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Special Delivery 2:

Heat Me Up

Marie Rochelle

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By

Marie Rochelle

Dedication:

*True Friendship is a
comfortable place of quiet
understanding, laughter and
grace. “A friend loves at all
times...”*

Proverbs 17:17



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Prologue

“I thought you were going to be home over an hour ago. Did you forget about me?”

Preston looked up from the paperwork scattered across his desk and smiled at the good-looking woman standing in front of him. “Baby, I’m sorry. I was getting all of this ready for Stamford. You know that he’s coming next week.”

“Are you happy that you sold half of Director Enterprises?” Layla asked. “I know how hard you worked to get this company where it is.”

“Come here.” Preston waited while Layla came over to him and then pulled her down into his lap. “Director Enterprises is just a place of business. You and the baby mean more to me than this building.” He placed his hand on her slightly rounded stomach. He couldn’t stop the warm feeling that spread through his body.

“Preston, do you know how much I love you?” Layla asked as she placed her hand on top of his.

“I know that it can’t be more than I love you,” Preston whispered as he pulled his wife closer to his chest. “My life changed so much when you came into it.”

“For the better I hope,” Layla grinned. “I almost gave up on you.”

“You better believe it was for the better. I was all about work and making money until I looked into those big brown eyes of yours. I wanted you instantly and nothing was going to stand in the way of me winning your heart.”

“Is that how you remember our relationship?” Layla laughed tapping him in the middle of his chest. “I think your memory needs some refreshing.”

“Okay. How about we settle this at home in front of the fireplace?” Preston suggested. He lifted Layla off his lap and stood her up next to him.

“Oh. Can we have some popcorn and hot chocolate?” The words practically purred from his wife’s mouth and he couldn’t keep the smile off his face.

“Your wish is my command, Mrs. Scott.” Grabbing Layla by the hand, he escorted her from the room.

“What about all of that paperwork? Don’t you need to take it home with you?”

“No, it can stay there until tomorrow. I’ve more pressing things to do,” Preston answered closing the office door behind them.

“Like what?” Layla asked as she walked next to him.

“I need to take my beautiful wife home and make sure she understands how much she means to me.” Stopping in the middle of the empty office, Preston pulled Layla into his arms and planted a soft kiss on her mouth.

Chapter One

Stamford King sat in his car in the parking lot of Director Enterprises watching as the employees hurried through the door. He still couldn't believe that he was part owner of this international company. For years, he had been trying to make Preston Scott give him a piece of the action. But the only answer he got was a harsh no until last year when he got a call from Preston offering him half of the business.

He jumped at the chance to be part of the multi-million dollar business. However, he wasn't able to come when Preston wanted because he had a few loose ends to tie up. Coming from North Carolina to Marvel, Illinois was a huge change, but he was never one to back down from a challenge. In addition, he wanted something new in his life and this job was going to be it. It was time that he got over his past and moved on with his future.

Getting out of his car, Stamford made his way towards the front door and went inside the building. Once he got indoors he couldn't get over how vast the space was plus that Preston started this endeavor without the help of anyone else.

To do something like that took a lot of skill and finesse, two qualities that his new business partner possessed a lot of. Making his way to the elevators,

Stamford pressed the up button and a few minutes later the doors opened. He walked inside and as the doors were about to close he heard a feminine voice yell.

“Please hold the elevator.”

He quickly pressed the hold button and waited while the woman rushed on. She gave him a small smile as she stood next to him. “Thank you so much.”

“You’re welcome,” he replied as his finger let go of the hold button and then touched the number for the floor he was headed to.

From the corner of his eye, Stamford glanced at the woman next to him. She looked to be in her late twenties. She was wearing a red shirt and a pair of tan pants. The rich color brought out her beautiful brown skin and he was surprised that he even noticed her. Her black hair was pulled into a tight bun at the back of her neck making him wonder how long it was.

African American women usually never drew a second glance from him, because they never seemed interested in dating him back in North Carolina... However, something about *her* did make him want to strike up a conversation.

“I apologize I didn’t ask you what floor you wanted,” Stamford said looking at the goddess beside him. The light floral scent coming from her was intoxicating.

“Oh, I’m running late. I didn’t even think about telling you,” she apologized then grinned. “I’m headed to the tenth floor.”

Stamford pressed the number and wondered why he was so disappointed by the fact his elevator companion was about to get off. For some odd reason, he wanted her to stay on here a little longer with him.

“I’m sure your boss will understand.”

“Yeah right,” she frowned. “I doubt that. I’ll probably get a lecture. When it gets this close to the holiday season he doesn’t like for anyone to be late.”

“What department do you work in?” he asked as the elevator came to a stop and the doors opened.

“Thanks for holding the elevator,” his mystery lady said as she hurried off without answering his question.

He wanted to follow behind her but he had a meeting with Preston and he didn’t want to be late. Without a doubt, he would find out who the wonderful smelling woman was later.



“Did you have any problems finding my office?” Preston asked as he stood up and shook Stamford’s hand. “I know sometimes people forget to turn left after they get off the elevator.”

“No, I found it without a problem,” Stamford answered as he took a seat and glanced at the woman in Preston’s office. If he remembered correctly she was

Preston's wife and they had gotten married sometime last year after Christmas. There was a huge article in one of the business magazines about them.

"Are you going to introduce me to the pretty woman next to you?" Stamford asked, getting a huge smile from the woman he was looking at.

"Hi, I'm Layla Scott," she replied coming around the desk extending her hand.

Stamford noticed that she looked about five months pregnant. "Hello, I'm Stamford King, your husband's new business partner." He stood up, shook Layla's hand and then retook his seat.

"Very nice to meet you," she replied. "Preston has mentioned you. Well, I'm going to leave so the two of you can talk."

He watched as Layla went around the desk and kissed Preston on the cheek. He had to admit they did make a good-looking couple. The love on Preston's face for his wife made him look years younger.

"Are you still going down stairs to visit Bridget?" Preston asked as Layla moved away.

"Yes, I'm hoping that I can get her to go shopping with me later in the week. I want her to help me pick out a couple of new tops. The ones I have are getting too small."

“Do you know how pretty you look pregnant?” Preston asked as he ran his hand over his wife’s stomach.

“You keep telling me that, but wait until I get so huge that I won’t be able to move,” Layla sighed.

“I’ll still think you’ll be the most gorgeous woman I’ve ever seen.”

“Okay. I really have to go before Mr. King here thinks all you do is praise me.”

Stamford watched as Layla gave Preston another kiss and then left the room closing the door behind her. “Your wife is really nice. You’re a very lucky man.”

“I know. I never knew how much I could love someone until Layla came into my life. The baby is only going to add to our love,” Preston grinned at him. “Have you ever been married?”

“A long time ago, but it’s something that I don’t want to talk about.” He hated talking about his past. It brought up too many bad memories of the things that he had done wrong and didn’t want to relive.

Preston nodded at him. “I understand. How about we get started on some of the paper work I have for you? After that we can go through the departments and their employees. What we don’t get through I’ll save on a flash drive for you and you can take it home.”

“Sounds good to me,” Stamford agreed. “I want to know the ins and outs of this entire place before you introduce me to everyone. I know about the business aspects that’s why I wanted to become a part of it. However, I need to know more about the relationships you have with your staff.”



“Syeshia, I was surprised that you didn’t get into more trouble. Mr. Baker was really irate when you weren’t here earlier. What happened to you?”

Syeshia Jones slid her purse underneath the counter and started getting the piles of mail on her cart together. She loved Whitney, but she wasn’t in the mood to talk this morning. She was still thinking about the hunk she met in the elevator. He must be here visiting someone because none of the men that worked at Director Enterprises looked that good.

His short brownish-black hair was thick and spiked. The style brought out the ocean blue of his eyes and the sound of his voice almost made her cream her panties. However, she kept herself calm answering his questions as politely as she could. Lord, she had always been attracted to white men and the one from the elevator was *fine as hell*.

“I overslept and missed the bus. I had to wait until the next one came,” she answered, wishing her day was already over. She had left the small town of Bauer, Mississippi hoping to hit it big here. But she could only land a job in the mail room

of Director Enterprises. Sure the pay was good and she had an excellent benefits package, but she was a math whiz. She had hoped to land a job in the finance department.

“I can’t believe you won’t try to get a loan and buy a cheap car. I don’t know how you can stand riding that bus. Aren’t you nervous because of the people who ride it with you?” Whitney complained as she tossed a business magazine in her cart.

“I’m from a small town and most of the people there traveled by the bus. It isn’t that bad. Sometimes I meet some really interesting people on my ride to work.”

“You call them interesting and I think they’re probably creepy.”

Syeshia wondered how she had become friends with Whitney. Everything about them was so different. Whitney loved to spend her paycheck on her clothes and her nails. Instead of doing that, she always found a way to help the elderly lady in her building get some extra groceries when she ran out.

On the weekends, she volunteered at the homeless shelter. Having a lot of material things never really mattered to her. She would rather have nothing and be happy. She wasn’t raised to think that having lots of money made a person.

She would have stayed in her home town if her mother hadn’t made her swear to leave one day. Being the oldest of six kids, her mother gave up on her own

dreams to raise her younger siblings. Her mother had told her that she made a promise to herself that she wouldn't make any of her kids do that same thing.

Unfortunately two months after she graduated from college her mother had a gotten sick and had to be placed in a nursing home. Since she had never known her father and her aunts and uncles weren't any help to her. Syeshia had taken on her mother's increasing medical bills with odd jobs until they got to be too much.

So, she had to make the tough decision to move here for a better job and more pay. Every month she sent half her check back home for her mother's care.

Sure, it made it tough on her. But she never thought twice about it. Syeshia loved her mother more than anything in the world and would do anything for her.

"Did you hear anything I said?" Whitney asked, tapping her on the shoulder.

"I'm sorry. I just have a lot on my mind."

"Is there something wrong with your mom? I know you have been worried about her."

"No, she's fine. I talked to her doctor yesterday and she's doing a lot better. The extra money I've been sending is helping a lot with her treatment."

"You're a really good daughter," Whitney said. "I don't know if I could do that for my mother. We don't have the best relationship in the first place. She was never really there for me when I was a kid."

“My mother was the best when I was a little girl,” Syeshia smiled. “She would walk me to school and be waiting for me outside after the last bell rang. We did everything together. I don’t know what I would do if something happened to her.”

“Are you still planning to go and see her for Christmas?”

“Yes. I can hardly wait. She can’t speak all that well, but at least she knows who I am.” Syeshia finished stacking all the mail in her cart and then glanced at Whitney. “I have to hurry up and get this delivered. Do you want to have lunch together in the cafeteria later?”

“Oh. I wish I could, but I’m having lunch with Bruce,” Whitney sighed. “Hey, how about we have dinner tomorrow night? He’s going to be out of town.”

“Cool. Let me know what time and I’ll bring the dessert.” Syeshia moved past Whitney and hurried out the door.

Syeshia spent the better part of the day going from floor to floor delivering the mail. For the most part, the employers and employees at Director Enterprises were pretty nice to her. She had a good relationship with them too.

However, she had run into the few that constantly acted as if they got up on the wrong side of the bed. Usually, she just gave them a smile and moved on. She had too much going on in her life to let them get her down.

All while she was out delivering the mail a part of her was hoping to run into the man from this morning. He was really drop-dead gorgeous. His voice was deep with a sensual tone to it. A woman wouldn't get tired of him whispering in her ear. God, she really shouldn't be fantasizing about a man that was probably already taken. But she couldn't help it there was just something about him that drew her.

Turning the corner, Syeshia came to a sudden halt as she came face to face with Layla Scott. She still had a hard time believing that the CEO of Director Enterprises was married to a black woman. Layla was a lot younger than Preston, but she seemed like she loved her husband so much. One time on the way to the bus stop, she had seen them standing outside kissing each other. It must be wonderful to love someone that much.

"Good Morning, Mrs. Scott," Syeshia said.

"Syeshia, haven't I told you to call me Layla?"

"Yes, but it doesn't seem like I should be doing that."

"Why not?" Layla frowned.

"Your husband is my boss and I want to treat you with respect," Syeshia answered quickly.

"Please call me Layla. Preston is all about the Mr. and Mrs. Formalities. I'm not. I'm just plain old Layla."

Syeshia couldn't help but smile because Layla was really a sweet person. Most of her bosses in the past hadn't come close to having the money she did, but they demanded respect twenty-four seven. Mrs. Scott was standing there telling her to call her by her first name. She had heard how down-to-earth Layla was and now she was finding out how true it was.

"Okay. I think I can call you Layla," Syeshia replied. "How are you doing today?"

"I'm doing pretty well. Thank you so much for asking. How are you enjoying working here?"

"I have only been here about six months, but I've met a lot of wonderful people. Everyone has been really nice so far."

"Wonderful," Layla smiled. "You know that if you ever need anything just ask. I know Preston wants all of his employees to love their job."

Syeshia only smiled and didn't comment. There was no way she was going to Mr. Scott and complain about any problems she may be having. Layla was being really pleasant to her, but that didn't mean her husband would.

"I'll remember that," she said. "Well, I better get back to work. I'm running late and I still have a lot of mail to deliver."

Layla stepped to the side and let her pass. "Syeshia, you have a wonderful day and don't forget what I told you."

“I’ll remember,” Syeshia replied as she made her way down the hallway to the finance department.

After her conversation with Layla in the hallway, Syeshia’s day went by pretty fast, before she knew it was lunch time. Since Whitney already had plans with her boyfriend she decided to have lunch by herself in the cafeteria.

Money was so tight Syeshia couldn’t have the baked chicken with mashed potatoes and gravy like she wanted. So, she decided on a tuna fish sandwich with a bag of potato chips. Quickly, she paid for her food then took a seat in the back of the room.



Standing in line with his tray Stamford looked around the semi-crowded cafeteria for a place to sit. He had just gotten out of his meeting with Preston. Instead of going out to eat, he decided to get something to eat here. It would give him the perfect opportunity to see his employees.

Preston had wanted to send out a memo announcing that he was now part owner of Director Enterprises, but he told him to hold off on it. He wanted a chance to get to know everyone and get an honest opinion of them. If everyone found out too early, who he was they would clam up. He was big on first impressions. So, he didn’t want anyone to judge him before they got to know him.

He waited while the cashier rang up his food and then he handed her the money. After he had gotten his change back, Stamford headed for a table at the side of the room until he saw *her* sitting in the back. His heart sped up a little when he noticed that she was sitting alone. Without giving it a second thought he made a bee-line for her table. There was just something about her that he couldn't fight.

"Is someone sitting here?"

Rich brown eyes glanced up at him with surprise before a huge smile spread across her face. "No. You're more than welcome to join me."

Pulling out a chair, Stamford sat his tray down and took a seat. "I think before we go any further I should know your name. I didn't get it this morning."

"Sorry about that," she grinned, displaying perfect white teeth that looked beautiful against her dark complexion. "I was running late. I'm Syeshia Jones."

"What a lovely name," Stamford smiled.

"Are you going to tell me who you are?" Syeshia asked.

"Stamford King."

"Stamford King? Wow. I like that name it sounds very powerful."

Stamford had never been fond of his name until now. He loved how it sounded coming off of Syeshia's tongue. He shifted around in his chair as his cock

became immediately semi-hard. Never had he been instantly attracted to a woman like this before in his life and it felt a little strange.

“So, what are you doing here? Are you visiting someone or are you a new employee at Director?” Syeshia inquired and then took a bite of her sandwich.

Did he tell her the truth? Something about her made him not want to start off their relationship on a lie. As much as he wanted too he decided against it. He still wasn't ready for anyone to know who he was yet. It was best if he just told her part of what was going on.

“I'm here visiting someone. They offered me a tour of the place and I couldn't turn it down. This building is astounding. I jumped at the chance to see more of it.” Taking a bite of his chicken, Stamford noticed how relaxed he seemed around Syeshia and how much he enjoyed the feeling. He definitely wanted to get to know more about her. “So, are you going to tell me something about you? I'm assuming that you work here?”

“Yes, I work in the mail room. I'm hoping one day to work my way up to the finance department. I love working with numbers, but the job I wanted was already taken.”

He loved a smart woman. He couldn't put his finger on it, but something about an intelligent female always turned him on. “That's surprising. Most people hate working with figures and find ways to stay away from it.”

“Not me.” Syeshia grinned while shoving her empty plate away. “My mother used to take me to the store when I was a kid and I could figure up the total in my head. I have a thing for numbers. I don’t know where I get it from because no one else in my family does.”

“I heard that everyone has a gift. Maybe that’s your gift. Have you thought about applying for another job in the finance department? If you love working with numbers that much you shouldn’t be working in the mail room,” Stamford said. He wondered if Preston knew about this. He would have to mention it to him the next time they talked.

“I have but I’m not able to work those hours right now. The hours I have in the mail room fit my schedule better,” Syeshia answered before an odd look passed over her face.

“Is there something wrong?” Stamford wondered why she stared at him like that. Was there food on his face? Picking up his napkin, he ran it over his mouth and then placed it back on his plate.

“I can’t believe how comfortable I feel around you. I usually don’t open up like this with anyone I just met. I’m more reserved than this.”

“Maybe I have that quality about me. I don’t mind. I like listening to you talk. The sound of your voice is very soothing.” Hell, he could sit here all day and listen to Syeshia. While she calmed a part of him he was still throbbing from being

semi-hard. He had not felt this calm or relaxed before, ever that he could remember anyway.

Syeshia stood up and pushed in her chair before he could stop her. “Hmmm....I think I should go. My lunch break is over. It was nice to meet you Stamford.” She picked up her tray and left the table before he could stop her.

Chapter Two

Stamford read over Syeshia's personnel file for the third time growing more and more pissed by the minute. He was trying to find out more about the woman who had *peaked* his interest the second he laid eyes on her. He hadn't been interested in a woman like this before and he hated to admit it but it felt damn good.

