just a *friend*," Destiny tried explaining but couldn't find the convincing words.

"Destiny, what are you doing?" Mrs. Peay inquired.

"Daddy told me he wanted me to drop Eric because there would be some guy for me whose parents would have a circular driveway... And Jasiah has a circular driveway in Potomac."

Mrs. Peay looked at her husband in disbelief, "Ray!"

"I-I-I was talking about in college," Mr. Peay shrugged. "I didn't think she would take me so literally so quickly."

"Can I go?" Destiny asked.

"This is a school-organized event?" Mrs. Peay asked.

"Yes, you both can meet him when he picks me up."

"Naw, I need to make sure he isn't blowing smoke.... We'll bring you to his house and meet his parents," Mr. Peay demanded.

"You're gonna take me to Potomac, Maryland?" Destiny questioned, worried that this was going in the wrong direction.

Her parents looked at one another and answered in unison, "Yes." Then Mrs. Peay added, "Get the details... I'll call your aunt to do your hair."

Destiny waited until her parents left the doorway before picking up the phone to call Jasiah back; her heart was fluttering, thumping wildly, thinking how Jasiah would take it. Taking a deep breath to calm her wavering voice, she dialed, but there was no ringing.

"Hello?" she inquired.

"Hey, Destiny, who were you trying to call?" Eric asked, surprised. "The phone didn't get to ring."

Destiny cursed to herself; she had picked up the phone before it could ring with Eric on the line. Gathering her scattered senses, she lied, "You." An unwelcome taste occupied her tongue after she did it.

"Look, I know I said I was hanging out with my boys this Saturday, but why don't you and Bria come to the block party?" Eric invited Destiny and her best friend.

Usually, Destiny would have happily complied, but now, the circumstances were different.

"It's fine. I'ma hang out with my family," Destiny said, discarding the notion of them seeing one another on Saturday. "I might go to North Carolina on Saturday with my mother," the story to cover her tracks rolled off Destiny's tongue so quickly that it even surprised her.

"Oh," disappointment oozed out of Eric's voice.

“I was just calling to make sure you got home safely. I’m going to finish up this essay for the scholarship packet. I’ll call you back before I go to bed,” Destiny continued, barricading the room for further conversation.

“A’ight, cool,” Eric hung up.

Breathing out the distasteful emotions, Destiny instantly dialed Jasiah’s number to ask for the details.

“Man, your daddy doesn’t play,” Jasiah affirmed Destiny’s suspicions that he heard the conversation.

“So, you were listening,” Destiny was slightly embarrassed but pushed forward to warn Jasiah, “And he wants to drop me off at your house to meet you and your parents.”

“I don’t know if my stepfather will be around, but that’s cool... at least I’ll save some gas.”

Destiny rolled her eyes at Jasiah’s reaction and responded, “You sure that’s cool with your mother?”

“My mother is always ready to meet anybody. And she will get the chance to show off her home – it’s a win-win, for sure,” Jasiah stated confidently, “She is so excited I got homecoming king that she told me to get a new fit from Georgetown.”

“You’re not going to Solbiato, are you?” Destiny referred to an exclusive Georgetown DC brand.

“Naw, flier than that,” Jasiah laughed.

Destiny had never purchased clothing from Georgetown other than at the GAP. The prices of brands located there were sky-high; she couldn’t fathom shopping there. Sometimes, her brothers would allow her to tag along when they took a girl out, so she was fully aware of the cost and expectations that came along with shopping on M Street or Wisconsin Avenue in Georgetown.

“I guess I’ll catch the train to Pentagon City,” Destiny mentioned, liberating herself from the idea of shopping with him.

She was quite confident that she could find a cocktail dress in Express or The Limited within her price range. If push came to shove, she could use her mother’s credit card at Macy’s.

“You are hanging with me tomorrow,” Jasiah stated confidently. “I got you, so let’s shop together.”

“Jasiah, I know how to dress myself,” Destiny replied as she sat at her desk and switched on her computer.

“I know, but I want to see you.”

“Jasiah, I already have plans tomorrow evening,” Destiny informed him, hinting that Eric was taking her out. “I’m already skipping work to find a dress.”

“Oh, so you have plans with Eric on Friday night, and you making plans with me for Saturday... player, player,” Jasiah teased Destiny. “Yeah, go ahead. Get ready to say your final goodbyes to him.”

Destiny burst into laughter, sensing the confidence imbued in Jasiah’s words. She thought to herself that there could be no *final goodbye* between her and Eric, considering they went to the same school.

