

Marie Rochelle

A romantic close-up photograph of a man and a woman about to kiss. The man is on the left, with his eyes closed and lips slightly parted. The woman is on the right, looking at him with a soft expression. Her hand is visible on his shoulder, with dark red nail polish. The background is dark and out of focus.

# Love Play

Red Rose<sup>TM</sup> Publishing

*Love Play*

*By*

*Marie Rochelle*

*Dedication*

*To one of my mama's favorite*

*singers RIP*

*Teddy P.*



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## Prologue

“I thought I told you that I didn’t want anything to do with you. Why are you still bothering me Ben? I’ve moved on with my life and so should you,” Rishelle, advised the man staring at her. She had to find a way to get rid of him. She didn’t want him back in her life not after everything that happened. It wouldn’t do either one of them any good to get involved with each other again. She had finally made a new life for herself without Ben and it was a pretty damn good life, too.

How in the hell did he even know where to find her? Had he found out where she lived now and followed her here? She hadn’t seen him since that horrible night Nicey introduced her to Ben not knowing that she already knew him.

“I don’t believe you. We were good together. Just give me a chance to explain,” Ben pleaded with her not caring if he was drawing unwanted attention from the people walking around their bodies. “I won’t lose you a second time. You belong with me and we both know it. Why are you fighting this so hard? You still love me I can see it in your eyes.”

Rishelle glared at the man who had broken her heart all those years ago. She wasn't going to open herself up to that kind of heart wrenching pain again. When was he going to get it through his thick skull that she wouldn't fall back into his arms because of a few sweet spoken words? Ben Forster was out of her heart and it was going to stay that way regardless of how hard he tried to worm his way back into it. He was her past *not* her future.

"No, you are all out of chances. Go away!" She spun away, but Ben grabbed her arm preventing her from storming off.

*Shit! Why wouldn't he just leave her alone?*

"Sweetheart, please wait," he pleaded. "Have dinner with me tonight. I've spent years looking for you. You can at least give me an hour of your day. Do you know how stunned yet excited I was to see you at Spencer's get-together? I never imagined in a million years that you would be best friends with Nicey."

Jerking her arm away, Rishelle glowered at Ben over her shoulder. "How can you ask me anything after I found you with her? If you didn't want to date me anymore, you should have been man enough to tell me. Hell, I'd have been strong enough to handle your rejection, but you didn't do that, did you?"

"Instead, you took the coward's way out. You disappeared without any warning so you wouldn't have to deal with me. So, that means I can't have dinner with you today or any day of the week for that matter."

“Damn it, I wasn’t interested in what’s her name. I was only with her because my job demanded it. How could you *ever* think I wanted to ruin what we had? You were and still are so perfect for me. I realized that after the second day I spent with you. I was planning a future for the two of us until that awful day that ripped you away from me.”

As she faced him, Rishelle tried not to laugh at the worn-out line Ben was feeding her. “You were working in an accountant’s office. What kind of job did you have that called for you to make out with your boss?” She could only imagine what kind of lies Ben was trying to think up to tell her. It was like she could actually see the wheels churning around in that gorgeous head of his.

“I don’t want to get into it here,” Ben answered, looking around the crowded shopping center, “but I swear I wasn’t cheating on you. I was in love with you. I could have never hurt you like that.”

“You don’t know how to love anyone else, but yourself,” Rishelle accused, and then lowered her voice when several people looked her way. “That’s why you have two ex-wives. Hell, if I had stayed with you I would have probably ended up being number three.”

Ben frowned at her and then shook his head. “That’s a lie. Like I said, have dinner with me so we can get things worked out between us. I know after you



hear what I have to say that you will forgive me.” He was certain Rishelle wouldn’t stay mad at him after she learned the truth. *She couldn’t.*

*Do it. Do it.* Rishelle’s heart screamed at her, but her mind was going to win out this time. Listening to her heart was how she got into trouble last time. She was older and wiser now. She wasn’t going to make the same mistake twice. Ben wasn’t going to seduce her with his words or looks anymore — at least she secretly hoped that he wouldn’t be able to.



Ben didn’t know what else to say to make Rishelle to listen to him. She couldn’t go on believing he had cheated on her. God, he loved her too much back then for that. Hell, he was still in love with her. Now all he had to do was find a way to make her believe in him and the incredible love the two of them had shared.