Syeshia had a certain 'spunkiness' that he found very appealing. She didn't fawn over him like most women did. She looked him directly in the eye and had a conversation with him, but he felt like she was going to change his life for the better. Now all he had to do was get Syeshia to spend more than twenty minutes with him. She always seemed like she was on the go.

"I'm going to find a way to get her alone again tomorrow and maybe I can get her to have dinner or something with me," Stamford said as he exited out of the computer program. Preston had mentioned he would help him with anything at work. He might have to ask what his new partner knew about the adorable Ms. Jones.

Getting up from the table, Stamford grabbed his brandy off the top and headed over to the fireplace. Sitting down in his favorite chair, he watched the

flames as they danced across the logs. Pleased with the way he was fitting in at Director Enterprise, he smiled. Sometimes it was hard to leave one job for another one, but he couldn't say that about Preston's work place.

All the employees seemed really happy and energized to work there. He had a feeling that the new environment had something to do with Layla. He had heard in the past that Preston was a stickler for formality when it came to the workplace, but after he got married his whole attitude changed.

A part of him wondered if the love of a good woman could do that for him. Sure, he had women in his life but none of them had inspired him to become a better man. In reality, all they wanted from him was monetary things. He was ready for a woman to love him for who he was and not his riches.

He had a feeling that Syeshia was different from the females he used to know in North Carolina. It had to do with that openness that seemed to surround her.

Was he getting in over his head here? While he truly didn't know that much about Syeshia but he couldn't stop thinking about her. She could have a boyfriend or husband for all he knew. Did he want to think about Syeshia being with another man when he wanted her for himself?

"I can't believe that I'm home on a weekday and not working away on a report or something," Stamford said to himself. It felt kind of good to be part of a

business that was already a huge success. “The days of working sixty hours a week were over. I’m going to enjoy each day as it comes. I might even get a new interest in life.”

Yeah, and I don’t need three guesses to know what it is either, his mind thought. He shouldn’t think about Syeshia as a new project, because he was really fascinated about knowing more about her. All he had to do was get her to open up more. People in his past called him a closed book, but he was thinking he might have met his match with Syeshia and for some reason he loved that.

“Tomorrow is a new day and I’m going to see if I can get her to reveal more about herself. She’s a really attractive young woman and I truly think we could have a lot in common,” he said to himself.

Stamford finished off the rest of his drink and thought about a way to approach Syeshia tomorrow. He didn’t want come on too strong, but he was used to getting what he wanted and desired. Without a doubt she has become the object of his desire.



“It seems like we’re going to keep meeting like this.”

Syeshia froze at the sound of the deep voice behind her and took several deep breaths hoping to calm her nerves. She couldn’t get to sleep last night because of him and now here he was.

“Good Morning, Stamford,” she replied looking over her shoulder and then up. She loved a tall man and Stamford totally fit that bill. Today his black hair looked even sexier, it was like he had been running his fingers through it before he got to work. Plus the dark royal blue shirt brought out his eyes.

“Morning, Syeshia,” he replied and then smiled displaying perfectly white teeth any dentist would love “I’m not surprised to find you getting off the elevator this morning. Did you make it on time today?”

Syeshia turned around so she could face Stamford. Catching a quick whiff on his cologne she wondered what woman was lucky enough to be dating him. He was truly the total package. “Yes, I was even early today. So, I was very happy about that.”

“Since you’re in such a good mood why don’t we keep it going?” Stamford suggested in that deep voice she dreamed about at night.

“What do you have in mind?” Syeshia asked. She wouldn’t mind having lunch with him again. Stamford was so intriguing. He had a quality about him that she found attention-grabbing. He was a very charming man so she couldn’t help her attraction to him.

“I would love to take you out to dinner. I know this wonderful Thai place about two blocks from here. I’ve wanted to try it out for a while, but I hate to eat alone. I can pick you up at your house around six o’clock.”

The smile slowly slipped off Syeshia's face. Stamford wanted to come to her house? No, she couldn't let him see where she lived. Stamford probably never set foot in her neighborhood. Not that she lived in a bad part of town or anything, but she could tell from looking at him that he was used to the best things in life.

She was living paycheck to paycheck; she didn't have a lot of expensive things to impress him with. She still didn't know exactly what Stamford did here at Director Enterprises, but she knew it had to be something important. He didn't come across like he would take orders from anyone. He had to be the boss of something. She just didn't know of what.

"That wouldn't be a good idea. We don't know that much about each other. So, I don't think inviting you to my house is wise." Syeshia knew she was grasping at straws, but she didn't care. Stamford wouldn't fit into her world. He was fun to flirt with at work, but it wouldn't go any further than that.

He reeked of sophistication and she wasn't anywhere near that level. Sure she loved herself even being very proud of all of the things she accomplished. Like coming out here and landing a job so quickly. It wasn't exactly what she wanted, but it helped her pay her bills along with her mother's.

She couldn't go out and buy an expensive dress to impress the man standing in front of her. She would love to do things like that, but she couldn't so it was fine with her.

“I’m sorry. I can’t go out with you.” Syeshia tried to move around Stamford, but he stepped in her path.

“Care to tell me why?” he asked staring down at her with his piercing blue eyes.

“I have other plans,” she lied. “So, I can’t have dinner with you. Maybe we can have lunch tomorrow. See you later.” She started around Stamford again, but he stopped her by touching her arm.

“I don’t like hearing the word no. I know that we’ll have a good time. Since you have plans tonight I can move things around on my schedule. I can rearrange it so we can have dinner tomorrow night.”

Why didn’t Stamford understand that she couldn’t afford to go out with him? Not while she had all of this other stuff going on in her life. It was such a shame because she was really attracted to him. He was fine as hell. God, she wished that things were going better for her. She couldn’t remember the last time she bought a new dress.

“Sorry, the answer is still the same.” Syeshia removed Stamford’s hand from her arm and headed down the hallway. So deep in thought she never had a clue that Stamford watched her until she turned into the corridor.



Syeshia went on with her day delivering the mail secretly hoping to catch another glimpse of Stamford. Maybe she said no too hastily to his dinner request. It would have been nice to have gone out to a nice restaurant for once instead of eating leftovers.

She truly didn't know how much more meatloaf she could stomach for dinner. However, it was something that she could fix that would last her the entire week. Sure, her money was tight because of her mother's nursing home bills, but she never thought twice about paying them. How could she after everything her mom had done for her in the past? Hopefully, one day she would have enough money saved up to eventually have her mother moved here with her. She missed seeing her mother every weekend.

"Well, I can't change my mind now. I told him no and I have to stick to my decision. Besides, I'm not sure that he's even still here. I have no clue how long he works anyway."

As Syeshia made her way back to her work area, she glanced up at the clock in the hallway and cursed under her breath. "Damn it, I only have ten minutes to get my stuff cleared off my table and outside to the bus stop. I can't miss this last bus, because I don't have the extra money for cab fare home from here." Rushing back to the mail room, Syeshia prayed that she made it on time because if she did miss the bus she honestly didn't know what she was going to do.

Ten minutes later, she stood in the middle of the sidewalk watching in shock as the buses taillights faded into the distance as the December snow fell around her. What in the hell was she going to do now? She lived too far to walk home and she couldn't call Whitney because she was home sick with the flu. That was the reason she was running late tonight she had to get Whitney's mail along with her own mail, delivered today. Whitney had six more floors than she did.

Walking over to the bus shield, Syeshia went inside and took a seat. She wasn't there ten minutes before the cold started to ease in through her thin coat. Great, she thought. Not only was she hungry and tired. Now she was going to freeze to death. She would be a cute, chocolate Popsicle when they found her.

"God, could you please send me some help? I usually don't ask because I'm self-sufficient, but I'm at my wits end tonight and I really need you tonight."

The sound of a car driving up pulled Syeshia from her prayer. She froze as the tinted passenger window slid down and her heart pounded in the middle of her chest until a familiar dark head appeared at the window. "What are you doing out here in the snow and cold?" Stamford asked.

"I missed the bus," she replied rubbing her hands together. She was wearing gloves, but her fingers were almost frozen from the cold. "I was trying to figure out how I was going to get home."

“Well, your prayers have been answered,” Stamford grinned as he opened the passenger door. “Get in. I’ll give you a lift home.”

Syeshia didn’t have to think twice about it before she jumped up and got into the car. She closed the door behind her and almost moaned at the heated seats. Damn, she had to get a car like this. She didn’t realize how cold she was until now.

“Are you okay?” Stamford asked as she buckled her seatbelt.

“Yes, I’m fine,” she replied as he pulled out into traffic.

“You sure are,” Syeshia heard Stamford mumble under his breath. She decided to just leave his comment alone and enjoy the ride.

They had been driving for about five minutes before it dawned on Syeshia that Stamford hadn’t asked for directions to her house. Where was he taking her?

“Stamford, don’t you need directions to my house?”

“Ummm...I was hoping that you would reconsider and have dinner with me. Like I mentioned earlier I know this wonderful Thai place. We can get some take out and take it back to my place. I hate eating alone. Unless, you have someone to get home to that I don’t know about.” Stamford glanced at her from the corner of his eye.

The word *no* was right on the tip of her tongue, but she swallowed it back down. She wasn’t going to miss this opportunity to have dinner with Stamford. He

seemed interested in her and she sure as hell was attracted to him. This dinner wasn't a prelude for sex or anything, but it would give her a chance to get to know more about him.

"Sure, I would love to have dinner with you and no I don't have anyone at home waiting for me," Syeshia answered.

Stamford's huge smile made her stomach flip flop. "Excellent, I love that. At first, I thought you might be dating someone. I hope you know that I find you very beautiful and would like to get to know you better."

She wanted to jump at the chance, but she never moved this fast with a guy. "How about we enjoy dinner and see how it goes from there?"

Stamford stopped at a red light and looked over at her. "I think you have a deal Miss. Jones."

"Good, I'm glad that you agreed."

"Haven't you ever heard that the best things are worth waiting for?" Stamford asked as the light turned green and he continued to the restaurant.

Chapter Three

Relaxing her tired body against the back of the couch, Syeshia sipped on her glass of red wine while watching the flicker of the flames in the fire place. She was waiting for Stamford to change inside his bedroom. She couldn't believe how good the Thai food was. She never had Lahb Gai (Spicy Chicken Salad), Kaho Soy (Chang Mai-Noodles really a Thai Alfredo) or Pad Ga Pow (Stir Fried Basil with Meat) before. All of it was so delicious. Now she had to repay Stamford by inviting him to dinner at her house.

Their dinner date was turning out way better than she thought it would. Sometimes she over-analyzed stuff way too much, but it was part of her make-up. So, there was nothing she could do about it.

Syeshia took the rubber band out of her hair and let it brush the back of her neck. Pulling her legs up to her chest, she rested her chin on them. Stamford's house was so peaceful. The dark brown furnishings fit his mysterious personality perfectly. She wanted to know more about him, but she didn't want to come off as nosy by asking too many questions. She liked her privacy, so she tried not to butt into other people's business. When Stamford wanted to tell her more about his life he would.

“You look so relaxed in my living room. I’m really glad that you agreed to have dinner with me,” Stamford’s deep voice said behind her.

Syeshia glanced over her shoulder and her heart stopped in the middle of her chest. Stamford was standing behind her wearing a well-worn pair of jeans. They looked like they were made for his muscular body. A white shirt was unbuttoned displaying a light dusting of chest hair and the sleeves were rolled up displaying powerful forearms. His jet black hair looked even sexier brushed back off his forehead. She could see it was still slightly damp from his shower.

Lord, if she stayed here much longer she was going to turn into one of those girls her mother told her not to become.

“I had a nice time. Thanks for the invitation,” she whispered as she tried to calm down her beating heart.

Closing the distance between them, Stamford sat down next to her on the plush rug. The light scent of him mingled with cologne filled her senses. It wasn’t right for one man to look this hot without even trying. She really had to go before she made a fool of herself.

“I really should go,” she said placing her wine glass on the table in front of her. “It’s getting late and I have a lot I have to do tomorrow.” Syeshia started to get up only to have Stamford tug her back down next to him.

“Tomorrow is Saturday what is your big rush?” he asked running his fingers through her hair. “I was hoping you would stay a little longer. It’s only ten o’clock.”

Syeshia closed her eyes as Stamford continued to stroke her hair and massage her scalp with the ends of his fingers. It felt so good. She couldn’t remember the last time she was this comfortable. “Are you trying to seduce me with food and wine?”

“No. I’m not,” Stamford whispered by her ear. “But I do want something from you.”

Leaning away from his warm body, she stared into Stamford’s eyes. She could only imagine what he wanted. Did she judge him wrong? Was he not a nice as she first thought? Well, there was only one way to find out.

“What do you want from me?”

“A kiss,” he replied. “I’ve been dreaming about kissing those perfect lips of yours for a while. I swear I only want a kiss for now. Maybe after we get to know each other better it can turn into something more. Do you think you can agree to that?” The pad of his thumb ran over her bottom lip sending shock waves through her body.

Lord...when was the last time a man’s touch had made her want to come in her panties? She knew it was NEVER. Stamford was special and she wasn’t about to deny herself the chance to find out if he was a good kisser.

“I think I can agree to that,” she whispered.

Syeshia gasped when Stamford leaned back against the couch and pulled her between his spread legs. Cupping her head with his hand, he moved his head and then ran the tip of his tongue along the side of her mouth. She moaned in the back of her throat and pressed her chest closer to his.

“Do you know how good you taste?” Stamford asked. “It’s so much better than I could have ever dreamt. I could get lost in you and my tongue isn’t even inside your mouth yet.”

She didn’t know what to say. No man has ever said that to her before. It was like something out of the romance novels she used to sneak and read when she was a teenager. It warmed a part of her heart that she didn’t even know was cold.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

“Let’s see how much hotter it can get.” Stamford covered her mouth with his and slipped his tongue inside.

Chapter Four

His kiss was slow and thorough like he wanted to savor the moment as much as she did. The caress of his lips on her mouth sent a racing tremor along her entire body. Purring in the back of her throat, Syeshia wrapped her arms around Stamford's wide shoulders and shoved all her problems away.

Stamford's mouth didn't become softer as he kissed her. His tongue explored the inside of her mouth pushing her to give him a response. She was shocked at her own eagerness to give him what he wanted.

"Do you know how much I want this to go further?" His lips brushed against hers as he spoke.

Syeshia felt Stamford's erection poking into her stomach. She didn't doubt how much he wanted her. She was feeling the same way. Hell, it was probably ten times worse on her part.

"Do you want to go further right now? I don't mind," Syeshia said, playing with the top button on his shirt.

"Honey, I want you more than anything in the world. However, I'm a man of my word. I'm only going to take a kiss and nothing more."

She was totally taken aback that Stamford didn't want to make love to her, but secretly she was pleased. "Okay, I better leave. It's really getting late. I can call a cab. You don't have to drive me home."

Syeshia moved away from Stamford. Standing up, she ran her fingers through her hair before pulling it back into a ponytail. She had embarrassed herself enough tonight.

Stamford didn't waste a second before he was standing next to her. "What kind of host would I be if I let my attractive dinner date take a cab home? I didn't have any alcohol to drink. So, I'm perfectly capable of driving you home. Besides, I would love to spend some more time with you."

Leaning down, he placed a soft kiss on her mouth. "Let me grab my car keys. I left them in the bedroom and I'll take you home." He winked at her before he headed back in the direction of his bedroom.



"Are you sure that you don't want to come in for something to drink?"

Stamford tightened his grip on the steering wheel as Syeshia's words echoed in the car. God, he wanted to say yes so badly, but he couldn't. Syeshia was worth more than a night of hot, passionate sex.

He wanted to get to know the woman next to him. He had been fascinated by her from the moment she stepped into the elevator. Now, all he had to do was see how far things could go between them.

“Baby, I wish I could, but I can’t. I’m still turned on from the kiss back at my house. I wouldn’t be able to leave if we started kissing again.”

Syeshia nibbled at her bottom lip as she glanced at him from the corner of her eye. She looked so damn hot doing that. He couldn’t believe how quickly Syeshia could turn him on. He wasn’t going to ruin what he was trying to build with Syeshia by rushing into sex with her. He had done that in the past and ended up with less than perfect relationships. This time he was going to take things slow and see how well it would turn out. He wanted Syeshia with a passion he had never known, but he wasn’t going to make love to her just yet.

“Okay, I guess I’ll see you at work on Monday,” Syeshia said reaching for the car door.

“No, wait.” He leaned over and placed his hand on top of hers. An electric current shot through his body at the light touch. Shit, Syeshia was having an unbelievable effect on his body. He couldn’t let her leave like this. He could hear in her voice that Syeshia didn’t believe what he just told her.

“I was hoping that you would go out with me tomorrow. I was hoping we could have lunch and then maybe window shop. I love this time of year. I have always loved the Christmas holiday.”

A smile spilt Syeshia’s face making her even more gorgeous. “I would love to do that. I love this time of year too. I heard that it might even snow some more.”

“Wonderful, I’ll be here around eleven tomorrow to pick you up.” Stamford knew that he told Syeshia that he wouldn’t kiss her again, but he lied. He wasn’t about to leave without another taste of her.

Sliding closer, he pressed his mouth against the pulsing beat at the side of her neck and nibbled at the skin lightly. He slowly worked his way up her neck before covering her soft mouth with his.

Parting her lips, Syeshia raised herself to meet his kiss. Moaning as she slid her fingers through his hair slightly scratching his scalp. Stamford felt his cock hardened in his jeans at her touch. Shit, he was too old to be making out in a parked car. He kissed Syeshia a few more times before he moved back.

God, he could become addicted to this woman. “I swear I’m going to keep my word now.” Stamford squirmed around in his seat trying to get some relief from his erection. “I’m not going to kiss you again tonight.”

“Do you think I believe you?” Syeshia asked grinning at him.

“I’m serious this time,” he said staring at her. “I’m going home to take a long cold shower.”

“Are you sure I can’t tempt you into one more little kiss?” Syeshia asked as she ran her hand along his thigh. She came within inches of his stiff cock before she stopped.