“What you eat for dinner?” Destiny asked, trying to sway the direction of conversation from Eric while she noticed that she left her bookbag downstairs. Stepping down the stairs playfully, her feet galloping like a horse with the cordless phone stuck to her ear, she trod toward the door. She bypassed her cousins’ game of Craps in front of the big-screen television to get her bag as she intently listened to Jasiah’s afternoon with his old tennis team members at a neighborhood deli. A rush of gleeful emotions swept through Destiny at the thought of everyone Jasiah had ever mentioned being in awe of them together.

Returning to her room, she looked at herself in the mirror over her desk as she thought-- *Why not? Why not seize the opportunity while I have it?*

Finishing his story, Jasiah went back to convincing Destiny to join him on the shopping date. He craved to gaze upon her hazel eyes. Laying across his bed, Jasiah recalled the way he felt when she rubbed the top of his head and the sweet scent of honeydew and vanilla on Destiny's skin that enveloped his car while she was in it.

Still, there were some specks of anxiousness tainting his thoughts. He wanted to make sure that Destiny fit the bill when he introduced her to his friends. He hadn't talked about her to anyone, as his associates would make assumptions about Destiny based on where she lived.

Chapter 3: Popeyes

Jasiah and Destiny giggled on the phone all night, sparking a flame of nervousness and excitement within them as they both craved to see one another.

That morning, Destiny stood in front of the full-length mirror in her parents' room, dressed in blue stretch jeans and a fitted white shirt, with a pair of Jordan 7s on her feet. Looking down at the sneakers, she remembered the day she bought them with her first paycheck because Jasiah couldn't stop talking about them. She smiled, knowing it was the perfect day to debut them at school.

When Eric saw Destiny walking down the hall with her best friend and his cousin Bria during the first period, flickers of adoration sparkled in his eyes. He silently admired her and threw his arm around her shoulder.

Destiny removed his arm with a scowl on her face.

"What's going on with you two?" Bria asked, sensing the unsettling energy revolving around Destiny.

"She tripping because I wanted to go the block party with Jacob and them," Eric quickly responded.

"I'm tripping because he didn't even mention there was a block party," Destiny insisted.

"I'ma stay out of it," Bria held her hands up. "Let me get to class."

As soon as his cousin stepped off, Eric asked, "Who got you those?" he motioned toward her shoes with a nod.

"These are things you can do for yourself when you have a job," Destiny responded in a matter-of-fact connotation, her tone stern.

"You don't look like you're going to work today," he questioned as his gaze lingered on Destiny's fit.

"It's casual Fridays," Destiny retorted, averting her eyes as the falsehood escaped her lips.

"We still on for this evening?" Eric inquired as the bell rang for their next period.

"You sure you don't want to hang out with your boys?" Destiny responded sarcastically.

"Come on now, Destiny. I told you that with you is where I want to be," Eric licked his lips as he looked at Destiny seductively.

Destiny blushed. "Boy, bye!" She strolled toward her next class, waving goodbye to him.

Destiny's heart thumped once she left school as if she were going to work, knowing she had called in sick that morning. Jasiah was parked exactly where he had when he picked her up previously. The possibility of being caught mixed with the allure of seeing Jasiah face to face excited her a little this time. Jasiah stepped out of his Caprice as she grew closer.

To her surprise, he was dressed in the exact fit, just his white T-shirt was from Hugo Boss. Casually, he strode toward her and suddenly stretched his arms wide out to give her a hug as if two long-lost friends were reuniting.

Nervousness gripped Destiny's heart when she thought of hugging Jasiah back in a similar way. Walking forward, Jasiah enveloped Destiny in his arms; the fresh scent of citrus, leather, and musk entangled Destiny's senses. She inhaled deeply, hypnotized by Jasiah's aura when he suddenly squeezed her harder.

"Boy!" Destiny playfully punched him on the side.

“Girl, you better hug me back. I know you are happy to see me.” Jasiah’s gaze focused on her, his arms still holding her tight.

Destiny sensed Jasiah’s gaze as she stared back at him. For a moment, both were lost in the eyes of one another, connected by the threads of longing and affection. Jasiah craved to kiss Destiny as their breaths danced in unison, mingling between their faces.

“Hi,” Destiny broke the moment of silence.

“Hi,” Jasiah replied in a hushed voice, his fresh minty breath carrying notes of warmth on it as he winked at her.