If they could just get some alone time without any distractions from their jobs, friends, or family Ben knew with a little love play that he could win her back.

“Come away with me for a month. Give me a chance to redeem myself.”

The look of astonishment on Rishelle’s face almost made him wish that he hadn’t brought up the trip at all. He didn’t know if she was pissed or shocked, but either way it didn’t look good for him. He only wanted some alone time with her and going away on a little getaway seemed like the perfect thing to do.

“You can’t be serious,” Rishelle gasped. “Why would I go away with you?”

“Because like me you’re wondering what could have been. Give us both this chance to find out.” Ben prayed that Rishelle was still interested in him in some kind of way despite her boisterous protest and she agreed to his suggestion. Unfortunately, if she turned him down, then he would have to think of something else to win Rishelle over and find a way back into her life.

“How do you know that I’m not already involved with someone? Do you think I waited around for almost six years for you to come back into my life?” she tossed back.

He quickly banked his anger before his jealousy chased Rishelle away. He had to do this the right way or he wouldn’t get what he wanted. “If you were with someone, you wouldn’t have spent the better part of thirty minutes talking to me, so, is it a yes or no?” Ben wouldn’t let Rishelle toss what they could have away without a second thought.

“I’ll accept, but only on one condition,” Rishelle finally answered.

*I’ll give you anything you want as long as you agree to go,* he thought. “What’s the condition?”

“The condition is I’ll be able to leave before the thirty days is up if I want to.”

Ben wanted to argue, but decided against it. Rishelle was giving him this much, so he couldn’t complain. “You’ve got a deal,” he agreed, then grinned.

“Good, then I guess I’ll go away with you,” Rishelle uttered, irritated like she would rather be going to the dentist instead of spending time with him.

“Thank you and I swear I’ll make it a time that you’ll never forget,” Ben promised.

He knew that after this trip was over there was no way Rishelle would leave him. They were *perfect* for each other in the past and the six years they had spent apart hadn’t changed that.

## Chapter One

“I must be out of my damn mind to have ever agreed to do this. I was doing fine without him. Why did I not tell him to just take his suggestion and shove it up his ass?” Rishelle Damian asked, storming around Nicey’s Carlton’s luxuriously well-decorated office later on in the afternoon. She decided to take a late lunch after dealing with Ben this morning at the mall, so she would be able to get some advice from her best friend. She hoped that Nicey would tell her what she wanted to hear.

“Do you really want me to answer that question?” Nicey inquired as she spun away from the window. “I can give you an honest answer.”

“When have you ever not giving me your honest opinion about anything happening in my life? I wouldn’t have come all of this way to see you if I wasn’t looking for some guidance.” Rishelle stared at Nicey like she had grown an extra head or something.

Walking away from the window, Nicey came across the room and took a seat on the white couch in the corner. “I don’t think you really ever got over Ben. A part of you has been waiting for an opportunity like this. You have always

wondered what happened that day and now you will have the full story after this trip is over.”

Rishelle hated to admit that what Nicey said was the honest to God truth. She had thought about Ben a lot over the last six years. Way more than she should have, but she had thought she was in love with him. However, after his betrayal she realized it was just a bad case of lust. She wasn’t going to let him romance her back down the same endless road without a light in sight. She was too mature to have a crush on a man who wasn’t any good for her.

Ben wasn’t the man for her and he would never be. She was *only* going on this trip to prove to herself that she had finally gotten over Ben Forster. This trip would show him that he no longer had any kind of control over her emotions or feelings. She could spend the next thirty days with him without getting any piece of her heart involved.

“I’m going out to the cabin with Ben, but nothing is going to happen between the two of us. I know that I’ll be back at home way before the thirty days are up. The relationship I had with Ben is over and it has been for years. I just have to prove it to him.”

“Are you sure about that? I remembered how Ben acted after he saw you at the party Spencer had last year. He looked like he had seen a ghost. The second you ran out of the house Ben wasn’t far behind you. I thought he was going to

break several speed limits going after you. I believe those are the actions of a man still in love with a woman. Are you going to deny what I 'm saying isn't true?"