“Stop trying to seduce me,” Stamford growled running his thumb across her swollen mouth. “I’m trying to be a good guy here and you’re making it hard for me to not take you upstairs and make love to you all night long.”

Syeshia’s pink tongue came out and licked his thumb before she slid away from him. “Fine, I’ll go inside and take a cold shower too. But I’ll be thinking about you tonight when I’m in bed.” She opened the door and got out of the car.

Stamford fought back the urge to follow Syeshia. He watched her until she got to the door. She turned around and waved at him. He waved back and waited until Syeshia was inside before he started the car and drove away. All the way home all he could think about was how he was going to win over the delectable Syeshia.

Chapter Five

Stamford stood back and watched as Syeshia window shopped without asking him to buy her a single thing. Sure she didn't know how wealthy he was. God, he hadn't even told her that he was half owner of Director Enterprises yet. Hell, none of the employees knew and he wanted to keep it that way a little longer.

He liked having the ability to walk around his employees without them trying to hide their opinions from him. He got a lot from their views about the work place in the elevator in the morning. He had a meeting with Preston later on in the week. He wanted to go over a few things. However, he was spending the day with Syeshia and work was going to be the last thing on his mind.

Spotting Syeshia looking at a necklace through a shop window, he walked over to her and wrapped his arms around her waist. "What are you looking at gorgeous?" he asked placing a kiss beneath her ear. He loved the scent of vanilla that clung to her skin.

"Oh, I'm just looking at this necklace," she replied, pointing to a silver necklace with a tear drop amethyst stone hanging from it.

Stamford couldn't believe Syeshia wanted such a simple piece of jewelry. There were a lot more expensive pieces in that case and he didn't mind getting them for her. Most women wanted diamonds and pearls and never had a problem asking him to buy it for them.

"Do you want me to buy it for you?" he inquired, brushing his cheek against Syeshia's smooth one. He realized that he had made a mistake when she stiffened in his arms. She moved his hands from her body and stepped away from him.

"Syeshia, what did I say?" Stamford asked as he grabbed her hand. He couldn't let her walk away from him mad. This day was going too well and he didn't want it to end like this. He couldn't recall the last time he enjoyed a woman's company this much.

"Stamford, I'm not dumb. I can tell that you're a wealthy man. I don't know if you were born into it or if it's self-made. But that doesn't mean every time I look at something I want you to buy it. Sure, I didn't have a lot coming up as a kid. However, I had love and material things aren't overly important to me.

"Now, I am a woman and sometimes I do wish I had more money to buy a sexy dress every once in a while, but I don't let it bring me down because I can't. I like being with you because I like you. Not for what you might be able to buy me." Syeshia removed his hand from her arm and walked a few feet ahead of him.

Stamford stood shell-shocked for a second or two. He had never had a woman say that to him before. Syeshia was just as rare as he thought she was. She just proved that she was the kind of woman that he needed in his life. Her little speech just pushed her deeper into his heart. He wanted to be the man that would give her everything she missed out on as a child. He had to show her that she was worth that necklace and so much more.

“Syeshia, you’re a special woman and I’m going to do everything in my power to show you how much,” Stamford swore to himself as he hurried through the crowd to catch up with her.

Chapter Six

“So, how are things going with you? Have you found everything to your liking? Is it a lot different here than back in North Carolina?” Preston asked. “Sorry, I haven’t had a chance to talk to you before now. I’ve been busy helping Layla shop for baby clothes.”

“Don’t worry about it. I’ve been getting acquainted with the employees,” Stamford answered, thinking about the nice time he had with Syeshia two days ago at the park after they left the mall.

“Yes, I’ve heard that you’ve been spending time with Syeshia Jones,” Preston chuckled.

Stamford sat up straighter in his seat and glared at Preston. “Do you have a problem with that?” He wasn’t about to stop dating Syeshia for this job. If his partner had a problem with his relationship then Preston would have to deal with it.

“Calm down, Stamford,” Preston said. “I like Miss Jones, she’s a hard worker and very intelligent. I’m surprised that she is in the mailroom. She seems like she would be working in a different department.”

He wondered if he should say anything about the conversation he had with Syeshia. She had mentioned how she wanted a job in the finance department. He totally agreed with Preston. Syeshia was smart as hell and deserved to be out of that mailroom and he was going to help her anyway that he could.

“I heard that Syeshia wanted a job in the finance department when she first applied here, but there weren’t any jobs available so she took the mail room position instead.” Stamford noticed the frown that marred Preston’s forehead after the words left his mouth. “Is there a problem?”

“Yes, there’s a problem. I’ve been trying to fill a position in that department for three months now. But Norman told me that there weren’t any qualified applicants here.”

“Do you know if Syeshia has the experience you’re looking for?” Stamford asked. He would love to help Syeshia land this job. It would increase her pay enormously. With the added pay she would be able to move out of that neighborhood she lived in. Not that it was in a bad part of town, he just didn’t like how easy it was to get inside of her building.

Plus with the lack of lighting it wasn’t safe for his woman. Wait, when did Syeshia become his woman? They had only been on two dates and shared a few kisses. She might only think of him as a friend. He would have to find out what she thought of him later because he wanted more than a friendship with her.

“Stamford, are you listening to me?” Preston’s voice broke through his thoughts.

“Sorry, I was thinking about something,” he answered. “Can you repeat what you said?”

A knowing grin passed over Preston’s face. “Don’t worry. I was the same way when it came to Layla. She was on my mind a lot. I couldn’t get her out of it.”

“Did you fall in love with her instantly? Like love at first sight?” Stamford saw a light come on in his friend’s eyes and it made him look ten years younger.

“I think I did, but I was too caught up in the past to admit to it at first. It almost cost me the love of my life, but I made everything right and convinced Layla to marry me. I don’t know what my life would be without her now. I love her so much.”

Stamford knew his feelings were starting to go in that direction for Syeshia. After their date the other day, he went home and his mind was totally focused on her instead of the quarterly reports that Preston had given him to look over. He was determined to make her see that they could be good together. As much as he didn’t want to, Stamford dragged his inner thoughts away from Syeshia and focused on what Preston was telling him.

“Okay, back to what I was saying earlier,” Preston said. “I’m going to look over Syeshia’s application and see if she has what I’m looking for. If she does I’ll give her an interview.”

“Good, but don’t let Syeshia know I had anything to do with it, he said, worried about her reaction. “She has this thing about hand-outs. I want her to think she got this interview on her own.”

Preston studied him like he didn’t quite agree with his request. “You are going to tell Syeshia who you are, aren’t you? She needs to know sooner rather than later. Take my advice, being secretive will only get you in trouble later.”

“Of course, but right now I want to enjoy the newness of the relationship. I love Syeshia’s openness. I don’t want her to be guarded around me. You know her attitude will change after she finds out about me being a partner here.” Stamford wasn’t about to come clean until he was sure Syeshia wouldn’t overreact to the news.

“I understand, but don’t wait too long to tell her,” Preston advised. “I know I said it already but take my advice. I know what I’m talking about.”

Stamford heard what Preston was telling him, but he still wasn’t ready to tell Syeshia. He would but not right now. “I better go. I have something to take care of.” He stood up and left thinking about the advice Preston had given him.

Turning the corner, Stamford stopped in his tracks at the sight of Syeshia talking to a handsome African American guy in the middle of the hall. The man looked closer to her age than he was. His gut clenched when Syeshia gave him a hug followed by a kiss on the cheek. He stood there until the guy got on the elevator and the door closed behind him.

Walking up behind Syeshia he whispered in her ear. “Who was that guy and why in the hell did you kiss him?”

Syeshia flinched at the sound of his voice and then spun around. “Are you spying on me?” she asked, staring up at him from her five feet three inches.

“Answer my question first.” Stamford hated feeling jealous, but he was. He wasn’t fond of Syeshia kissing another man and he wanted to know who in the hell the guy was. He hadn’t officially staked a claim on Syeshia, however, he wasn’t going to let some young guy steal her away from him.

“What if I don’t?” she shot back.

Chapter Seven

Wrapping his hand around Syeshia's arm, Stamford pulled her into an empty office and closed the door locking it behind them. He pressed her back against the door and moved closer until his chest touched hers.

"Sweetheart, I've had a long day and I don't like coming down the hallway finding my woman with another man. Do you want to tell me who he is? Should I be worried someone is trying to steal you away from me?"

"When did I become your woman? I thought we were only friends," Syeshia said, looking into his eyes.

Stamford loved how dark Syeshia's eyes were. They reminded him of a rich cup of coffee and he loved a good cup of coffee. He could look into them forever and never get tired. He had never been jealous of other men before because he was always confident. However, seeing Syeshia with that younger man made him a little nervous. He wasn't as young as he used to be Sure, he looked damn good for forty-one, but Syeshia was at least ten years younger than him.

What if she only saw him as a friend?

She might not be interested in dating an older man. She was intelligent, beautiful and gorgeous enough to stop a man in his tracks on the sidewalk, but that didn't mean she wanted to share any of that with him.

No, he wasn't going to let his mind go down that road. Syeshia was interested in him, because if she wasn't she would have never responded to his kisses like she had the last couple of days.

"This makes you my woman," he growled before capturing her mouth with his.

Stamford didn't give Syeshia a chance to respond before he slid his tongue between her lips. He hadn't been kissing her five seconds before she wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him back.

He felt his cock swell and press against the front of his slacks. Picking Syeshia up, he wrapped her legs around his waist and rubbed his erection against her. He didn't miss the soft whimpers coming from the back of her throat.

Breaking the lip lock, he planted soft kisses along her jaw bone. "Baby, I want you so bad. I can't wait until we make love."

"Stamford, I want you too," Syeshia moaned rubbing her lower body against his. "I'm so tired of waiting."

The way his cock was throbbing Stamford almost broke down and agreed, but he couldn't. Syeshia wasn't expecting him to pull her into this office and kiss

her senseless. Besides, he wanted their first time to be at his house not against a door in a dark office at night. He respected her way too much for that.

Unwrapping Syeshia from his body, he planted her feet back on the floor and kissed her. “Baby, I’m sorry about that. I didn’t mean for it to get out of hand like that,” Stamford apologized. Moving away from her, Stamford turned around and ran his fingers through his hair. He needed to calm down his throbbing body.

“Why do you keep doing that?” Syeshia asked moving away from the door and standing behind him. “Do you enjoy getting me all hot and then leaving me that way?”

Spinning around, Stamford pulled her against his chest. “No, I’m not getting any pleasure out of this. But I want our first time together to be like fireworks. I want to have all the time in the world to love your body.”

He felt Syeshia’s smile against his shirt and couldn’t keep a grin from spreading across his own face. He was proud that he was controlling his intense emotions when it came to this woman in his arms. He didn’t want to ruin anything by coming on too strong. The last thing he wanted to do was scare her out of his life.

“I have never met someone like you before,” Syeshia said, stepping away from him. “Men back in my home town wouldn’t have turned me down once let alone twice.”

Stamford shoved down his panic. Was he doing something wrong? Did Syeshia want him to be more aggressive? He could because he wanted to make love to her so bad that he could taste it.

“Is that a good or bad thing?”

“Oh, it’s a good thing because I really like the man I’m getting to know.”

“Do you want to tell me more? What do you like the most about me? Is it my blue eyes? My good looks?” he teased.

Laughing, Syeshia shook her head at him and went around his body to open the door. “I’ve got to go I’ll be ready to leave when you are.”

Stamford followed Syeshia out the door to watch her until she turned in the direction of the steps. It took a lot of coaching on his part before she finally agreed to let him drive her to and from work. She didn’t understand that he was trying to make her a permanent part of his life. She was making him look forward to this Christmas holiday.

Being around Syeshia was almost making him forget about how horrible last year’s Christmas turned out for him. He really needed to come to terms with it but he couldn’t. He still felt like what happened was his fault. That was the main reason he left North Carolina in the first place. He should go back, but he didn’t have enough strength to do it. He wasn’t ready to come to terms with what happened.



“You never told me who that guy was from the hallway,” Stamford whispered next to her ear as he grabbed a brownie off the plate in front of her.

“Are you jealous?” Syeshia asked. Pivoting, she leaned her back against the counter and looked up at Stamford. After work they decided to come to her apartment instead of his house. She still felt a little uncomfortable with him here. Her tiny apartment could fit in Stamford’s living room.

Yet, he acted like her place as the best place in the world. However, she was lucky enough that they didn’t run into any of her crazy neighbors. She loved them dearly and thought their ludicrousness was cute and funny, but Stamford seemed too reserved to find some of it funny.

“Yes, I’m jealous,” he answered licking the crumbs from the brownies off his fingers. “I don’t want you kissing any man other than me.”

“It wasn’t a big kiss,” Syeshia sighed looking at him. “I was just congratulating him on something. I’ve know Bruce for a while.”

“Bruce...so that’s his name,” Stamford exclaimed. “Well, I don’t like him and I’ll make it a point of telling him to keep his distance from you.”

She liked the warm feeling that coursed through her body at Stamford’s jealousy. He was showing signs of wanting a deeper relationship with her than she first thought. Stamford was the type of man she had been wanting for a long time.

However, she couldn't let him think he could tell her who her friends were. A little jealousy was nice, but too much wasn't good at all.

"You have nothing to worry about. Bruce is Whitney's boyfriend and he was telling me that he proposed to Whitney and she said yes. They have been dating for almost a year."

"Good...I'm glad to hear it because I'm enjoying getting to know you and I don't want anything to prevent us from becoming closer," Stamford said stepping towards her until his body was brushing hers. "Do you know how sexy you are?"

Syeshia loved how Stamford was always giving her compliments. He constantly made her feel like the most important woman in the world. She had never met anyone like him before. He was almost too good to be true.

"No, why don't you tell me how sexy I am," she flirted back.

"When I first saw you all I could think about was kissing you. Your lips just fascinated me. I never dated a woman with a mouth as perfect as yours. They're naturally full without anything having been done to make them that way." The tips of Stamford's fingers trailed slowly across her bottom lip.

The light touch made a tingling start in the pit of her stomach. It slowly worked its way through her body until her heart jolted and her pulse pounded. She tried to relax the sizzling current racing through her, but her attraction to

Stamford was too strong. It was like he was in her blood and she didn't know how to get him out.

Her intense reaction to Stamford was strange, because most men she dealt with never got her this off track. She usually stayed focused on what she had to do and got the job done. However, all she could think about now was spending all her free time with Stamford. He hadn't made it official that they were a couple, but she was hoping he would. Hell, she was already thinking about his Christmas present and that was still weeks away.

"You don't play fair," she whispered, softly. "I thought we weren't going to do this anymore. I had the hardest time getting myself back under control earlier after we did this."

Stamford gave her a sly grin. "I'm not doing anything but giving an attractive woman a compliment. Don't you like hearing that you make me hard just from a look?"

She tried not to be swayed by Stamford's words, but he was a very handsome and charming man. So, she couldn't help it. It felt wonderful hearing that he was drawn to her. A man like Stamford wasn't going to cross her path every day. Now, she wasn't saying that she couldn't get a good man if she wanted. However, Stamford possessed a quality that most men she came across lacked. He

seemed like an honest and dependable guy. If she needed him to be there for her he would, yet on the other hand if she desired some space he would give it to her.

God, it was so hard for her not to tell Stamford how much she was dying to be with him. Most nights she couldn't get enough sleep because her dreams....no *fantasies* were filled with him making love to her all night long. She really wished that was one dream that would come true.

"Well, if I have the ability to turn you on from one look. What are you going to do about it?" Syeshia's fingers unbuttoned two buttons on Stamford's shirt and slipped her hand inside. She moaned as his chest hair brushed across her palm. She loved when a good-looking man had a hairy chest. It just did something to her body. She didn't want to say it made her horny as hell, but the truth was that it did make her cream in her panties a little more.

"Stamford, I want you," she confessed as she undid the rest of the buttons and pushed the shirt off his wide shoulders. "Why don't you want to go to the next step?" A gasp flew from Syeshia's lips as Stamford lifted her up and sat her on the counter behind them.

"This is why," Stamford growled as he grabbed her hand and wrapped it around his straining cock. The heat of him came through his slacks and burned her fingers.

“I want to be buried so deep inside of you that you’ll scream with pleasure. I want to see how your face looks when you come around my cock. It’s killing me to keep pushing you away, but I don’t want to rush you into something you aren’t ready for. I know we haven’t known each other that long. However, if you tell me you want the same thing I’ll make this a night for you to remember.”

Syeshia purred in the back of her throat as Stamford’s cock jerked in her hand. It was blowing her mind that she was holding him like this. The reality of him was so much hotter than her daydreams. If he felt this good through his clothes how amazing would his skin feel in her hand with nothing between them?

She was a little more than nervous. Her hand was barely able to hold his erection now. How would it be to have it inside of her? Would it stretch her until she screamed with pleasure? Could she keep up with Stamford the way he might want? He was older and was bound to have more experience than her. God, she was dying like hell to find out how good he was.

“I’m waiting for an answer,” Stamford said. His hand slipped under her skirt and past her underwear.

The thickness of his fingers inside of her body was driving her crazy. Stamford was making her want to beg for the release she knew only he could give her.

“Yes...please Stamford, make love to me. I can’t wait anymore,” she begged.

A shiver shot through her as Stamford lifted her off the counter and carried her out of the room. “Princess, your wish is my command. Tell me where your bedroom is,” his warm voice whispered next to her ear.

Syeshia didn’t give herself a chance to second guess herself. For once she was going to live in the moment and take pleasure in it. Stamford wanted to be with her and she sure in the hell wasn’t going to tell him no.

“It’s down the hallway, the first door on the left,” she answered, wrapping her arms around his neck.

Chapter Eight

Inside her bedroom Stamford slid her down his body until her feet touched the floor. Syeshia stood there looking up into the eyes of the man she was slowly losing her heart to. She wasn't one to believe in Prince Charming and Happily Ever After, because she had to struggle so much to get where she was today. However, after spending these past few days with Stamford a part of her was starting to believe.