Destiny embraced Jasiah back, laying her head on his broad chest as the feelings of peacefulness settled within her. Jasiah caressed her back; the sweet scent he craved – honeydew and vanilla – was there again, filling his nostrils and making him smile.

Snuggling, he whiffed her hair; the familiar sweet smell of Kemi oil pierced through his barriers of restraint as he unconsciously squeezed her even tighter.

“You are suffocating me now, Jasiah,” Destiny said playfully to tease him as she patted his hip and attempted to back away.

“I’m not letting you go,” Jasiah exclaimed.

“I don’t belong to you,” Destiny reminded him.

“But I belong to you,” Jasiah whispered without thinking.

Destiny could feel the sincerity lingering in his velvety voice as she felt his heartbeat quicken. A warm, affectionate smile curled up the edges of her lips as she held him until his heartbeat simmered down.

Seconds passed by; their breaths became one, both hearing the melodies of their hearts, disconnected from the world. A thought sparked within Destiny—a thought with Jasiah is where she should be. Slowly, they pulled away from one another, brushing away their hands from each other’s waists, only for Jasiah to hold her hand until he opened the car door for her.

Destiny sat in the car and took a deep breath as she came to her senses. Just the previous evening, she had been intertwined in Eric’s arms, and now, here she was, openly sharing another intimate moment with someone else. Taking a deep sigh, exhaling any thought about Eric, Destiny checked herself out in the visor mirror. This wasn’t like her at all, she thought.

“*Jasiah*,” Destiny sighed his name aloud before he entered the car as if she was taking it all in.

Jasiah was well-read. He had collegiate aspirations just like her. When she was stumped on calculus homework, he could walk her through it over the phone. Jasiah was what she would call a charming gentleman and scholar.

“What are you thinking about?” Jasiah asked, noticing the tinge of worry on Destiny’s face as he cruised through the city.

“You,” Destiny replied casually as she looked over at him. “You sure you want to take me around your friends?”

“The question should be, am I sure I want to bring my friends around you,” Jasiah smiled, his dimples vivid on his vibrant face.

Destiny shrugged. “Well...I think I’m nice.”

"I think you're nice to me, but the way you bite off Lafayette's head when he speaks is crazy," Jasiah said with a mischievous smirk plastered on his face.

"He always talking crazy in front of you. In school, he only acknowledges me with a head nod. But when you're around, he suddenly has so much to say."

Jasiah laughed, "Maybe he doesn't want Eric to get suspicious."

Destiny sighed, "Maybe."

"After this weekend, Eric's gonna be a sad puppy," Jasiah stated confidently.

"Yeah, sure," Destiny agreed sarcastically as she turned to Jasiah. "So, tell me, am I gonna get evil stares at this dance?"

"Of course," Jasiah glanced over at Destiny. "Everyone will wonder where I got a beauty like you from," he reached over and grabbed her hand.

Jasiah held her hand gently, and Destiny didn't pull away as she sat there, hazed by the sparking emotions within her.

"Let's start with some lunch," Jasiah suggested to Destiny once they parked at Georgetown Park Mall.

"We have time for that?" Destiny asked, looking at her watch.

"I got all the time in the world for you, girl," Jasiah winked and got out of the car.

He escorted her to Beni Hana's Japanese Restaurant with his arm around her shoulders. Destiny had only been there with her brothers and cousins.

"You ever been here?" Jasiah asked once they sat in front of the hibachi grill.

Destiny nodded, looking at the menu. "What you think about starting with a shrimp tempura roll?"

Jasiah was surprised. He thought he was taking her somewhere new.

"Jasiah," Destiny waved her hand in front of him. "Wake up. Do you eat sushi?"

"Oh, I'm awake, beautiful, but I'm surprised you eat this stuff," Jasiah stated honestly. "You're always talking about getting Wendy's or Popeyes."

Destiny shook her head. "We go to restaurants, Jasiah," she said, not knowing whether to laugh at the dumb look on his face or be insulted.

Jasiah turned and stared at his menu for a second.

Destiny threw her menu down and sat back. She knew she was ordering the teriyaki shrimp.

Jasiah stared aimlessly at the menu, not knowing what to say.

For a moment, Destiny became agitated with his silence, but when she saw him bite on his bottom lip, she thought maybe he was nervous too. After all, this was their first time alone.

"You never answered me," Destiny spoke, breaking the uncomfortable silence that swirled between them. "Do you eat sushi?"

"No," he mumbled.

"Just try this one, it's cooked," she encouraged.

Jasiah nodded.

Destiny placed her hand on his knee when she noticed his leg jumping. "You okay?"

Jasiah looked over at Destiny and smiled, but specks of worry remained on his face. He was trying to restrain himself from kissing her.

Destiny smiled back, imbuing the emotions of comfort in her expression, "I'm the one risking a relationship to hang out with you," Destiny reminded him. "I should be the one nervous."

"I know, but I just want to impress you," Jasiah admitted, looking at his hand instead of Destiny.

"Just be yourself," Destiny touched him on the shoulder. "You impress me every time you recite Shakespeare or walk me through a calculus problem on the phone."

Jasiah got a bit shy at the compliment and smiled nervously. "You sure it's not these muscles?" he flexed his arm playfully.

Destiny caressed his bicep with her hand gently. On the inside, she felt like his physique was titillating, but on the outside, she mockingly said, "Naw, these little arms don't do it for me. Remind me of chicken legs from Popeyes."

"Now, you are tripping," Jasiah retorted, snatching his arm away, slowly drenching in embarrassment.

Witnessing his reaction, Destiny couldn't hold herself back as she broke into laughter.

Silence engulfed them again as they waited on a server. Destiny looked around, watching the intentional flames spewing at another table. Then, she looked down and noticed Jasiah's leg start to jump again.

"Sooo, what impresses you about me?" Destiny asked as she placed her hand on his knee in an attempt to help calm his nerves.

"Your confidence, your drive, your beauty," he answered honestly. "And those eyes are mesmerizing."

Destiny didn't expect him to answer like that; caught off guard, a flush crept across her cheeks.

"Can I kiss you?" Jasiah asked suddenly.

Destiny nodded without a second thought.

Jasiah liberated himself from the chains of restraint as he leaned in closer for the kiss, the warmth of his hefty breath spread across Destiny's face. Her eyes fixated on Jasiah's plump, fresh lips, beguiled by the intensity of Jasiah's breath as she grew anxious. Before Jasiah could lean in for a kiss, a group of people dressed in suits came over with the waitress to fill up the table and take their orders. Both leaned back to their spots, the moment of affection quickly evaporating.

"Goddamn," Jasiah whispered in Destiny's ear.

She turned quickly and pecked him on the cheek before whispering in a lusty tone, "Patience is a virtue."

Jasiah was amused by the tingling sensation her lips left on his face, but he simply nodded in return.

"Something wrong?" Destiny asked.

"I don't know whether something is wrong or ever so right," he smiled at her.

"We're gonna figure out if this sushi is right for you when it comes," Destiny sipped her water. "You know I can't wait to see where you live," she admitted out of the blue as if the water was a truth serum.

"Is that so?" Jasiah's eyes widened. "You want to know where I lay my head?"

“If you’re talking about your house – yes – if you’re talking about your bedroom – no,” Destiny made it clear.

“I’m a change that,” Jasiah stated confidently.

“We’ll see,” Destiny looked at Jasiah in the eyes as she smiled merrily.

Jasiah could have kissed her right then and there – his whole existence screamed to touch her, but he knew he had to restrain himself at a table full of strangers. As time flew by, during the meal, they made small talk about Destiny’s upcoming road test in a few weeks and pranks that she played with her nephews around the house. Jasiah felt like he would love to be around Destiny’s family.

Though his cousin had pegged them all as misfits, Destiny painted a different picture of her family. The stories she told of dinner time, Football Sunday, weekend trips to North Carolina, and even repast only displayed camaraderie that he had never experienced. Drowning himself in Destiny’s bewitching voice, he felt like he could listen to her stories for hours.

On the other hand, Destiny was dreaming about how extravagant Jasiah’s life seemed to be. He was always eating out or having something delivered. She knew that he didn’t have to worry about leaving out of the house smelling like fried chicken. He was always at the mall buying something new or hanging out with his friends instead of working like she did. He didn’t have to worry about helping his little brother with his homework, unlike Destiny, who was responsible for her nephews’ homework most nights. He didn’t have to worry about the expense of his own gas, even though Destiny had to ensure she had bought enough Metro tokens and train fare cards weekly.

To each, the grass was greener on the other side of the fence. Their craving to be part of the other side magnetized their emotions, attracting them slowly yet steadily toward each other.

Soon, they were out in the street, strolling hand in hand as the dazzling light of the sun shimmered across their faces. Jasiah let his thriving, unquenched emotions take over him as he grabbed Destiny, pulled her closer, and planted a sloppy, wet kiss on her in the middle of the sidewalk.