"Do you know how beautiful you are?" Stamford asked, brushing her hair away from her cheek. "I could stare into your eyes and get lost forever."

"Why don't you show me how beautiful I am?" she asked, running her hands down Stamford's chest until her fingers touched his belt buckle.

"Sweetheart, don't do that," Stamford's voice moaned above her head. "I won't be able to make it last if you touch me like that."

Did he really mean that her little touch could make him lose control like that? Could she actually make this hunk in front of her weak in the knees? That thought was so powerful!

"I want this night to be a night that I'll remember for the rest of my life. Can you make that happen?" Syeshia inquired.

Picking her back up, Stamford laid her down on the bed and stared at her like she was the most precious thing in his life. “Syeshia, I can make that happen. I promise you’ll love the memory I’m going to leave you with.”

Stamford covered her body with his and a second later his lips nibbled at her neck. She felt on fire as he worked his way down her body removing clothing as he went. “Shit, baby your body is so damn perfect,” he groaned as his hands cupped her breasts.

Syeshia squirmed on the bed as Stamford pulled a hard nipple into his waiting mouth and sucked. She felt like she was burning up as Stamford slipped two fingers inside her wetness.

“Hell, babe,” his deep voice growled as Stamford let go of her breast. “You’re so damn tight. So tight. God, I don’t know how much longer I can wait until I’m inside of you.”

“Please, don’t make me wait,” she begged as her body thrashed around on the bed. “I have built this moment up for so long that I’m about to scream.”

“You want me that bad, do you?” Stamford teased as he thrust another finger into her body.

“Yes, I do and I thought you wanted me, too.” Syeshia whimpered as she spread her legs wider trying to get his fingers to go deeper.

“Oh princess, don’t ever doubt how much I want you,” he said as he removed his fingers and stood up.

Syeshia didn’t have a chance to miss him before Stamford was covering her naked body with his. “Are you sure about this?” his warm breath moved over her mouth as Stamford asked her one last time about making love.

Without a shadow of a doubt, she was positive about this. She wanted Stamford more than any man in her past. He was the one. “Yes, I want you buried deep inside me until I know nothing else.”

“Thank God,” he muttered before he thrust into her.

She wasn’t ready for the shocking pain that shook her body as Stamford took her virginity. Syeshia felt him become completely still as he cupped her face in his hands and stared into her eyes.

The shock of her innocence was plain and clear in his dark blue eyes. “You were a virgin,” he whispered as she tried to block out the pain.

“Yes,” she answered as she moved around trying to ease some of the discomfort.

“Syeshia, please stay still,” Stamford begged as his big body shuddered above her.

“Why?” she asked moving her hips again. The pain as going away and the sensation of Stamford inside of her was beginning to feel pretty good.

“I want you to get used to me. If you keep moving like that I’m going to lose control. I don’t want your first time to be a bad memory.”

Syeshia couldn’t help it. She moved her hips again. Stamford was so thick and having him buried so deep inside of her was a delicious feeling. “It won’t be if you stop talking and make love to me,” she said, trailing her hand over Stamford’s sweaty back.

“I’m done talking,” he promised as his hips moved. All the while he thrust in and out of her at a leisurely pace. The slowness at the way he was making love to her was driving her crazy and the devil knew it.

“Please, Stamford, give me what I need,” she panted as she worked her hips in tempo with his.

His eyes widened in surprise like he was stunned to hear the words coming from her mouth. “Are you sure?” he asked as his grip tightened on her thighs.

Stamford’s body was tense like he was ready for action. Sweat dripped from him onto her chest. It was more of a turn on than she ever thought possible. “Positive,” she replied.

A low moan filled the bedroom as he plunged inside of her like she had wanted for a while now. Capturing her mouth with his Stamford slipped his tongue inside and the pleasure in her body grew as he built up his pace and kissed her senseless.

She pushed against him to get the release she felt building up in her body. If she had any clue it would be this enjoyable she wouldn't have said no to Stamford all of those times in the past.

"This is so good," Syeshia panted the second Stamford stopped kissing her.

"It's only going to get better." Stamford arched his hips and drove deeper into her sending her into a frenzy. She moved beneath him as her orgasm started to hit. Her cries echoed through the bedroom as her release rocketed through her body.

Stamford's body tensed up and his voice roared with his orgasm two seconds behind her. "It has never been this good," he panted as his body collapsed on hers.

Syeshia ran her fingers through Stamford's slick hair as her body shivered from the wonderful aftershocks. "I thought it was pretty good myself," she agreed as he rolled to the side and pulled her against his damp body.

"I'm glad you did, Princess," he whispered kissing the side of her temple. "Maybe if you're up to it later we can have another go at it."

Her body grew moist at the thought be making love with Stamford again. However, she knew she wasn't up to it tonight. "I'm not going to be able to do it again. I'm worn out," she confessed.

Stamford chuckled as his arms wrapped around her. “I thought you might be. How about I just hold you and we can talk until you fall asleep?”

“Are you going to leave?” she asked as Stamford covered their damp bodies with a sheet.

“I won’t until you’re asleep. I wish I could stay, but I don’t have a change of clothes here.”

“That’s okay. I’ll understand if you want to leave now.” She was used to being independent. She didn’t want him to think she was going to turn into a clingy female now.

“Sorry, you’re stuck with me until you close those beautiful brown eyes and let the sandman take over.” Tucking her closer to him, Stamford ran his hand down her back, “Now why don’t you tell me more about yourself.”

“There isn’t much to tell. I’m an only child and I moved here to get a better job to help my mama who’s in a nursing home.”

“Why is your mother in a home?”

“She got sick after I graduated from school and I was taking care of her until it got to be too much. It killed me to put her in a home. I promised her that when I got enough money saved up that I would move her here with me.”

“Baby, I’m so sorry you’re going through this. Is there anything I can do?”

“No, I have enough money saved up and I’m going to see her for the Christmas holiday. I already asked for time off and Mr. Scott gave it to me.”

“When are you going to leave?” Stamford asked.

Syeshia sensed a change in Stamford and wondered what it was about. Was he disappointed that she wasn’t going to be here for Christmas? They hadn’t discussed anything about doing something for the holiday together.

“I couldn’t get a flight earlier than Christmas Eve. Do you have plans for Christmas with your family?”

Stamford moved away from her and sat up in the bed. He ran his fingers through his hair a couple of times before he looked down at her. “Syeshia, I have something to tell you and I don’t know how to say it.”

Sitting up on the bed, Syeshia wrapped the sheet around her body and laid her hand on Stamford’s arm. “Just tell me. I’m sure whatever it is it’s not as bad as you’re making it out to be.”

“Really,” he said capturing her eyes with his. “What if I told you that I killed my son a week before Christmas last year?”

Chapter Nine

Stamford watched as a mixture of emotions played over Syeshia's face. He knew that she didn't know what to say. How could anyone after the bombshell he just dropped?

"What do you mean? I know that you really didn't physical kill your son. So, do you want to tell me what happened?"

His throat closed up at the thought of telling her about Adam. How could he tell Syeshia that he drove his only child to his death? No matter what anyone said him not being there for his son is what caused him to die so young.

"Come on, I'm here for you. Tell me what happened," she encouraged.

Swallowing a couple of times, he tried to get rid of the bitter taste that suddenly developed in his mouth. He had to get himself under control. He really hadn't talked about it since it that fateful day. However, he was ready to talk about it with her.

"Adam's mother and I got divorced when he was eight years old. I don't think he ever got over it. He lived with his mother until he turned thirteen and then he moved in with me.

“Why did he move in with you? Was he having problems with his mother and decided to come and stay with you?”

“I think Adam wanted to spend more time with me since he was getting older. I was overjoyed that my son wanted to rebuild our relationship. I had been trying for years, but he kept turning me down. So, when I got the phone call from him I thought I was finally getting another chance to show Adam that I could be a good father.”

“Sounds like everything was starting off on a good foot, what happened?”

God, he didn't know where things went wrong between him and Adam. He was so happy when his son moved in and started calling him Dad again instead of by his first name. But after three years Adam seemed to distance himself more and more from him.

“At first, everything was perfect and I was finally getting to know my son. However, after Adam turned sixteen things started to go bad. I would give him a time to be home and he came home two hours late. I thought he was just acting out, so I let it go the first couple times. Yet, when he stayed out all night long and waltzed in early the next morning. I knew I had to do something. So, I enrolled him in military school.”

“Did he like it there?” Syeshia asked. “I'm not sure I could have sent my son away like that.”

He thought it was a good idea at the time. Adam needed something and his son wasn't getting it from him. At the time, the military school seemed like a perfect situation for the both of them.

"My parents sent me to the same military school when I was having problems. It turned me around. I was hoping it would do the same for him, but I was wrong."

Stamford paused wondering if he could go on. This was so hard for him. Maybe he had been too strict on his only child. Was Adam just going through the normal teenaged problems and he wasn't smart enough to see it?

"You can't keep this in." Sliding her fingers through his hair, Syeshia helped relieve some of the stress in his body. "Get it out."

"Adam was home on break from the military academy. For an early Christmas present his mother had gotten him a motorcycle. I thought he was too young to have one and I told him I would get him one when he turned twenty-one. However, his mother thought I wasn't being fair to him and bought him one anyway.

"We had been fighting for almost three days straight about how he shouldn't ride on the roads yet. They were still slick from the weather, but he didn't want to listen to me. I knew he wasn't experienced or mature enough for

the bike. Adam got pissed when I told him this and stormed out of the house. He got on the bike and sped off.”

His heart clenched in his chest as the memory came rushing back to him. He shouldn’t have fought with Adam about the bike. If he hadn’t his son would still be here.

“Are you going to be able to finish?”

Stamford would never forget that knock on the front door. It was the day that his world ended. “I had been trying to reach him on his cell phone. I was hoping that he had pulled over to the side of the road and calmed down. For the love of God, I wish that had happened, but it didn’t. Adam had been so pissed off at me that he drove through a red light and got hit by a truck. He was killed instantly.”

Syeshia’s gasp of surprise didn’t come as a shock. He wasn’t taken aback by it. She was thinking the same thing everyone in his home town thought. She thought he was a horrible parent who caused his child’s death.

“Oh, sweetheart, I’m so sorry that happened to you.” Wrapping her arms around his body, Syeshia kissed him and didn’t say another word. Her silence was the best medicine anyone could have ever given him. It felt like the weight of the world have been lifted off his shoulders.

“Let’s laid down and get some rest.” Pulling him down beside her on the bed, Syeshia rested her head on his chest. “Thank you for sharing that with me. I know it had to be hard. I don’t want you to blame yourself for Adam’s accident.”

”Yes, it was an accident, but it’s so difficult for me not to blame myself,” he confessed, softly. “I keep thinking if I hadn’t been so hard on Adam. He would never have stormed out of the house that night. I know he had an anger problem and I should have worked on getting him in counseling for it.”

“Sweetheart, it wasn’t your fault. It was a horrible accident that happened. I know Adam wouldn’t want you to have these feelings. Despite what he might have said to you on that day he loved you,” Syeshia said trying to give him some comfort.

“I know, but it’s still hard on me. My ex-wife doesn’t even speak to me now. I was so devastated about Adam’s death that I almost didn’t tell you. I didn’t want to see the hurt or maybe blame in your eyes when you looked at me,” Stamford confessed.

“I’m glad that you cared enough about me to share it. I don’t want any secrets between us. The best kind of relationship is an open and honest one. Do you want to talk more about it? I’m here for you. I’m a great listener, and I promise I won’t judge you.”

No, he wanted some time to himself to think about things. He just dumped a lot on Syeshia and he wasn't ready to confess anything else tonight. "I think I want to think for a while," Stamford said pressing her closer to his body. "Why don't you try to get some sleep?"

"If you're sure," she retorted. Snuggling closer to him, Syeshia's body slowly started to relax, within minutes she was sound asleep.

Stamford didn't know how long he stayed awake after Syeshia drifted off to sleep. She was truly the best thing that had come into his life in a long time. Her openness and honesty is what made her so special to him. However, would he still be able to hold her in his arms like this after he told her who he was? Or would he be spending another Christmas miserable and alone?

Chapter Ten

“Baby, you’ll never guess what happened to me today,” Syeshia gushed the second she opened the door to her apartment.

Walking inside, Stamford kissed his woman before closing the door behind him. He was trying to talk Syeshia into moving in with him, but she wasn’t having it. She said they still needed to get to know each other better first. Why couldn’t they get to know each other better with her living under the same roof as him?

“Tell me,” he said taking off his coat and gloves. He placed his coat on the rack by the door and laid his gloves on the table. He listened to the sounds of the Christmas music that filled Syeshia’s small apartment. It was still weeks away but she had started celebrating early.

“Mr. Scott called me into his office today for an interview for a position in the finance department. I couldn’t believe it. I have been waiting for months for an opening to become available.”

Stamford tried to keep the smile off his face as he led Syeshia over to the couch and pulled her down next to him. He hoped that Preston kept his secret. He knew when he was going to tell Syeshia that he was part owner of Director Enterprises and it was going to be soon.

Everything was slowly falling into place for his big surprise. Christmas was only two weeks away and he wanted this to be the best Christmas of his and Syeshia's lives. He guessed a while back that she didn't have a lot growing up, so he was dying to give her everything she desired and more.

"So, what happened did you get the job?" He was dying to know if Syeshia was finally getting the job she needed. The bonus that came with the new position would help her enormously with her mother's nursing home bill. She wouldn't have to live paycheck to paycheck anymore.

"Yes! I got the job," she screamed hugging and kissing him. I start first thing tomorrow morning."

"Baby, I'm so happy for you. You're a very intelligent woman. I'm glad that you aren't working in the mailroom anymore." This was the first part of his plan to make all of his woman's dreams come true.

Syeshia's body tensed up a second before she moved away from him. He could tell by the frown lines in her forehead that he had messed up. Okay, he wasn't going to say a word until she let him know what was wrong. Only then could he take his foot out of his mouth and apologize.

"There's nothing wrong with working in the mailroom. It's a good and honest job. A lot of my friends are still there. Are you saying because I moved up that I should forget about them?"

“No. I’m not saying that at all.” Stamford said trying to defuse the situation. He didn’t want Syeshia mad at him. He loved seeing her beautiful smile too much. Besides he couldn’t give her the present he had if she was pissed at him.

“Then what did you mean to say? I really get upset when a person with money, power, or a better job takes advantage of someone who has less than them. I think everyone should be given the same opportunity regardless of money.”

The pit of his stomach dropped into his shoes. God, would Syeshia think he was just using her after he told her the truth? No, they had a better relationship than that. “I only meant that I was happy you were achieving one of your dreams. I remember you telling me you wanted a job in that department.”

Stamford waited nervously to see what Syeshia’s response was going to be because she was still giving him that disappointed look. This meant he had to wipe that expression off of her face and make sure that it never returned.

“If I didn’t know what a great guy you were I might have to stay upset with you,” Syeshia confessed before a huge smile covered her face. “I truly think that you’re the man I have been waiting for my entire life.”

He was itching to wipe the sweat from his brow but he didn’t. Instead, he stared at his gorgeous girlfriend and wondered how he got so damn lucky. He wasn’t even thinking about getting involved with anyone when he left North Carolina. He only wanted to work and to forget about what made him come all

this way in the first place. However, he got blessed with a woman who wasn't only beautiful on the outside, but the inside as well.

Tonight, Syeshia had her hair brushed off her face displaying the wideness of her eyes and cute cheeks that he loved so much. Syeshia called them chipmunk cheeks, but he thought they made her adorable. He wouldn't want her to change them for anything in the world.

In addition, she was wearing one of his dress shirts with a pair of killer jeans that should be outlawed. He didn't want her going out of the house without him in those things. Every man in the city would be lusting after her. He liked how the stark white of his shirt enhanced the rich chocolate of her skin. He knew it wasn't possible that he could love this woman anymore. She was the last person he thought of before he went to bed at night and her name was the first thing on his mind when he woke up.

"Do you know how much I love you? After everything that has happened to me I never believed I would feel this kind of happiness again. I want to make all of your dreams come true for giving me my life back."

Laughing, Syeshia stood up shaking her head. "Stamford, no one can make everyone's dreams come true. I love being with you. I don't need anything else. We're good together and I like that."

Wrapping his hand around her wrist, he tugged Syeshia into his lap before she got away. “Syeshia Jones, what are your dreams? Let me be the man to give them to you.”

“You’re serious aren’t you?”

He could tell from the wide-eyed look on Syeshia’s face that those words had never been spoken to her before. “I’m very serious. I opened up to you about a very difficult part of my past. You don’t know how long I’ve kept that in. Now it’s your turn. Let me in. I want to be the man you can come to when you’re having problems.”

Snuggling closer to him, Syeshia laid her head on his chest and laced their fingers together. He loved the light and dark contrast. He didn’t know how she did it, but his woman made something as simple as holding hands beautiful.

“Well, I’m like every woman. I want a man that will listen to me. Someone I can tell my secret desires. I would love to have a man that I would hate to leave in the morning and can’t wait to get home to after work.”

Hell...he could be that man for her. He was already head over heels in love with Syeshia as it was. He seriously doubted there was a man out there who was better for her than he was. If she wasn’t ready to believe him, he would do everything in his power to help her get on the same page as him.

After spending the night in her arms, Stamford knew Syeshia was meant to be his forever. “Are there any Christmas dreams that you have from your childhood you want granted or were you a good girl and Santa bought you everything on your list?”

“Sure, there are,” she chuckled. “But I’m too old for Santa now. I’m an adult with adult responsibilities. I can’t live in the past.”

“Humor me,” Stamford whispered tracing Syeshia’s full bottom lip with his index finger. Her pink tongue came out and licked the lip. His cock twitched in his pants and he quickly removed his finger. He wasn’t going to let her sidetrack him with her sweet seduction. He wanted to know what made her into the wonderful and caring woman she was.