He could feel the softness of her lips, his heart unwilling to pull away from this tender feeling. The firmness of Jasiah’s touch was stimulating for Destiny as she gave in and drowned herself in the intimate moment. When Jasiah noticed that Destiny didn’t pull away, he darted his tongue into her mouth, tasting the sweetness and saltiness of their meal.

The heat between the two flourished as Jasiah wrapped his tongue around Destiny’s. The world around them vanished as they stood on M Street with their lips locked. Their souls were isolated from the prying eyes and street noises around them as if the earth and the skies were enjoying the moment alongside them.

Suddenly, a screeching voice pierced through the haze, “Get a room!” making them instantly separate in laughter.

Destiny walked alongside Jasiah, her heart a captive of the blossoming emotions. There was a tingling sensation growing inside of her that she could not shake as Jasiah took her to the nearby boutiques. She had never been kissed like that. But the sensual sensation quickly vanished as nervousness grew within Destiny. Her mother had given her a hundred dollars for a dress, shoes, and accessories. But when she saw the prices in the boutiques, she knew she didn’t have enough money. She fumbled through a rack of bejeweled clutches as if she didn’t like anything, but the truth was, she couldn’t afford anything.

“I think this was a bad idea,” Destiny stated honestly after walking out of the second store.

“Let me pick something out for you,” Jasiah suggested, grabbing Destiny around the waist.

Destiny bit her bottom lip, nervous about whether she should tell Jasiah it wasn't that she didn't like anything – it was just that the price was too much.

"I got you," Jasiah kissed her on the cheek as if he was reading her mind. "You trust me?"

Destiny nodded. She was shocked when Jasiah picked out a black Iceberg dress to match the outfit that he was purchasing. "Sir, I still have a prom to think about," Destiny said, looking at the price tag and shaking her head.

"I got this," he dismissed her as he pulled out a credit card.

"Your parents are going to kill you," Destiny murmured in his ear, her teeth clenched.

Jasiah laughed, knowing he had spent more on the double din in his Caprice, and no one had mentioned anything about the charge on his credit card bill.

"This is nothing. I still gotta get you some shoes," he winked at her.

"Jasiah, you can't spend this much money on me," she whispered. "It just...it makes me nervous."

"You don't owe me anything but a good time this weekend," Jasiah assured her. "I'll be a perfect gentleman, and you'll be my lady."

Destiny bit her bottom lip and looked at Jasiah. *Could he like me this much? What does he want in return?* she wondered.

Jasiah leaned down and planted a kiss on her forehead. "I got you. Stop looking scared," he reassured Destiny, a gentle smile on his face, carving dimples in it.

"I just don't want to feel like I owe you something," Destiny admitted. "I cannot afford to return the favor," she whispered.

Jasiah shook his head and waited until they were outside of the store before stopping Destiny in her tracks. "I can be this nice to you without wanting anything in return but your time," he informed her.

"Where I'm from, only drug dealers drop money like that, and they always want something in return."

"I just told you I want your time," Jasiah replied. "I have patience. If you can't tell," he grabbed her hand, "just let me spoil you."

"Jasiah, you hardly know me," Destiny reminded him. She didn't want to remind him again about her boyfriend after he dropped nearly \$200 on a dress for her.

"Let's not make this so difficult," Jasiah caressed the side of Destiny's face. He wanted to kiss her again, but this time he held himself back, not letting her think he was just some horny boy looking for any opportunity to fondle her.

Destiny closed her eyes for a split second, his touch inducing the emotions of calmness and assurance within her. When she opened her eyes, she wondered if she was looking at the young man she was supposed to be with because Eric had never made her feel this special. But she knew he didn't have the means to do so, which wasn't a fair comparison. However, it was still a fact that Destiny couldn't ignore.

"Okay, I won't make this difficult," Destiny replied, vowing to herself that she would simply enjoy the moment.

After rummaging through several shops, Jasiah bought her everything he had promised. Destiny couldn't help but feel excited; her heart was thrilled seeing how Jasiah cared for her. Soon, they were driving back home, and Destiny noticed that her home was now only a few blocks away.

“You can drop me off here,” Destiny said.

“Let me drop you off at home,” Jasiah insisted when Destiny told him to drop her off two blocks down from her house after their afternoon together.

“Naw, Eric’s been blowing my pager up, and he might already be in front of my house. Let’s just play it safe,” Destiny said as she looked down the street, trying to figure out if she could see any vehicle that Eric would have access to.