“Fine, when I was a little girl I really only had two ultimate wishes when it came to Santa Claus,” she confessed. “I wanted to sit on his lap and tell him to bring me a puppy for Christmas. My best friend Donna had a black Chow and I would play with him every day after school. I cried for days when she moved away.”

I’ll tuck that bit of information in the back of my head and save it for later, he thought.

“Is there anything else that you want?” he asked breathing in the peach scent that covered Syeshia’s skin. He was dying to make love to her again, but he didn’t want her to get the idea that he only wanted her for that.

“Yes, I do,” Syeshia purred while moving her body until she was straddling his hips instead of sitting in his lap. “I want you to make love to me. I keep thinking about the first time it happened and I want to do it again and again.”

Chapter Eleven

Syeshia's body froze at the dark desire that came into Stamford's eyes. She had been playing it cool waiting for him to touch her again, but he was taking his sweet time about it. Didn't he understand that she wasn't a piece of fragile glass that was going to break if he made love to her again? She was dying to be with him in the most beautiful way possible and he kept finding reasons to turn her down.

Her underwear got even wetter at the thought of Stamford's thick cock being inside of her body again. *Wait....what was wrong with her?* How could she be thinking about having sex with Stamford with the sounds of Jingle Bells playing in the background?

But she couldn't help it for some reason he was in her blood, all she did was think about him. She wasn't used to being this attached to someone. She had been in relationships before but none of them made her feel complete like Stamford did.

She shook her head trying to calm her racing hormones, but it was hard because her man was so handsome...no devilishly handsome and he was all hers. How could she be acting so immature when she was turning twenty-nine on the fifteenth of this month? She would soon be a thirty year old woman with a

promising future ahead of her now. It was about time she did something for herself and she wanted to do it with Stamford.

“Honey, what’s wrong?” Stamford inquired. The concern in his voice made her stomach flip flop.

“I was thinking about how lucky I am to have you in my life. I never thought the day I stepped into the elevator and saw you that you would turn into the perfect match for me.”

“No, I’m the lucky one,” he corrected. Stamford’s rough timbered voice was laced with lust and something else. She secretly hoped that it was love.

“You’re everything my mind and heart have been searching for. These last few weeks of my life have been more than I could ever ask for.”

Squirming on Stamford’s lap, she tried to ignore the huge bulge between her thighs and listen to the sincerity of his words. Yet, it was hard since Stamford’s dark blue eyes were filled with such undeniable arousal. Her whole body seemed to go into overdrive as her stomach clenched with lust, making her nipples pebble so hard that it felt like they might pop off at any moment.

“You want me, don’t you?”

She didn’t think it was right for a man to be this sinfully sexy. How did he have the power to turn her on from just a look or a few whispered words? Was it

because he captured a part of her heart when they made love? Or did her sixth sense know this was the man she had been waiting for her entire life?

Her mother used to tell her how every woman had her other half and no other man could fill that void inside her but that one special man. Syeshia always laughed at her mother for being a hopeless romantic. But now she was starting to believe it might be true because Stamford sure did make her feel good anytime he looked or smiled at her.

“Yes, I do,” she whimpered and then prayed silently that he would do something about it.

“Don’t worry, baby. I can ease your ache. I can’t stand the thought of my woman being in pain.” Long, strong fingers quickly pulled the shirt out of her jeans and unbuttoned it. A second later it was tossed to the floor followed by her bra.

“You’re so damn breathtaking,” he whispered cupping her breasts like they were the most perfect things in the world.

Syeshia watched in awe as Stamford bent his head and drew her nipple into his hot mouth. The erotic feel of his tongue and lips working at the same time sent another pool of moisture between her thighs.

“Stamford,” she panted, as she slid her fingers through his cool, thick black hair. The sound of her voice didn’t stop his sensual assault. It seemed to egg him on

as he picked her up and laid her on the couch without his mouth leaving her breasts.

Spreading her legs as wide as they would go, Stamford pressed his cock against her wetness. She could feel the heat of him through the layers of their clothes. It was one of the hottest sensations in the world, but she couldn't wait until the clothes were gone and he was deep inside of her. Her body had missed him and was waiting for a second taste.

She was still in disbelief at how well her body and mind seemed to be in perfect harmony with Stamford. She had kept this part of herself bottled up for so long and hid from everyone; however, he brought it out of her. Stamford made her smile and enjoy the best that life had to offer.

The way he made her experience things had her thinking about a forever after and every delicious thing that went with it. She was so used to taking care of other people instead of herself. Now, it was time for her to get all the pleasure that she could with Stamford. She wanted someone to take care of her.

"I'll take care of you, sweetheart," Stamford whispered as his fingers trailed sensuously over her heated body. Syeshia didn't realize that she had spoken the words out loud. "I've waited so long to love someone as much as I love you."

Dropping his head, Stamford kissed her, drawing the last of the doubt from her mind into his body. She no longer wondered if he was the right man for her.

Her body shivered at the thought of spending as much time as she could with the man above her.

The touch of his lips was a dream-like sensation as they seared a path down her neck and over her shoulders. “You have the silkiest skin. I will never get tired of tasting you.”

“Well...that’s good because I want you to keep doing it,” Syeshia moaned as her panties grew damper as Stamford licked her skin. Moving her lower body against his, she tried to give him a hint that she wanted more.

She held her breath as Stamford’s hand slipped between their bodies and unsnapped her jeans. It wasn’t a second later when she felt his hand slip inside her underwear and his middle finger slide into her wetness.

“Tell me how much you want me,” he breathed into her ear. “Am I the only man for you?”

“I want you so bad that I ache from it. I couldn’t think about another man after being with you. You’re the perfect man for me.”

Syeshia was rewarded with another thick finger being thrust into her. She wrapped her hands around Stamford’s biceps and got lost in the moment. She shouldn’t let him do this. She loved having him inside of her and it wouldn’t be the same if she came without him.

Reaching between their bodies, she grabbed his hand. “No.”

Blue eyes shot up to hers, “No, what?”

“I don’t want to do this without you. I need to have you inside of me. I love the closeness that we share when we explode in each other’s arms.” She pulled Stamford’s hand from her body and laid it by her hip. “Take me to the bedroom.”

Flashing a devilish grin, Stamford stood up and she stared in awe at how the muscles moved beneath his shirt before he swept her up into his arms. “Baby, I’ll make love to you anywhere you want.”

“That’s good to hear because the next place I want us to make love is the shower,” Syeshia confessed as she wrapped her arms around her man’s wide shoulders.

Chapter Twelve

The touch of something cool woke up Syeshia from her light sleep. Running her hand over her breasts, she picked up the item and then opened her eyes. The amethyst necklace from the mall swung from her fingers. “What is this doing here?” she asked Stamford who was sitting next to her on the bed fully clothed.

“I bought it for you. I saw how much you loved it and I wanted to see that look on your face again. Don’t you understand how happy I want to make you?”

Sitting up, she arranged the sheet over her breasts and noticed how Stamford’s eyes lingered there before he looked at her again. “I’m not the kind of woman who needs gifts. I got used not to having them as a kid.”

“Well, your childhood is behind you and I’m going to give you presents until you learn how to say ‘Thank you Stamford’ and then kiss me.”

Leaning over, she gave Stamford a quick kiss and then moved back before he could deepen it. “Thank you, Stamford.” She held the necklace in her hand and watched how the light played off the colors. “It’s beautiful. I don’t know what else to say.”

“Just wear it to work so I can see it on you. It will make me feel good to know how much you loved my gift.”

“I’ll wear it tomorrow.”

“How about I put it on you now? I want to see how it looks on you before I leave.”

Syeshia handed Stamford the necklace and gave him her back. Moving her hair out of the way, she waited while he put it on her. He planted a quick kiss on her neck and then fixed her hair. “Do you know how much I don’t want to leave you?”

“Why don’t you stay the night?” She would love waking up and finding Stamford next to her.

“I can’t. I don’t have any clothes here to change into. Have you thought again about moving in with me? You know I have plenty of room at my house. Plus I would love having you there. It’s going to be the next stage in our relationship, so why don’t we just do it?”

The harder she tried to deny the truth the more it kept taunting her. She did want to move in with Stamford, but moving in before Christmas would be a hassle. She loved decorating for the holiday and Stamford was a neat freak. There wasn’t much at his house and it was for a reason. He didn’t like to have stuff in his space.

“I’m still not sure that’s a good idea. I love the Christmas holiday and I usually have my little apartment decorated from top to bottom. I couldn’t do that at your place.

“Honey, when you move in it would be our place. You can do anything your heart desires. I haven’t had Christmas decorations up in a very long time. I would love coming home to the smell of Christmas. So, is that a yes? Will you move in with me?”

“Are you sure about this?” she frowned. “Shouldn’t we wait at least six months or maybe a year to make sure this is for real? We could just be blindsided by the hot attraction we have for each other. What if you find another woman or I find another man?” Stamford’s hands shot out and wrapped around her upper arms.

Jerking her against his body, he held her shocked gaze with his heated one. “You aren’t going to find another man. You’re mine. You have been mine since the moment you got on that elevator. If I don’t have something that you’re looking for tell me and I’ll work on it. However, you aren’t going man hunting. Do you understand me?”

He was jealous and she couldn’t be more pleased. If Stamford was upset at the thought of her being with another man, it proved that she was more than a quick conquest for him. He wanted a deeper relationship with her.

“Honey, I’m not looking for another man. You’re all the man I’ll ever need,” she grinned.

Relaxing his hold, Stamford smiled at her. “Does this mean you’re going to move in with me?”

She couldn’t deny it any longer. When Stamford wasn’t around her, she felt a huge void. She had gotten used to seeing him around her after work. His place was more like home to her now than her own.

“Yes, I’ll move in with you.”

Stamford fought down the urge to toss Syeshia back on the bed and make love to her for the rest of the night. Yet, he couldn’t because he had to get back home to finish up some reports for Preston.

A part of his conscience was nagging at him for not telling Syeshia the truth before she moved in, but he wasn’t afraid to admit that he was scared as hell. She had already told him how much honesty meant to her. However, his lie wasn’t all that huge. It was just a little *white lie*.

If he told Syeshia now, he would without a doubt ruin everything he had worked so hard to achieve with the lovely woman in the front of him. No, he would tell her after they were all settled in. He was going to marry Syeshia, so he had to do everything in his power to show the world Syeshia was his.

“How about we pick up some boxes after work and I can help you pack?”

Grinning, Syeshia wrapped her arms around his neck and the exceptional scent of her filled his senses. “Impatient, aren’t you? Don’t I get a chance to get used to the idea first? I might change my mind after I think about it.”

The hell you will, his mind thought.

“Sorry, you already agreed so you can’t take it back. Now, give me a kiss I have a long drive home and then I have to get into a cold, lonely bed.” It was never easy leaving Syeshia. He always wanted to stay as long as he could. He loved being around her positive energy. It relaxed him better than a professional massage.

“I could pack a small bag and go with you.” The words were out of her mouth before Syeshia could stop them.

“Woman, get dressed and pack that bag. I’ll wait for you in the living room,” Stamford said as he pulled her from the bed. “I was secretly hoping that you would offer to come with me, but I didn’t want to pressure you.”

“Don’t you want to help me get dressed?” Syeshia purred smoothing the short nightie over her hips. She loved the light that smoldered in Stamford’s eyes. It made her feel sexy and wanted, the way a woman should feel around the man she loved.

“Stop teasing me or we won’t leave this bedroom. I’ve to get home and do some paperwork before I go to bed.”

She wasn't aware that Stamford had work to do. She wouldn't go with him then. She could spend the night another time. "Listen, I can stay here. I have to meet with Mr. Scott anyway first thing in the morning. So, I'll catch the bus instead of having you come get me." Syeshia turned to get back into the bed, but was halted by a strong grip on her arm.

"I don't think so, sweetheart. I want you at my...our home tonight. I can't wait until I get to crawl under the cool white sheets and have you there waiting for me. There's no more you or me...but us. You're my woman and my job will never come before you. Now get that cute ass in the bathroom and change."

The tenderness in Stamford's voice amazed her, so the only thing she could do was nod as she make a mad dash for the bathroom.



Lifting a sleeping and content Syeshia out of the passenger side, Stamford carried her up the front steps of his house. The cold winter air blew through his shirt, but he didn't feel it because he was too focused on the beauty he was holding. Syeshia didn't stay awake ten minutes after they hit the road. Pausing, by the keypad, he shifted her in his arms and pressed in the numbers to unlock the door.

After he was inside, Stamford flipped on the lights and then reentered the code to lock the door before continuing through the house towards his bedroom.

Syeshia stirred in his embrace but she didn't wake up only snuggled closer. Inside the bedroom, he quickly stripped her out of her clothes and tucked her into bed.

He hoped this report didn't take too long because he couldn't wait to get into bed with his woman. As he turned to leave a soft touch on his wrist stopped him, Stamford glanced down at Syeshia and found her watching him.

"I love you. Thank you for the beautiful necklace. I'll never take it off."

The warmth of her words spread through his body warming him more than the heat in the room. He couldn't remember the last time a woman's words had meant so much to him. It was as if that soft-spoken confession filled the void his son's death had left. He finally felt whole again.

"Sweetheart, you're welcome. I love you too more than anything in this world. I can't wait until you're moved in completely and when that happens it's going to be the best day of our lives." Leaning down, he kissed Syeshia on the mouth, winked and then left. If he stayed in that room any longer with her smelling so tempting, he would never start on that damn budget report.

Chapter Thirteen

“I’ve heard nothing but praise for Syeshia since she started working in the finance department. Her boss is practically in love with her and Jack is a hard man to please. He doesn’t give out thumbs up to anyone.”

“As long as Jack realizes that Syeshia is already taken there won’t be any problem,” Stamford replied as he watched Preston read over the report he’d worked on until one o’clock this morning. He couldn’t forget how damn good it felt when he was finished to go slip into bed with Syeshia. This year’s Christmas holiday was going to be better than he ever thought possible.

“How’s Layla doing? I haven’t seen the mommy-to-be around lately.”

“She’s busy at home working on the nursery. I have never seen her so happy. She’s thrilled that we’re having a boy.”

A quick image of a pregnant Syeshia flashed before his eyes and he couldn’t keep the smile off his face. He would love to have more kids. God, he was willingly to have four if Syeshia agreed. He always wanted a huge family. His patience was wearing thin while waiting to propose to Syeshia. If everything went right his girlfriend would be his fiancée on Christmas morning.

“What brought that grin to your face? Or do I have to ask?” Preston chuckled.

“You know that it’s Syeshia. I love her so much. I never imagined I would be in love like this. I’m getting everything worked out so I can give her a ring before she goes to see her mother at Christmas.

Preston whistled under his breath. “Damn, is it that serious? Does she have a clue about this? Do you think she’ll say yes?”

“Now from the talk I’ve heard around the building you fell hard for Layla in the same amount of time,” Stamford tossed back with a grin. “Love doesn’t have a time period. My heart was captured the first time my eyes connected with hers. I want to spend the rest of my life with Syeshia. I’m praying she will say yes.”

“I hope she does too. Syeshia’s a sweet woman who has run into a lot of struggles in her young life. She needs something good to happen to her. In addition, I think she would be perfect for you. Plus she forgave you when you came clean with her.”

Squirming around in the chair, Stamford’s intense guilt ate at him because he was still keeping his true identity a secret. He was still having problems letting the employees at Director Enterprises know his true reason for being here.

However, he couldn't let them know before Syeshia. He was supposed to be getting a memo ready to send out by the end of the week, but he hadn't even started working on it yet.

He already had such an excellent relationship with everyone here and he didn't want it ruined when the truth came out. At his previous job, the employees considered themselves on a different level than higher ups. Director Enterprises didn't come across like that, but he couldn't be for sure.

However, he had to give Syeshia some credit. She wasn't totally clueless. She could tell by his car and house that he had money. The problem was that she didn't know that he was wealthier than Preston. With the money and connections that he had he could have bought Director Enterprises right from under Preston, but he didn't.

He loved how his business partner took this company from nothing and made it into the success it was. That alone gained his respect, and that's why he wanted to work side by side with him to make it even bigger and better. The foreign market was his specialty and he knew without a doubt within the next six months Director Enterprises would be a household name overseas.

"I haven't told her about that yet. I'm waiting until I have a ring on her cute little finger. I love her too damn much to lose her over something like this. I don't doubt she'll be mad at first, but she loves me enough to let it go."

Preston shook his head and laid the report on his desk. "I wouldn't advise you to do that. I know the problem I had getting Layla and she knew who I was from the very beginning. Women don't like being lied too. It doesn't matter how little the lie is. Tell her the truth as soon as possible. You know that the truth has a way of getting out when you least expect it."

A sudden heart clenching doubt eased into his body. Was he doing the wrong thing by wanting to spend time with the woman he loved without the issue of money coming between them?

Syeshia wasn't a superficial woman and he knew money wasn't the biggest thing on her mind. He adored how the simplest things brought her pleasure. He was worried that the reality of his wealth would scare her away. Most women ran to him because of it however, Syeshia wasn't like that. She would find a way to leave him because of it. This was the first time he had ever thought of his wealth as a burden.

"Stamford, are you listening to me?" Preston asked drawing him away from his thoughts.

"Yes, I hear you and I'm going to tell her before Christmas. I just have a few more things I have to get done first. I swear I won't put it off much longer."

“Good, because I need to get your memo sent out before everyone goes on break. It wouldn’t be fair to toss something like this at them when they come back. Besides everyone here likes you so your position shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Preston, thank for your concern, but I’m only worried about Syeshia right now. I want to give her everything that I can, especially since she has done without for so long.”

Preston nodded in agreement. “I totally understand what you mean. I was the same way towards Layla after we got married. I thought by showering her with presents it would make-up for all the wrong I had done, but I was so wrong.”