“You better tell that nigga what’s up,” Jasiah stated confidently, some part of him annoyed at the mention of Eric.

Destiny just looked at Jasiah, noticing tinges of jealousy on his face.

“It ain’t no competition, Destiny,” he continued.

Jasiah was right, but Destiny didn’t like his sudden cockiness. It was a turn-off for her since she thought he looked down on others so casually.

“Let me find out you arrogant on the low,” Destiny stared into Jasiah’s eyes. “You a narcissist?” she quizzed.

Jasiah broke into laughter, a bit surprised by Destiny’s unexpected question.

“What is so funny?” The roots of agitation started to grow in Destiny.

“It’s just that Lafayette would say that’s an SAT word,” Jasiah answered, still chuckling.

Destiny couldn’t help but chuckle, knowing well that he would.

“I don’t know what to do with you, Destiny. I play it cool; you keep me as your homework buddy – friend-zoned. I finally get to see you, and you let me treat you like you’re my girl all day. And now I’m back in the friend zone, just that fast? It feels like I’m in a circus ring or something.”

Jasiah shook his head, shackles of disappointment binding his heart as he poured his distress into his words.

“Jasiah, you asked me out – knowing that I already have a boyfriend.”

“You’re letting me take you out – knowing you have a boyfriend.”

Destiny shook her head. She didn’t like the pressure. “Jasiah, just let me figure this out, please,” she touched him on the shoulder, “I promise I’m not trying to lead you on or hurt anyone’s feelings.”

“Feelings will be hurt, Destiny.”

“Okay, well, let me not get *my* feelings hurt.” She was honest. “You live a world away from me.”

“Forty minutes,” Jasiah corrected her.

“Jasiah,” Destiny rolled her eyes. “Sometimes I can’t believe you’re this into me.”

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

“I can’t say it out loud. I can’t let my insecurities get the best of me.”

“Then don’t.” Jasiah grabbed her hands. “Destiny, you’re beautiful and smart as hell, and did I mention sexy?”

Destiny rolled her eyes.

“I wish you could have seen yourself from my eyes when you put on that dress,” he winked at her.

“Jasiah, I don’t want to be anyone’s charity case, pet project, or *side piece* on the other side of town.”

Jasiah laughed. “You are literally sitting in my car, two blocks from your house, because *your* boyfriend might be lurking around, and you’re worried about being *my* side piece.”

“No, for real, Jasiah.” She punched him in the shoulder.

“I’m homecoming king. Taking you to the dance. If that’s not being on display, I don’t know what is,” Jasiah continued to laugh.

Destiny took a deep breath, letting out the growing agitation from the sudden pressure, and looked at Jasiah. Her mind still couldn’t wrap around the fact that someone like him was into her, and she couldn’t believe that she was going to break it off with Eric.

She thought she loved Eric. He wasn’t the first boy to take interest in her, but he was always the sincerest. He was patient and kind. They rarely got into arguments even though she knew that her disappearing for the whole afternoon would be a big disagreement. She was stuck in this chasm; she wanted Jasiah, but the thought of hurting Eric strangled her mind from making a decision.

To Jasiah, Destiny’s silence spoke volumes. The day had started light and fun; he thought the flowers of love had bloomed, but now, facing this gutting silence, they slowly began to wilt. He had been anxious to see Destiny after a long time. He thought he was prepared to continue to take things slow with her, and he was confident he could win her heart. But as the day passed, he realized he didn’t want to play in the background anymore.

“You don’t feel the same way about me as I do about you,” Jasiah murmured as he leaned his head on the steering wheel – suddenly feeling like he was a fool for believing this could work.

“I do,” Destiny responded. “It’s just that I’ve known you for a month, and I’ve been with Eric way longer,” she reminded him. “Jasiah, I really like you, and I had a good time with you today. Hopefully, we will still have a good time tomorrow, but I just need some time to figure this out, okay?” She explained as she pulled Jasiah by the shoulder so that he had to sit up. “I know you’re a spoiled kid who is used to getting whatever he wants whenever he wants it, but you’re going to have to be patient. Okay?”

“Okay,” Jasiah pouted.

“You look so cute with your lips poked out,” Destiny smiled as she plucked Jasiah’s lips in her fingers. “Come here, let me kiss ‘em.”

Jasiah leaned in eagerly for their lips to meet. He still had his lips puckered playfully when Destiny pulled away.

She giggled and gave him one small peck. “Playing it cool has gotten you this far with me,” Destiny reminded him. She wanted to tell him to play his role, the line she heard her brothers telling females too often, but she decided against it. “Page me when you get home, okay?” she told him.

Jasiah nodded. “I just need a hug,” he opened his car door.

Destiny became nervous that someone would see them but didn’t want Jasiah to feel any more defeated at the moment. He opened her side of the car door while she was contemplating her next move. When she got out of the car, he had her pinned against the car.

“Jasiah,” she tried pushing him back as a reflex.

“Naw, you can’t run from this,” he scooped her up by the waist, bringing her eye to eye with him. “You call me when you get settled later tonight, okay?”

Destiny nodded as she secretly enjoyed that he could easily pick her up like plucking a flower from the garden. "But you know this is not how people hug, right?" she reminded him.

"I just wanted to show off these muscles you called Popeye's chicken legs earlier," Jasiah stated as he placed Destiny back on her feet.

"Umm hmm," Destiny took a deep breath, and her pager went off again. This time, it was her house number. "Boy, let me go. I was supposed to be home thirty minutes ago."

"It's barely seven o'clock."

"But I told my mom I would be back by six, six thirty," she reminded him. "One thing about my parents is they are sticklers for time."

"A'ight. I will not hold you," Jasiah hugged her and planted a kiss on her forehead.

Jasiah stood away from his car, his eyes fixated on Destiny, dazed with affection as he watched her stroll down the sidewalk with shopping bags in hand. He couldn't take his eyes off her; no matter how much he looked, it wasn't enough. To him, she had disappeared from his sight too quickly. He wanted her to turn around, to catch a glimpse of her hazel eyes, and come back to him to enjoy the evening, but she didn't.

For Destiny, it was the longest walk of two blocks of her life. Her mind was circling in an overflow of thoughts. She desperately tried to think of an excuse to tell Eric why she had ignored his pages. She lied to him about going to work. What if he tried to surprise her and pick her up there even though she told him not to bother because she wanted to come home and change her clothes first? Struggling through her thoughts, she entered her house to see her mother and father sitting alone at the dining room table.

"Where are the boys?" Destiny questioned as she tried to head upstairs with her bags.

"First, let me see what you got," her mother yelled after her. "And the boys are with your brother."

"That lil' nigga been calling here for you," her father stated flatly as he turned the page of the Metro section from *The Washington Post*.

Destiny reluctantly retraced her steps back down the stairs with her bags still in her hand.

Letting out a deep sigh, she dangled the dress Jasiah bought her in front of her parents. Upon the reveal of the dress, seeing its exquisiteness, her father got up and trod into the kitchen. Her mother almost choked on the water she was sipping.

"Mr. Peay, I guess your daughter is over her tomboy phase," her mother touched the material and secretly admired her daughter's taste. It was a world away from what she would normally wear at a dance.

Destiny shrugged at her mother's remark. "I gotta go call Eric back."

"Mr. Peay, your daughter gonna have two dates in one day," her mother stated, looking at her daughter in the eyes. "Destiny, do you know what you're doing?"

"Shittt!" Mr. Peay chimed in from the kitchen, displaying his disdain in the matter.

"I'm trying to figure it out," Destiny answered honestly.

"May the best boy win," Mrs. Peay mumbled as she went back to turning the page of *House Beautiful*.

Mr. Peay cursed again from the kitchen while Destiny sprinted upstairs, her mind swirling in the torrent of the lies she would tell Eric. She sat down on the bed and took a deep breath, gathering her senses before calling her boyfriend. Swirling in the conflict of emotions, she dialed Eric.

“What’s up?” she stated nonchalantly.

“What’s up!?” Eric retorted in an angry tone. “You been missing all fucking day, and you call me with a *what’s up* like nothing happened?”

Sensing the anger in Eric’s voice, Destiny stayed quiet, biding her time to figure out the best way to reply.

“Why haven’t you responded to my pages all day?” Eric questioned.

“I was working... I left my pager in my book bag,” Destiny shocked herself with how easily the fib rolled off her tongue.

“Destiny, you didn’t think to call me all afternoon?”

“I have a lot on my mind, goddamn it!” Destiny knew she needed to get loud and frustrated to redirect the energy of the conversation, imitating how she had seen her brother Jax cover his tracks from his wife. “I have A/P classes... I’m working.... Getting ready to submit my college applications and scholarship packages,” she rambled off, trying to justify her tone by explaining her daily to-do list. “I was tryna get shit done so I don’t have to worry about it all weekend.”