“All it did was upset her and make her doubt the love I had for her. I was still a total workaholic until she had a talk with me. Now, I don’t work sixty hour weeks anymore. I usually leave before most of the employees. I adore my life and don’t want to do anything that would cause her to leave me.”

Stamford was offended. How could Preston think he wasn’t totally devoted to Syeshia? He loved her more than the air that he breathed. He would give up everything he had for her without a second thought.

“I don’t like what you’re implying. I love Syeshia. I only want to do what is best for her.”

“Tell her the truth and then let the stones fall where they may. I learned the hard way that not being truthful might cost you what you love the most,” Preston warned.

Stamford hated to admit it but Preston was giving him good advice. It was past time for him to let Syeshia and the rest of the employees know who he was. “Fine, I’ll tell her tonight over dinner. I can’t let her find out when everyone else does. That would be the worst thing that could happen. “

“Excellent,” Preston grinned. “Let me know how it goes. Layla is so worried about the two of you. She thinks Syeshia is perfect for you. She’s such the little matchmaker since she has gotten pregnant. She wants everyone to be happy and in love.”

Standing up, Stamford fixed his suit jacket and tie wondering how he was going to do this. Syeshia took a personal day, so she could start packing her stuff for the move. He hated to tell her tonight, but he would. It was now or never.

“I’ll tell her after tonight.”

“Don’t talk yourself out of it,” Preston warned. “I know you might be a little nervous, but the truth is always better than a lie even a little white one.”



Placing the last box in the center of the floor, Syeshia wiped the sweat off her forehead. She couldn’t believe that she was finally moved in with her man.

God, she never moved this fast with guys, but something about Stamford made her feel safe and secure. He was perfect in so many ways; however, she was a little worried about their monetary differences. Stamford *had* money. She could tell from the cut of his clothes, the car he drove and the house he invited her to live in.

She wasn't able to tell if it was family money or if he earned it the hard way. But it did intimidate her on a small level. She wasn't raised getting everything she wanted. Yet, she had so much love from her mother as a child that she felt richer than Donald Trump.

How could someone like Stamford relate to her on that level? Would he understand how it felt to want something so bad that you could taste it, but not have enough money to buy it?

Don't even go there!

Stamford loved her and she was in love with him. She wouldn't let the reality of him having money mess with her head. She couldn't let him being a wealthy man stand in the way of their contentment. Christmas was coming up and this was the first time in years she had a man to share it with.

"I want some cookies," she decided out of the blue. It was the holiday season and Stamford's house needed to smell like it. Smiling to herself, Syeshia took off for the kitchen. If she remembered correctly she should have some stuff left over from last week.



She looks so good in my house. I'm so glad that she's here. I don't want her ever to leave.

His place finally seemed like a home and he wanted to see children in it again with Syeshia as their mother.

Moving away from the door, Stamford eased up behind Syeshia and wrapped his arms around her waist. "I love seeing you in our house," he breathed beside her ear.

"God, you scared me," Syeshia gasped dropping a cookie on the cookie rack. "I didn't hear you come in."

"Sorry about that, baby." He spun Syeshia around and planted a kiss on her mouth. "You should have waited for me instead of taking a cab. I wanted to help you move in."

Wrapping her arms around his neck, Syeshia grinned at him and his heart skipped at beat. "I'm not fragile. I got everything put away just fine, plus I have a furnished apartment. So, I didn't have that much stuff to move in."

"Did that upset you?"

"What?"

"That you didn't have a lot of personal belongings to pick up and move," Stamford questioned, worried.

“No, I don’t need a lot of material things. I have your love and that is enough for me,” Syeshia replied, hugging him.

Stamford swallowed down the lump in his throat. Damn, how he loved this woman. “Your love is everything to me too,” he confessed.

“It is?”

“Yes,” Stamford answered knowing he wanted to spend the rest of his life with Syeshia.

“Why don’t you show me how much I mean to you?” Syeshia steeped back and pulled her red long-sleeved t-shirt over her head. Perfect brown breasts popped out from a red bra with a Christmas-tree detail above the right breast.

“Nice bra,” he whispered cupping her breast in his palm testing its weight. “I don’t think I ever loved a Christmas tree as much as I do now.”

“Aren’t you forgetting something?” Syeshia asked leaning into his touch.

Lines formed on Stamford’s forehead as he thought about Syeshia’s question “I can’t think of anything.” He brushed his thumb over her already hard nipple enjoying her low moan.

“Aren’t there usually presents under a Christmas tree?”

Stamford’s hand stopped as Syeshia’s words washed over him. “Where are the presents? I love getting Christmas presents especially when they are early.”

“I’m not going to tell you. You have to find them for yourself,” Syeshia teased brushing past his aroused body.

“Stop teasing me,” he said reaching for her.

“I didn’t know I was,” Syeshia grinned dancing away from his touch.

Growling, Stamford grabbed Syeshia by the waist and flipped her over his shoulder. “Woman, I’ll teach you to tempt me like that.”

“Oh, are you going to spank me?” she laughed as he carried her back to their bedroom.

“No, I’m going to make love to you until neither one of us can stand, think or eat,” he answered depositing her in the middle of the bed.

Stamford stood back and looked at the amazing woman that he was blessed with. He didn’t know what he loved the most about her. Was it her silky black hair that barely brushed her shoulders? Could it be her milk chocolate skin, dark almond eyes or cheeky smile? No, it was her good and loving heart. Syeshia loved him just for him alone and nothing else.

“I love you too, baby.” He unbuttoned his shirt tossing it in a chair by the bed.

“I love you more.” Syeshia got on her knees and crawled across the bed to him.

Will she still love me after she finds out the truth? He didn't move as Syeshia rid him of his belt and unzipped his pants. She wasn't able to get the zipper all the way down because of his ragging erection.

"Uh, it looks like someone is excited about finding presents underneath the tree."

"Baby, I'm happy to receive any present you want to give me," he said, falling down on the bed with Syeshia. "Seeing your beautiful face is all the present that I need for the rest of my life."

"You have a way with words, but I want more than that." Linking her arms around his neck, Syeshia pulled his body onto hers. The feel of her bare breasts against his chest made his cock throb even more.

"What do you want?" He would give her anything her heart desired and more.

"I want you to stop talking and make love to me," Syeshia answered right before she kissed him.

Chapter Fourteen

“Jeff, this report looks wonderful. I can’t believe you got all of this done so quickly. I really needed these figures.”

“Syeshia and I didn’t mind working late to get them done,” Jeff replied grinning at her like a little boy with a crush. It was kind of funny since he was thirty-eight years old. She truly hoped that Jeff stayed late to work on the report for business reasons not because he had feelings for her. Whitney kept telling her that he constantly asked about her, but she never saw him as boyfriend material.

Sure, he would flirt with her when she used to deliver the mail, but she never took it seriously. Jeff Statman was a sweet guy; however, regardless of how gorgeous he was she was totally in love with Stamford. He was the only man for her.

“Now, I’m not fond of you working late. If you have other plans by all means do them and take your time with your work. It doesn’t have to be completed over night.”

Jeff shook his head and moved closer to her. “That’s okay. I like working late.”

“How does your girlfriend feel about that? I don’t want you missing time with her.”

Jeff eyed her for a few minutes. “I’m single. However, if you aren’t seeing anyone I would love to take you out to dinner. I think you’re smoking hot and I would love to get to know you better.”

Shit! Whitney was right. Jeff did want more than friendship from her. Okay, she had to let him down nice and easy because this came out of the blue. Syeshia opened her mouth to answer Jeff, but an irate male voice stopped her.

“Syeshia doesn’t have time to go out on a date with you. So, I think its best you leave and get back to work,” Stamford threatened behind her.

Spinning around, she gawked at Stamford stunned by his harsh tone of his voice. “Mr. King, I didn’t know you were there.” It was so hard for her to call Stamford by his last name at work, but she did. She wasn’t ashamed of their relationship, but she didn’t want it to filter into the workplace.

“Stamford, I didn’t know you had a say in who Syeshia goes out with. As far as I know, you’re only her co-worker not her boyfriend,” Jeff tossed back.

Syeshia saw how Stamford’s usual gorgeous blue eyes turned a deeper blue as he advanced further into her office. “Listen, if you value your job Mr. Statman, you’ll leave now without saying another word.” The threat was loud and clear.

She watched as Jeff's eyes swung back and forth between her and Stamford. Why did he have to go and get all possessive on her? Surely, he knew that she wasn't interested in the clingy or needy type of man. That's why she fell for him. He was a man's man. He knew what he wanted out of life and went for it. However, he had never shown her this controlling side before and she didn't know if she liked it or not.

"Jeff, do you mind leaving so I can talk to Mr. King alone?"

"Are you sure?" Jeff asked eyeing the taller, bigger man. Stamford had at least fifty pounds of muscle and several inches on him.

"I'm not going to hurt Syeshia you idiot," Stamford snapped.

Syeshia flung Stamford a hard look before she gave Jeff her attention again. "Yes, I'm sure. Why don't you take an early lunch and we can talk when you come back?" she had to get Jeff away from Stamford before he killed him.

"Okay, I'll be back in an hour." Jeff squeezed her on the shoulder and then hurried from the room when Stamford took a step towards him. The door was barely closed completely before Stamford lost his cool.

"Why does he think he can ask you out on a damn date?"

"Stamford, calm down," Syeshia sighed. "Jeff was just being nice."

"Nice my ass! He wants you. I saw how he was looking at you."

“Are you seriously jealous of Jeff? He isn’t my type. He’s nice and very sweet, but that’s it.”

“No, I’m not jealous of that guy. I’m pissed that you flirted with him. You shouldn’t have encouraged him. I don’t share what’s mine. If Jeff doesn’t know I’ll tell him so he’ll understand and back off.”

Syeshia stood rooted to her spot shocked as Stamford rattled off in his green-eyed monster tirade. “Baby, I’m not interested in Jeff. How many times do I have to tell you that? He’s just a co-worker. Sure, Whitney told me he had a crush on me, but that doesn’t mean a thing. You’re the man I’m in love with and can’t wait to spend Christmas with.”

The anger cleared out of Stamford’s eyes as his hand circled her wrist and he pulled her to his body. “You’re in love with me? Are you sure? We haven’t been dating for that long.”

“Of course I am. Why do you think I moved in with you? It wasn’t for your killer looks or hot body. Now, don’t get me wrong. I love your eyes and unbelievably thick black lashes. However, I’m head over heels in love with the man you are.”

“What kind of man do you think I am?” he asked wrapping his arms around her waist.

“Honest, dependable, loving and caring. I know that I’m safe when I’m in your arms.” Syeshia felt the slight tremble in Stamford’s arms as he moved back from her.

“What if I wasn’t always one of those things? Would you love me any less?”

Why was he asking her this? Was there something going on that she wasn’t aware of? “Of course not,” Syeshia frowned. “I’ll always love you no matter what.”

She noticed a look that passed over Stamford’s face and it looked like relief. What did he have to be relieved about? Was he keeping something from her? No, she wasn’t going to think that. Stamford was a good man who wouldn’t do a thing to hurt her.

“Are you hiding something from me?”

“No,” Stamford answered way too quickly for her taste. “I’m just tired and overacted when I saw you with Jeff. I know you wouldn’t cheat on me.”

Syeshia wanted to believe Stamford, but a part of her felt that he was keeping a secret, but she wasn’t going to push. He would tell her when he was ready. “So, what brought you to my office?”

“I wanted to see how you were doing before I had my meeting with Preston,” Stamford answered touching the side of her face with the back of his hand. “We didn’t get a chance to talk too much this morning.”

“I’m good just busy, but I love working here. How about I fix us something good to eat tonight? We can stop by the store and pick up some stuff.” She wanted to do something special for him since she wouldn’t be here for Christmas with him. She believed in doing something for the person you loved besides she was totally in lust with Stamford’s kitchen. She could spend every waking minute in there. It was at least three times bigger than her last one. “So what do you say? Do you want me to cook something to keep that hot body of yours satisfied?”

Chapter Fifteen

A content feeling spread through his body because of the way Syeshia wanted to do stuff for him, but he was the one who should be doing things for her. The love of his life deserved to get pampered and spoiled within an inch of her life. She had gone without for way too long and he was here to change that.

“No, I’m going to cook for you. I can grill something outside on the patio.”

“Isn’t it too cold for that?”

Rubbing his body against hers, Stamford nibbled on Syeshia’s ear for a few seconds before letting it go. “I know that you’ll find a way to warm me up if I get too cold out there.”

“Hot chocolate always warms me up,” she teased.

“Nope, hot chocolate won’t do it.”

“A hot bath?”

“Only if you join me,” he suggested softly.

“I’ll see what I can do for you but only if you get cold. Now, aren’t you going to be late for your meeting with Mr. Scott?”

Glancing over Syeshia's shoulder he looked at the clock and cursed under his breath. She was right. He was about five minutes late, but anytime he got around his woman time never seemed to matter.

"Syeshia, I have to stop letting you sidetrack me or I'll never get anything done."

"Is that such a bad thing?" she inquired then winked.

"Not for me it isn't, but I think Preston might want to start our meeting on time." Stamford gave Syeshia a quick kiss on the lips and then left before he changed his mind. God, that woman had him wrapped around her little finger without even trying and he loved every minute he was able to spend with her.



"Is Stamford going back home with you to see your mother for Christmas?" Whitney asked before taking a sip of her ice water.

"He hadn't asked and I don't want to pressure him into it," Syeshia answered.

"Isn't he your man?" Whitney glowered. "He should have volunteered."

She totally agreed with Whitney, but Stamford had his own Christmas demons to get over. She couldn't add her problems to his. "Stamford is going to be busy for Christmas so I'm going by myself. We're going to spend New Year's

together.” Well, she was hoping that they would she hadn’t officially asked him yet.

“Hmmm.... you are a lot nicer than me. I wouldn’t let him avoid spending the most perfect holiday of the year with me. But hey, it’s your life so I’ll let it go. Anyway, I’ve some juicy office gossip for you.”

Syeshia suppressed the urge to roll her eyes at her gossip hungry friend. She loved Whitney to death, but her friend loved being in other people’s business. She never knew what new story Whitney had heard about.

“Okay, what news do you have to tell me now?”

Moving her water glass out of the way, Whitney looked around the room before she leaned across the cafeteria table. “I heard that Preston Scott sold half of Director Enterprises to a silent partner. The guy is supposed to make an appearance after the Christmas holiday.”

Syeshia shook her head. She wasn’t going to believe this. “You’re lying. This business is Mr. Scott’s life. He wouldn’t do that.”

“You’re thinking about the old Preston,” Whitney cut in. “He totally changed after Layla came into his life. He doesn’t work himself into the ground anymore. He smiles and laughs with everyone now. Layla is his world now. Okay, back to the new man. I also overheard that he’s a hottie. Like he would make you slap your mama good-looking.”

Syeshia couldn't help herself she had to ask. "Do you know who he is?" She was worried that this new boss might take her new job away. She couldn't go back to her old salary. The job in finance was finally building up her bank account.

"No, I haven't gotten a name, but I can try to find out for you. Why do you want to know? You're already dating a hottie. You sure don't need another one."

Lord, didn't Whitney ever know when to stop? Sometimes she wondered if Whitney forgot that she was engaged to a gorgeous guy herself. "I ought to be able to Google him. Maybe I can find out more about him. That's how I found out more information on Preston Scott."

"Have you ever Googled me?" Whitney gasped. "What did you find out?"

"No, I never did that to you. I have no reason too. Now, see if you can find out anymore about this new boss," Syeshia said standing up. "I'll talk to you later." She waved goodbye to Whitney and then hurried out of the employees' lunch room.

Chapter Sixteen

“I’m still cold,” a deep rich voice whispered by her ear. “Can I get warmed up?” Stamford rubbed his hard body against her back sending tiny shock waves throughout her system.

Placing the last dish in the dishwasher, Syeshia spun around and arched an eyebrow at the over eager man behind her. She couldn’t resist teasing him a little. “You can’t still be cold after two cups of steaming black coffee.”

“You promised to warm me up after I grilled the steaks,” Stamford exclaimed eyeing her body. “Are you going to keep it?”

“I’m a woman of my word,” she tossed back. Moving closer to him she stood on her tiptoes and linked her arms around his wide shoulders. She loved how Stamford was so much bigger than her. The differences in height made her feel so sexy. “Will a kiss help?”

“It would be a damn good start,” he growled grabbing her butt with both hands.

Syeshia didn’t hesitate wrapping her legs around Stamford’s hips before pulling his head down for a white-hot kiss. The touch of his tongue inside her

mouth sent her body into overdrive. Shoving her fingers into the thick strands of his hair, she opened her mouth allowing his tongue entrance.

“I want you,” she moaned the second Stamford’s mouth left hers.

“Damn baby, I want you too. I thought about making love to you all day.”

“So, what’s stopping you?” Syeshia asked staring into Stamford’s desire filled eyes.

“Nothing,” Stamford replied. There was no mistaking the need or want in his voice. It thrilled her knowing she had this affect on Stamford.

Back home most guys didn’t pay attention to her because she wasn’t as rich as most of them. Even the poor guys stayed away from her because she had nothing to offer them. Now she was glad none of them bothered her. They weren’t her happily ever after like Stamford.

“I love you, Stamford. I never loved any man as much as I love you.” She couldn’t keep the words in any longer.

“Darling, I’m in love with you too,” Stamford answered as he carried her down the hall to their bedroom.

Placing her in the center of the bed, Stamford stood at the end and stared at her like she was a work of art. Minutes ticked by as she laid there and enjoyed being cherished just with his eyes.

“What are you looking at so intensely?” she asked leaning back on her elbows.

“I can’t believe how stunning you are.”

“Well, you aren’t too bad yourself, handsome. However, I would love to see more of you.”

“You don’t have to ask twice.” Pulling his sweater over his head, Stamford let it drop beside the foot of the bed. Syeshia licked her lips at the muscles that bunched beneath his skin. Her man looked better than some of the men on the fitness magazines and he knew it.