“You could have called,” Eric replied flatly.

“My bad, but I’m calling now,” Destiny apologized for her lack of communication, so that didn’t become an issue later. “Are we still going to the mall?”

“I’ll be there in twenty minutes,” Eric answered before hanging up.

Destiny hung up the phone as she exhaled, the restlessness spreading its roots deep within her. She hoped her lies worked so she could enjoy the evening with her boyfriend without a hitch. Jumping up from the bed, she quickly changed into a sweatshirt to combat the cool night air and brushed her teeth, ensuring that none of Jasiah’s scent lingered on her skin. She had just freshened up her ponytail when the doorbell rang.

“I’ll get it!” Destiny yelled as she grabbed her denim jacket and purse. She hopped down the stairs just as her father was headed to the foyer. “I got it, Daddy.”

“Bring your ass home by eleven,” Mr. Peay reminded his daughter of her curfew.

“Aye, aye, captain,” Destiny gave her father a fake salute as she opened the door for Eric. A wave of shock jolted her soul as her eyes lay upon Eric, holding a small bouquet of wildflowers in his hands. Guilt flickered in her eyes as she sighed and thanked him for the flowers.

“You sounded a little stressed when I was talking to you,” Eric kissed her on the cheek. “I know you have a lot going on. Hearing how you feel, I thought to myself, I better get as focused on college as she is.”

Destiny clamped her lips shut for a second before saying, “Let me put these in some water. I’ll meet you in the car.”

She laid the bouquet on the table under the prying gaze of her parents.

“Let’s see how long this shit last,” Mr. Peay commented.

“She is mimicking the bad behavior that you and your sons have set as an example,” Mrs. Peay reminded her husband, shoving him into the pits of silence.

Mr. Peay just took a deep breath and slumped down in his seat as a response. It was rare that Destiny's father didn't get the last word. Destiny was grateful that her mother had shut him up, but she didn't like being reminded of her father's infidelities either.

Destiny really couldn't figure out why her mother didn't ever permanently leave him. They had packed up and moved out two times as far as Destiny could remember.

"Can you put these in some water, Ma?" Destiny requested as she shook off the memories of her parents' tumultuous marriage.

"Sure, have fun," Mrs. Peay said as she stood up to get a vase.

Destiny quickly left the house before her father could think of something else to say, meeting Eric as he patiently waited outside his car so that he could open the door for her. At that moment, she decided she didn't want to run a game on him. But she had to be sure that Jasiah was worth giving up everything she had with Eric.

"You okay?" Eric asked as he reached over to hold Destiny's hand as he drove.

With guilt still looming heavily over her head, Destiny wanted to spill everything about Jasiah to Eric. She wanted to tell him that she wasn't at work and that she had a fantastic day with another guy. She wanted to show him the little black dress that he could never afford to buy her. She wanted to tell him that within twenty-four hours, she would be rubbing elbows with the heirs of the most powerful people in DC. But holding the reigns of her emotions, she bit her bottom lip and thought about something else to talk about.

"Are you still thinking about going to Maryland Eastern Shore?" she quizzed.

"I'll probably end up at UDC," Eric looked over at Destiny. "But don't worry, I'll visit you wherever you are."

Destiny smiled. "You should start applying for scholarships," she rubbed his hand. "I can help you put your packet together."

Eric just nodded, "That would be cool."

Instantly, Destiny started to feel even more guilty. *Why am I making plans with him?* She asked herself.

"Man, let me tell you about Jacob," Eric started. "This why I've been blowing your phone up," Eric continued, telling Destiny about how his best friend had gotten a girl pregnant. "He's telling me that she must have roofied him."

Eric shook his head. Destiny laughed.

"When his grandmother finds out, she gonna flip," Eric said.

Destiny couldn't imagine being so comfortable with any boy that she wanted to take the condom off. Not with the way her father talked about the girls that came into his weekend security job at Planned Parenthood. Mr. Peay's cautionary tales of teenage pregnancy and the emotional anguish he saw after an abortion ensured that Destiny took sex seriously.

Peering into Destiny's eyes, Eric noticed that she was lost somewhere far away. As an attempt to unshackle Destiny's silence, he changed the subject.

"You hungry? Want to go to Popeyes?" He asked.

The mention of Popeyes made Destiny's mind plunge into thoughts of Jasiah and his muscular arms. A smile crept across her face.

“Sure,” she replied, twirling the strands of her hair in her fingers.