Syeshia moved around on the bed until she was kneeling in the middle. Her hand went to the first button of her sweater, but Stamford’s voice stopped her. “Don’t...I want to undress you. You have the most beautiful body in the world.”

Brushing her hand away, he unbuttoned her top until the top of her breasts were revealed.

She couldn’t control the shiver that ran through her body as Stamford finished removing the rest of her clothing. Stamford made her feel beautiful and perfect. The ends of his fingers trailed over her skin softly like teasing little kisses. Using the tip of his tongue he flicked it across her nipple before drawing it into his mouth.

“Oh, that feels so good,” she moaned running her hands down Stamford’s back. The sucking only increased as two finger slid down her stomach into her wetness. Syeshia spread her legs wider to give Stamford better access.

“I guess you like that,” he breathed against her breast.

“Hmmm...yeah, I love it.”

“Good, you should love this even more,” Stamford replied before he started kissing the side of her neck.

Talented.....oh.....talented should be his middle name, Syeshia thought as two thick fingers worked their way in and out of her body until the first orgasm. Passion pounded throughout her body into her heart, mind and soul. She knew that she wouldn’t ever be the same. Stamford had the ability to touch her in ways no other man ever had or would.

The pleasure was pure and explosive. As she was coming down from her high Stamford removed his fingers and got off the bed. From underneath her lashes, she watched as Stamford undressed and bit her bottom lip to keep from moaning out loud. Without saying a word he rejoined her on the bed, his hands explored the lines of her body starting at her back and then working their way over her entire body.

Stamford moved between her thighs and eased his cock inside of her dripping body. He made love to her like she was the other piece of his heart. They

were in perfect harmony as he thrust in and out of her. It was intense yet tender at the same time.

“This will never be enough,” Stamford yelled above her as his body tensed right before his orgasm hit. Seconds later, her body shattered into a million pieces as her second orgasm of the night ripped through her body.

“Damn, that was good,” he whispered as he rolled off her body and pulled her against his wet chest. Automatically, she curled into Stamford and rested her head on his chest.

“I’m so happy. I don’t think my life could get any better,” she mumbled trying to stay awake.

“I think it could,” Stamford chuckled brushing a damp strand of hair behind her ear.

“How?” Syeshia yawned.

“Why don’t you just wait and see. I think Santa is going to be really good to you this year.”

Syeshia raised her head off Stamford’s chest and looked up into his eyes. “What do you have planned? I told you that I don’t need a lot of presents.”

“It’s a surprise so you aren’t going to find out until Christmas morning,” Stamford replied pressing her head back down to his chest. “Now why don’t you go to sleep and let me think about some stuff?”

“You’ll tell me later,” Syeshia asked as she snuggled closer to the warmth of Stamford’s body.

“Yes, sweetheart I’ll tell you later.”

Nodding, Syeshia closed her eyes and savored the feeling of satisfaction that Stamford gave her as sleep slowly took over her body. Tomorrow was a new day and she would get the answers she wanted then.

Chapter Seventeen

“Why haven’t you ever told me what you actually do at Director Enterprises?”

Stamford laid the newspaper down on the kitchen table and looked at Syeshia standing in the doorway. She looked gorgeous in her red suit with her hair pulled away from her face. His woman looked every bit the professional she was trying to be and it was turning him on. He couldn’t wait until Christmas so he could spring his surprise on her. Good thing it was next week or he wasn’t going to be able to make it much longer.

“You know that I work there doing the day just like you,” he answered hoping Syeshia would let it go. He wasn’t ready to tell her everything yet.

“Stamford, you know what I mean. What’s your job title? Is your job a big secret or something?” Crossing her arms over her breasts, Syeshia stared at him waiting for an answer that he wasn’t ready to give.

“I’m like Preston’s advisor,” he lied.

“No, you can’t be his assistant because that’s Norman’s job,” Syeshia countered, frowning at him.

“I don’t know what’s up with Norman, but that’s my job title at D.E.” Standing up, he made his way across the room and kissed Syeshia on the mouth. He had to get her mind off of this or he might not be able to keep his secret much longer.

Leaning away from him, Syeshia’s eyes raked over his face like she didn’t quite believe him. He knew what the deep frown meant when she gave it to him. She wasn’t completely on the same page as him.

“Don’t you believe me?”

“I can’t believe that you would settle for being someone’s assistant. You come across way too intelligent for that. I would think of you more as a partner or owner of your own business.”

Stamford literally thought his heart had stopped as Syeshia hit the nail on the head. He wondered what she would do if she honestly knew how close to the truth she was. No, he had to get her off the subject and very quickly.

“How about you go shopping after work for some Christmas presents for your mother? Isn’t there something you want to get for her?”

Syeshia’s eyes brightened with pleasure at the mention of her mother. “I did want to get her a couple of new books to read and two pairs of new pajamas. Do you think you can take me after work?”

“No, I can’t do that. I have a ton of paperwork that I have to get done at home today. So, why don’t you take my car to work and then go to the mall when you get off?”

“Are you sure? I might not be home until late because I still have to get your present and a few other things while I’m there.”

“Sweetheart, take your time. I want you to enjoy yourself.” Stamford gave her a quick kiss on the mouth and it heated her body instantly. “The keys are on the living room table and lock me in on your way out. I’ll see you when you get back home.”

“I’m going to be so cold after I get back from shopping. What are you going to do to about it?” Syeshia flirted. She loved teasing Stamford like this. He always took the bait.

“I can’t give away all of my surprises, but I promise that you’ll love it,” he growled giving her another kiss followed by a light slap on her ass. “Now get out of here before I change my mind and make you call in sick today.”

Grinning, Syeshia stole another kiss from Stamford and then moved away from him before he could deepen it. “I’m expecting you to keep your promise.”

“I never break my promises,” Stamford yelled after her as she hurried from the room.



Stamford let out a sigh of relief when Syeshia finally left for work. He would have loved for her to have stayed home and them spend the day together in bed, but he had to get this damn memo done today for Preston. It was going to be sent out next week to all the employees at Director Enterprises, so they would finally know who he was. Honestly, he was surprised that his secret hadn't gotten out before now.

He didn't care what everyone else thought he was only worried about one person and that was Syeshia. She kept saying over and over how she wanted the truth from him and he had been keep this secret from her.

How did he tell the woman he was madly in love with that he was the reason she got her dream job? Sure, she was qualified for the position, but if he had never brought it to Preston's attention. Syeshia would still be down in the mail room.

"Shit, how do I tell her that not only do I own half of Director Enterprises, but I purposely set out to seduce her so she wouldn't leave me?" The entire situation was leaving a bad taste in his mouth. At first, he thought his situation was the same as Preston's when he fell in love with Layla. However, it wasn't, Layla knew about Preston's wealth and power from the beginning. Syeshia only thought he was assisting Preston with some jobs at D.E. The truth was going to be a blow to her, but would she be strong enough to handle it without getting angry

with him. Because he didn't know what he would do without her in his life. Christmas was the time you spent with the person you loved and he loved Syeshia more than all the money, bonds, and stocks he owned.

“Okay, I can't worry about the future. I have to take care of this memo and get it sent to Preston. I need him to look over it before it's sent out to everyone.” Stamford strolled from the kitchen to his study at the end of the hallway.

Inside the room, he sat behind his desk and pulled up the file he had been working on for the past several days. He was trying to make the memo as friendly but to the point as possible. It was going out to several hundred employees and he couldn't get them all in a panic. Preston would be able to handle some of them, but he knew a lot of the mayhem would come his way. Looking at the screen, he read over the letter one more time trying to see if he had gotten everything he wanted in there.

Director Enterprises Employees,

Good Morning,

I know all of you are wondering why you're getting this memo from me and I am about to answer your question. I know the majority of you have seen me working in different offices and mingling with other employees during the work day and it has been for a very good reason.

I've debated on how I was going to tell everyone who I am for a while now and I recently decided this is the time to disclose my identity. I am now part owner of Director Enterprises with Preston Scott.

Please don't panic about me being here. I'm not here to cut any jobs or shuffle people around to different positions. What's that old saying? "If it ain't broke don't fix it."

Director Enterprises is an amazing company and the work ethic is outstanding. I'm here only to enhance the high level performance not detract from it.

If you have any questions or comments feel free to stop by my office or email me. I want all of us to have a wonderful working relationship.

Stamford King, Partner

Director Enterprises

"I don't think I can write anything better than that," Stamford said as he hit the print icon on the tool bar. He waited while the document printed out and then shoved it into a folder on his desk. Tomorrow he would take this to Preston and have him look over it. He didn't want it sent out as an email until he was sure that Syeshia had heard it from him first.

Chapter Eighteen

“I think this memo is perfect,” Preston stated slipping it back into the folder on the side of his desk. “I’m glad that you finally got it done. I was beginning to worry that I might have to do one for you.”

“No, I was just trying to get Syeshia into my life before I did it. It’s going to be really hard telling her about me and how I helped her get the job in finance. She isn’t going to be pleased.”

“Syeshia’s qualifications landed her that job,” Preston corrected.

“Would Layla believe that if you told her that same story?”

“Man, I wish you luck. Syeshia is very independent when it comes to her job. If she thought she didn’t get something on her own it will upset her. Are you coming clean tonight?”

Stamford ran his hand along the back of his neck. “Yeah and it scares the hell out of me. I have a few projects to finish up here first and then I’m going home and tell her everything. I thought telling her about Adam was hard, but this is even harder. I couldn’t take it if she tossed me out of her life.”

“You have to know she is going to be upset. She’ll probably think you were using her from day one. I had a lot to prove to Layla at first, but she understood enough to give me another chance.”

“I’m hoping that Syeshia will feel the same way. I don’t doubt that she’s in love with me, but I’m not sure if she’ll take my confession well. She’s so hung up on honesty that this will be a blow to her trust issues. I don’t think it should matter, but without a doubt it will. I’ve been used to keeping things a secret for so long from people. I honestly didn’t know how to tell her the truth. Isn’t it ironic that I worked half my life to get the wealth I have today and that it may very well cost me the woman I love?”

“I heard that Syeshia isn’t into a lot of money and power, but she broke that rule for you. I believe that should tell you something,” Preston stated.

“Syeshia has guessed that I might have some money, but she doesn’t have a clue how much. Yet, I think keeping my job title from her will kill our relationship more than my money. She loves doing things for herself and if she has the slightest doubt about how she landed her new job she’ll quit. I can’t have her leaving me. Not after it has taken so long for me to find someone like her. Hopefully, I’ll say the right words to make everything okay. I would hate for this little lie to ruin my relationship.”

“A lie is never good or little when it comes to a woman, but I think Syeshia’s love is strong enough that she’ll over look this and still keep you in her life.”

“God, I pray you’re right,” Stamford uttered already dreading the future.

Standing up, Preston came around the desk and stood by the edge. “Hey, don’t dwell on it. It won’t be as bad as you think. How about you come home with me? I usually check on Layla around lunch time.”

“She gets tired more now and I thought it was best if she didn’t work. However, sometime she sneaks and does things around the house. I have to stop at her favorite restaurant first and get her something to eat.”

“Sounds good to me,” Stamford said joining Preston. “I always do better on a full stomach and I know that Syeshia is going to make me work for her forgiveness.”

“Are you up for the challenge?” Preston asked him as they headed for the door.

“You better believe it.” Stamford grinned as he followed Preston out of the office.

Chapter Nineteen

Syeshia knocked on Preston's office door and waited for him to answer her. She was really worried that she might have missed him. He usually left early on Fridays now. He told her that if he didn't answer the door she had permission to go into his office and place the folder on his desk, but she hated to invade his privacy like that.

However, Monday morning she had a financial meeting out of the office until noon and she hated to make Mr. Scott wait until she got back to the office.

"Okay, I'll just leave it on his desk and leave. I don't think there is anything wrong with that. People leave paperwork for me on my desk all the time." Syeshia told herself as she opened the door and went inside Preston's office.

She smiled at the pictures of Layla he had displayed on his desk and the counter behind his chair. Without a doubt, Preston was in love with his wife. Maybe one day Stamford would have pictures like this of her inside his office and vice versa for her.

Syeshia tossed the report in her hand on the top of Preston's desk. As she turned to leave, her hip brushed against the side of his desk causing a folder and several pieces of paper to scatter across the floor.

“Great!” she mumbled under her breath bending down to pick up the mess she just made. As she grabbed the sheet of paper a name caught her eye. She tried to place the paper back without reading it. Really she did, but once Syeshia saw the name she couldn’t look away.

Syeshia slowly stood up on shaky legs as she read over the memo in her hand. This might get her fired and right now she didn’t give a damn about her job. Stamford had been lying to her since day one.

He wasn’t Preston’s advisor. Stamford was part owner at Director Enterprises! He probably knew who she was the second she stepped on that elevator. He had been using her all along. What did Stamford think she was going to bad-mouth him to Preston? Were all his whispered words of love a lie? She wasn’t going to stand for this.

Trying to keep her temper under control, Syeshia placed the paper back in the folder and laid it on Preston’s desk. She wasn’t going to let Stamford get away with this. She deserved some answers and he was going to give them to her. After that she was going to toss him out of her life. He wasn’t going to use her anymore.

She rushed out of the office only pausing long enough to close the door behind her. All the way to Stamford’s office all she could think about was the good times they’d had and how all of it had been lies on his part. He wasn’t in love with her. Hell, he had probably been thinking about someone else when they made love.

Syeshia made it to Stamford's office in less than five minutes. Squaring her shoulders, she prepared herself for what was about to happen. Stamford was an excellent liar and he was going to try to lie his way out of this, but she wasn't going to let him. Without bothering to knock, she walked right on in. "Stamford, we need to talk."



Stamford glanced up from the Christmas list he was working on for Syeshia and slid it underneath a stack of papers on his desk. He wasn't prepared to see her. He thought she was still working in her office. He was going to surprise her later and take her out to an expensive dinner. They hadn't been out in such a long time. However, from the way Syeshia was looking at him his idea might not happen tonight.

"Baby, what's wrong with you?"

"Don't baby me. I know about you. How could you keep that from me?"

"You know what? What have I been keeping from you?" he asked standing up.

"I don't know if I should tell you. You might continue lying to my face," Syeshia uttered hurt in her voice.

Stamford was getting scared. Syeshia wasn't acting like herself. Moving from behind his desk, he stopped in front of her. "Baby, I would never hurt you.

Please tell me what's going on with you?" He reached out to touch her, but Syeshia stepped away from him and around his body.

"Fine, I'll tell you," she snapped. "I was in Preston's office earlier. I had to drop off some paperwork for him to read tomorrow. As I was leaving I knocked a file off his desk and this paper flew out. I wasn't going to read it until I noticed your name on it."

All kinds of uneasiness started forming in the pit of Stamford's stomach as he prayed Syeshia haven't seen his memo, but he knew that she had. Shit, what in the hell was he going to do? Syeshia was pissed as hell with him.

"You're part owner of Director Enterprises. I can't believe you were with me these past weeks and didn't tell me. Do you know how that makes me look? God, I have been so stupid. A guy like you doesn't pick up a woman in an elevator unless it's for a reason. Why was I the chosen one? Did Mr. Scott think I'd be the easiest nut to crack? On second thought don't tell me," she said holding her hand up trying to cut him off before he said one word.

"Syeshia, listen to me let me explain," Stamford pleaded as she hurried around him towards the door. "You can't leave like this. I love you. I don't want you to end things between us."

Pivoting, Syeshia held back tears as the man she had fallen in love with stared back at her from the middle of his office. She should have known that he

was too good to be true. A girl from small country town would never be lucky enough to land a man like Stamford King. She should never have talked to him that day in the cafeteria. If she had just gotten up and left her heart wouldn't be in a million pieces days before Christmas.

"I'm not ending this between us, Mr. King. You are," she snapped back hurt.

"I never said that I wanted to break up. Hell woman, I'm madly in love with you. I want to spend the rest of my life with you." Stamford moved closer to her trying to shrink the enormous space between them. "No, I can't do that," Syeshia said taking two steps back. "How can I ever trust you after this?"

"Baby, give me another chance. I swear I wasn't sent here to spy on anyone. That was a chance meeting between us in the elevator. I can honestly say it was the best day of my life. Can't you please understand, I just couldn't tell you who I was at first. I wanted to see how people reacted to me without knowing I was Co-CEO with Preston."

"That's how you think of me...."

"What are you talking about? How do you think I think of you, sweetheart?"

"As a person you had to keep your secret from because you didn't trust me with the truth. Who do you think I would have told? Do you really think I wouldn't have been able to keep my mouth shut? Did you ever really love me?"

"Yes..." Stamford answered.

Syeshia swallowed down her tears and fought to get her words out. “Oh, I see. You thought I was good enough to sleep with and ask to move into your house, but I wasn’t trustworthy enough to tell your ultimate secret. I had to find it out in a memo that fell off Preston’s desk.”

“Shit, you’re not listening to me. I didn’t mean yes I thought you would run and tell everyone that I was Preston’s new partner. I meant yes I do love you. I think...no I know it was love at first sight and I know it was for you too.”

“Nice try, but I’m not buying it.” The sarcasm in Syeshia’s voice filled the room.

“Damn it. It’s the truth!” Stamford roared pissed and hurt that Syeshia wasn’t listening to him. He didn’t like the way she was twisting his words around.

“I was dumb enough to let you snag my heart once, but I won’t let it happen again. I’ll get my stuff moved out of your house by tomorrow. I’ll give you a time so you won’t be home. I’ll leave my key in your mailbox. That way we won’t have to be bothered with each other.” Spinning around, she headed for the door but was stopped by Stamford wrapping his hand around her elbow.

“I won’t let you move out. My home is your home now too, baby. There isn’t a piece of it that won’t remind me of you. I can’t stay there if you aren’t living under the same roof as me.” Just the thought of Syeshia not being there with him made Stamford sick to his stomach.

“How about I make your favorite dinner and we can talk this out? I was going to tell you the truth tonight. I can’t let our relationship end like that. You’re everything to me. Don’t let a stupid business decision on my part tear us apart.”

Shaking off Stamford’s touch, she rubbed the part of her arm that still tingled from his fingers. “Stamford, I’m not breaking up with you because of the lie. I can understand why you did that. I’m leaving you because you didn’t trust me. How can I be with a man who can’t trust me?”

“Trust is so important in any relationship and when it’s gone I’m clueless as to how to get it back. Also, don’t worry anything that doesn’t belong to me I’ll be sure to leave at the house.” Syeshia hurried from the room with the sounds of Stamford screaming her name.

Chapter Twenty

Pausing in the middle of his office, Stamford stared at the box on his desk with his name scribbled across the front. Syeshia was avoiding him anyway she could. He had gone by her house last night to try to reason with her and she wouldn't answer the door. All he wanted to do was explain his side to her but she wasn't having it. He never knew that Syeshia had this stubborn side to her while they were dating. She was so agreeable and carefree. He hated to admit it but it was a turn-on for him.

When he got a chance to get her alone he wasn't going to let her leave his side until she said that she forgave him. He still didn't think he lied to her. He only kept his job a secret. Sure, it wasn't the best thing to do. Yet, he never thought it was bad enough for Syeshia to erase him from her life. Damn it, he loved the hell out of her. He couldn't even work without thinking about her gorgeous face.

He lost count how many times he went up to the third floor just to catch a glimpse of her at her desk. Last week he had gone so many times that Preston mentioned that he was making the other employees nervous. They thought he was watching them to make sure they were doing a good job.

How did Preston think he could stay away from the woman he was in love with? Syeshia was everything to him and he was going to win her back. Christmas was only days away and he wasn't about to spend it alone. He had plans for his woman and that dumb ass mistake he made wasn't going to change them.



“Girl, you look horrible. What is up with you? Isn't this your favorite time of year? Is there something wrong with your mother? Are you still going to see her?” Whitney kept firing off question after question so Syeshia didn't think she would be able to get a word in.

“Thanks for saying that I look as bad as I feel. I just have a lot going on now. You know working up in finance is a lot more stressful than working in the mailroom. No, my mother is doing well. I'm still going to see her. I used to love the Christmas holiday until I met Stamford. He has totally ruined it for me this year. If I never see his face again, I would be a happy woman.”

Whitney mumbled something under her breath that she couldn't quite hear. “What did you say?”

“I know you don't expect me to believe that lie about Stamford. You are missing the hell out of him. I notice how you try not to look in his direction when he comes around you. You practically made a mad dash out of the cafeteria when

he came towards you the other day. I never saw a man looked so crushed. He's so in love with you. Why don't you give him another chance?"

God...she really wanted too but how could she? Stamford was keeping stuff from her. Hell, he was the one that got her the job in the finance department. If the pay wasn't so damn good and was helping pay off a huge chunk of her mother's bills, she would have quit the second she found out and left Director Enterprises.

"How about we stop talking about my personal life? Have you finished your wedding plans? I know you were thinking about having a June wedding."

"Nice try, but it isn't going to work. You are lonely without Stamford and everyone at work knows that he is dying for some attention from you. Don't make the man beg for your attention. So what if he's worth millions on top of millions? Most women would love to have Stamford King in love with them."

"See, you're no better than him. I'm not a gold-digger. I didn't dream about marrying a rich man when I was a little girl. I was worried about getting a good education and then taking care of my mother after she got sick. I had other responsibilities."

Whitney shook her head at her making a 'tsking' sound with her tongue. "Syeshia, you're trying your best to put the blame on Stamford, but you're the one with the problem."

"What? Why are you saying that to me?"

“You’re holding his wealth against him and it’s wrong.”

“He wasn’t honest with me and that’s why we broke up.”

“Don’t lie to me. You’re scared of being with someone who has that kind of wealth. You were okay when you thought he was just rich, but when you found out he was filthy rich you ran for the hills.”

“That isn’t true,” Syeshia denied.

“Yes it is and we both know it. I would think long and hard before I tossed Stamford back out there. You wouldn’t want him to end up with the wrong woman on the rebound. He’s loves you but I doubt he’ll keep allowing you to push him away.” Whitney got up from the chair and stared down at her.

“For once in your life think with your heart and not with your head I bet it will work out better for you.” Giving her a small wave, Whitney left her alone inside the mall restaurant to mull over their conversation.

Chapter Twenty-One

“I need both of you to help me get Syeshia back. She’s still avoiding me and I can’t take it anymore. I need her back in my life. I’m lost without her,” Stamford told the two people sitting inside his office. It was after hours and this was the only time he knew of that he could talk to the both of them privately.

“I’ll be glad to help anyway that I can,” the man said.

The woman shook her head. “I’m not sure about this. Syeshia is really upset.”

“Please, this is the only way I can think of to get her back, but it won’t work without the two of you,” he pleaded. He wasn’t too proud to beg when it came to his Syeshia. He couldn’t let this year end without her being in his life.

“Come on, you can help him out. You know that he belongs with Syeshia,” the man coached.

“Fine, but if it blows up in his face I’m not taking the blame.”

“Great, now this is what I want the two of you to do,” Stamford smiled leaning across the table.



Syeshia read over the flyer she found stuck in with her mail and tossed it into the trashcan beside her chair. She didn't have time for that nonsense. If the rest of the employees wanted to go that was fine with her, but she was keeping her butt at home.

"What are you going to wear to the Christmas party Friday?" Whitney asked coming into her office.

"I'm not going to that dumb Christmas party," she uttered moving away from her desk and around Whitney. "I just want to get past the next couple of days and then leave so I can visit my mother."

Whitney stepped back in front of her and leveled her with a stare. "You aren't going to back out of this. The flyer said all employees and that means you. Who knows you could win the ticket to sit on Santa's lap?"

Rolling her eyes, Syeshia could care less if she got to sit on Santa's lap. The reason she didn't want to attend was Stamford. He had been trying to get her back and she wasn't having it. "I'm going to be honest. I don't want to see Stamford. I'm trying to get over him and seeing him won't help at all. That's why I'm not going," Syeshia confessed.

"He isn't going to be there. I heard he was going back home until January. So, you won't have to be bothered with him."

Syeshia tried not to be hurt but she was. Stamford left without a second thought about her. Well, she guessed the love he felt for her vanished pretty suddenly after she wasn't so available. Why shouldn't she move on too? Maybe going to this Christmas party would be the first step in a new direction for her.

"Are you going with me now? I can't stand the thought of walking in there by myself."

She knew that Whitney wasn't going to leave her alone until she got her way. Besides what would it hurt now that Stamford would be a no show? She might actually have some fun with her co-workers. It wasn't like she hated the sight of them or anything.

"Sure, I'll go with you. I have a new red dress that I've been dying to wear anyway," Syeshia grinned. "I might be able to seduce me a new man."

"I wouldn't do that," Whitney jumped in.

"Why not?" she frowned.

"Rebound relationships aren't good."

"Maybe I only want rebound sex," Syeshia tossed back.

"Are you serious?" Whitney gasped.

"No, I'm only talking. I can't even think about getting into a relationship after the way things ended with Stamford. I only want to have a little fun at the party and then go home and finish packing for my trip."

“I can promise it’s going to be night you’ll never forget,” Whitney said as she headed for the door.

“How do you know that?” Syeshia yelled after her.

“Because you’re going to be with me,” her friend replied before she disappeared around the doorway.



Standing in the open door to the hotel ballroom that Director Enterprises rented for the Christmas party, Syeshia couldn’t believe how quickly Preston had gotten the area decorated for Christmas. Every Christmas decoration known to man was hung up on the walls. Holiday music played in the background not loud enough to bother anyone, but just loud enough for everyone to enjoy it.

She smoothed her hands down over her red dress and wondered if she was too dressed up for the party. She hadn’t worn anything sexy since her break-up with Stamford. “I can do this,” she said giving herself a little pep talk as she moved further into the room.

“Wow! You look amazing,” Whitney gushed running up to her wearing a Santa hat carrying a clear bowl.

“Why are you wearing that?” Syeshia asked pulling at the little white ball hanging off the end of the hat.

“I was chosen to be Santa’s helper. Now pick a raffle ticket for later.” The bowl was shoved at her and Syeshia knew she wouldn’t be able to tell Whitney no. Reaching into the bowl, she pulled out a ticket. “Great, I hope that number twenty-five isn’t pulled. I think I’m a little too old to sit on Santa’s lap.”

“Come on, don’t be such a “party pooper.” I want you to have fun. Now go and mingle with the rest of the employees. I think the raffle will begin in a few minutes. You should have gotten here sooner. You almost missed the contest.”

“Just be glad I came,” Syeshia mumbled under her breath as Whitney left her and had the other Director Enterprises employees pull a number. Shaking her head at her friend’s enthusiasm, she worked her way around the room trying to guess what couples were going to hook up tonight. It was pretty easy to see which ones couldn’t handle all the champagne and other drinks that were being served.

“Would you like something to drink?” A cute young waiter asked coming up to her.

Syeshia was so tempted to say yes, but she didn’t. “No, thank you,” She gave the waiter a small smile and then went over to an area by the food and tried to relax. Parties just weren’t her thing and if she wasn’t trying to get over Stamford she would never have come.

The sound of a fork hitting a glass drew her attention to the stage at the back of the room. “What in the world is she doing now?” she sighed, shaking her

head at Whitney standing in the middle looking too cute in her green dress and Santa hat.

“Is everyone ready for Santa Claus? I hope that you’ve been good and not naughty because you might get a lump of coal in your stocking this year,” she laughed. “Do you hear that? I think I hear Santa coming now.”

“HO....HO....HO.” came from behind the stage before the Santa came around the corner. “Merry Christmas,” his rich baritone said before he joined Whitney on the stage.

“Merry Christmas, Santa,” Whitney grinned. “Why don’t you take a seat? I know you must be tired after your long trip from the North Pole.” Her friend pointed towards a red throne type chair identical to the ones Santa sat in at the mall.

“Thank you, Whitney,” Santa said before taking his seat.

Syeshia wondered if anyone else noticed how the Santa’s suit molded against the guy’s muscles, that was hired to play the holiday legend. She never remembered a Santa every looking that hot before. She wondered what he looked like behind the fake beard, hair and glasses. *Whoa!* She was pretty hard up if she was lusting after old St. Nick. Whitney told her not to get involved with anyone on the rebound, but she might have to change her mind after her little fantasy.

“Now is everyone ready to find out who the lucky person is who gets to sit on Santa’s lap?” Whitney asked.

“Yes, I am,” an intoxicated woman screamed behind Syeshia.

“Sure, why not,” Syeshia uttered. “I can’t wait to see who the lucky person is that gets the pleasure of sitting on Santa’s lap.” She was trying to be in the Christmas spirit, but she just wasn’t feeling it. She hated to admit it, but she was missing Stamford. She knew that she shouldn’t after the way he treated her, but she couldn’t help it. He cemented a part of himself in her heart and it was hard to shove him out.

“Okay, here goes.” Whitney shook the bowl and then pulled out a ticket. “Twenty-five is the winner,” she said waving the red stub in the air. “Come on up here and tell Santa what you want for Christmas.”

I couldn’t have won. Shock and disbelief filled Syeshia’s body as she glanced down at the number in her hand and back up at the stage. She didn’t want to go up there and sit on some strange guy’s lap no matter how sexy he was. She closed her hand over the ticket and prayed that Whitney would pick another one.

“Come on. I know the winner still has to be out there,” Whitney pouted looking out into the crowd and Syeshia swore it felt like Whitney looked at her the longest. “I’m not going to pull another ticket, so Santa and I are going to stay right here until the winner comes forward.”

Shit! Syeshia cursed under her breath. She knew Whitney well enough to know her best friend was telling the truth. It was best to get it over with and then she could go home and just write this entire night off.

“I’m the winner,” she shouted moving through the crowd. Making her way on the stage, she handed Whitney the small slip of paper and stood next to the Santa. An odd feeling came over her as she glanced down at the man. It was almost like she knew him or something.

“I really don’t need to sit on his lap,” she exclaimed. “I just can stand right next to him and tell him what I want.”

“No, you won the contest to sit on Santa’s lap and that’s what’s going to happen,” Santa told her. Wrapping his hand around her wrist, he pulled her down on his lap and wrapped his arm around her waist.

She tried to get up but the Santa only tightened his grip and tugged her closer to his chest. The light scent of his cologne reminded her of something Stamford used to wear. “Please let me up. I really don’t want anything for Christmas,” she said placing her hand on the guy’s chest and jumped when she felt how hard his heart was pounding.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

“I’m a lot better now that I have you in my arms,” Santa mumbled shocking her.

“Ummm...Whitney, I think I should leave.” Syeshia tried to get up again, but the guy wouldn’t let her go.

“You can’t until you tell Santa what you want for Christmas. Remember he’s making a list and checking it twice for girls who have been naughty or nice,” Whitney teased before she got off the stage leaving her with the hot guy in the Santa suit. She really couldn’t see what his face looked like because it was covered up by the hideous fake hair and beard.

“Do you want to tell Santa what you want for Christmas?”

“Not really,” she answered looking from him to her co-workers who were still around the stage staring at her. “I only want to be left alone.”

“Santa doesn’t believe you,” the guy said.

“Fine, I want for this party to be over so I can go home,” Syeshia tossed back trying to ignore how good the guy’s arm felt around her. Only Stamford had made her feel like this and he wasn’t here tonight.

“Santa still doesn’t believe you. Be honest and your Christmas wish may come true,” Santa whispered in her ear sending tiny chills all over her body.

What was it about this guy that made her want to believe him? Stamford had that same ability too and that was what had made her fall in love with him. Yet, he ended up breaking her heart.

“I want someone to love and trust me. I want a man that will believe I’ll be there for him and won’t keep secrets from me.” There she said it now what was this Santa going to do to make it come true.

“Syeshia, you already have that,” Santa whispered right before he kissed her.

She struggled against the guy trying to push him away. *Who in the hell was this?* Slowly, the texture and feel of his lips started to dawn on her and she stopped all movements. *No, it couldn’t be*, she thought as his tongue slipped past her lips inside her mouth. She just had Stamford on the brain.

Cupping the side of her face, he deepened the kiss making a rush of moisture soak her panties. “God, sweetheart I have missed you so much,” he breathed against her mouth before he moved back.

Syeshia pulled the Santa disguise off and gasped when she found Stamford staring back at her. “Is this some kind of sick joke?” she snapped. “Was Whitney in on this with you? Did the two of you want me to make a fool of me in front of the entire office?” she tried to get up again, but Stamford wouldn’t let her go.

“Let me go. I’m leaving.”

“No, I’m not letting you go again. I love you too damn much to see you walk out of my life for a second time. It killed me every day I had to walk around this building seeing you and knowing I couldn’t talk to you. When I went home the

memories of you were everywhere and I hate that. I didn't want any damn memories I wanted the real thing."

"You should have trusted me," Syeshia snapped, but she stayed put.

"Baby, I know," Stamford whispered by her neck oblivious to all the curious eyes staring at them. "I wanted to tell you a week after I met you but I got scared."

"Why?"

"You were so unlike any woman I had ever known. You liked the simplest things. Money and power weren't important to you. I was only used to dealing with people who lied, cheated and backstabbed to get what they want."

"I was afraid that side of me along with my wealth would turn you off. So, I set out to seduce you first in hopes that it would keep you with me. In reality, all I did was set myself up for a harder fall."

"I never saw you like that," Syeshia confessed finally turning to look Stamford in the face. "All I ever saw was the man I feel in love with. The man who could heat me up with one look. I loved you for you and nothing else."

"Do you still love me?" Stamford asked tracing her lips with his finger. "I don't mind working extra hard to get it back to where it was as long as I have a chance."

"I'm sorry but you can't."

Stamford's hand dropped away from her mouth as he stared back at her with total devastation on his face. He looked like his world had ended. "No, I don't believe you. I can't let this happen. We can go back and I'll take you out on dates. I'll work even harder at getting to know you better, but I won't let you dump me. I'm not the same man without you."

"You're not listening to me." Syeshia wished Stamford would stop talking so he could hear her.

"I'm listening and I don't like what I'm hearing. You want me out of your life because of one stupid mistake on my part."

"I don't want you out of my life," she jumped in quickly before Stamford articulated his love for her again.

"You don't," he whispered as a smile spread across his handsome face. "Why not?"

"Because I know that you love me and I love you just as much or more. I was having a horrible time without you and I hated the thought that you had left without telling me goodbye."

"Syeshia, I've been dreaming about spending Christmas with you since our first kiss and nothing was going to change that. I love you."

"I love you too," Syeshia answered. "You're the best present that Santa Claus has ever brought me."

“I do what I can to make Christmas wishes come true,” Stamford smiled.
“Should we set a wedding date now or later?”

“How about later?” Syeshia suggested spotting Whitney from the corner of her eye coming towards them with a camera in her hand.

“Why later?” Stamford frowned.

“Because I want a picture of me kissing Santa Claus first,” Syeshia captured Stamford’s lips with hers right before Whitney snapped their picture.

The End

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AUTHOR BIO:

Marie Rochelle is a bestselling author and award winning author of interracial romances featuring black women and white men. Marie first started writing IR books about three years ago and it has been nonstop for her ever since. Her first best selling IR romance was entitled **Taken by Storm**. This bestseller will be released by Phaze later on in the year. Her hero in the book Storm Hyde won the 2006 Choice hero from REC.

In addition Ms. Rochelle has several best selling books published through Red Rose Publishing that include: With All my Heart, Dangerous Bet; Troy's Revenge, Cover Model and Pamper Me.

Marie loves hearing from her fans. Please drop her an email at marierochelle2@yahoo.com or visit her website @ www.freewebs.com/irwriter/. She also has a discussion group fans can join and talk about her current releases. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MarieRochelle2/>. Or you can visit her website and join her regular yahoo group.

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