Rishelle made a snorting sound in the back of her throat as she joined Nicey on the couch. "Ben was inspired by guilt and that was all. He always had a no quit attitude. I know one thing for sure and that is Ben loves to hold on to what he think is his and I'm not his. Hell, I never was important to him. I don't know why I ever thought I was."

"I don't get that from Ben," Nicey exclaimed. "I think he really does still care about you. I lost count on how many times he came by Pamper Me trying to find out more information about you. I thought Spencer was bad when he was trying to get a date with me, but I think Ben has gone overboard for you."

"See, now you understand what I'm talking about," Rishelle sighed. "Ben doesn't know how to leave me alone. The past is the past. I think it would be for the best if we left it there and not try to relive it."

Rishelle wasn't going to tell Nicey this, but she was terrified as hell. What if when she went out there in the wilderness with Ben and discovered she wouldn't be able to resist him; Ben always had that affect on her. All he had to do was smile at her and her panties would hit the floor. *No*, she had to get out of this trip before it was too late.

“Rishelle, honey, are you listening to me?” Nicey asked touching her leg. “Your decision to spend a month with Ben seems like it is tearing you apart. Do you want to back out of it? I think he would be hurt, but he would understand.”

“I’m not sure,” Rishelle admitted, softly. “I have so much going on in my head. I’m so confused.”

“What does your heart tell you to do?” Nicey asked. “Are you willing to overlook the hurt and go away with Ben? You might not ever get this chance again. Do you want a ‘*what if*’ hanging over your head?”

“My stupid heart is telling me to give Ben a chance to explain himself because we never got the past cleared up. However, my head is forewarning me because Ben has broken my heart once, so do I really want to give him a chance to do it again?”

“God, you are truly torn about this. Do you know when you are going to make a decision? I’m so glad it isn’t me going through this now.”

Nicey didn’t have to tell her that, she already knew it. Her best friend and Spencer had several problems in their relationship before they finally ended up married to each other. They were totally in love now, but it took Nicey a little while before she was able to overlook the lies Spencer had spoon fed her.

“I probably won’t know what I’m going to do until Ben knocks on my front door,” Rishelle confessed. “This has to be the hardest decision that I have ever made in my life.”



“I can’t believe the woman you have been hung up on these past few years is my wife’s best friend. Just think if I hadn’t fallen for Nicey the first time I saw her you wouldn’t have Rishelle back in your life,” Spencer said turning the steaks over on the grill.

“I don’t have Rishelle back in my life yet,” Ben corrected. “I had to practically beg her to spend the month with me at my family’s cabin. I think she was going to turn me down until I agreed to her one and only rule. God, I’m such a dumb ass to have said yes. What will keep her from leaving the next day?”

“You just have to find a way to make her want to spend the entire month with you.” Spencer closed the lid to the grill and joined Ben at the picnic table in his backyard. “You know that I had a really hard time getting Nicey to go out on a date with me; however, I wasn’t about to give up. I knew that she was the woman for me.”

“Spencer, you don’t have the track record that I do with women. I have two ex-wives and Rishelle knows this. She even mentioned it when I asked her to go



away with me. How can I prove to her that she is the woman I want with me for the rest of my life? She's very stubborn."

"First, I wouldn't start off with those exact words. I think it will be too much too soon. Give her time to get used to being around you again after so long. Rishelle is very intelligent. I don't think she will fall for a few sweet spoken words. She seems like she would want a man to prove to her how much he cares about her." Spencer grabbed a barbeque chip out of the basket in the middle of the table and shoved it into his mouth.

"How did you get so smart when it comes to the workings of a woman's mind?" Ben asked before taking a long sip of his beer.

"After everything I went through with Nicey, I learned when to keep pressuring her and when to back off. Nicey wasn't having any of my old lines played on her. I had to step up my romance level to finally win her over. I almost lost her because I wasn't being truthful, and I placed her into the same category as women I had dated in my past. I quickly found out Nicey was her own unique person. The second I realized my mistakes, the sooner I was on my way to winning her heart and making her my wife."

"See, but the difference between Nicey and Rishelle is that Nicey wanted to be involved with you. She was just lying to herself because she didn't want to get hurt. However, Rishelle told me that she wasn't interested in picking up where we

left off. I think the only reason she told me yes was to shut me up. I don't want her going with me for that purpose," Ben complained, pushing his empty beer bottle away from him.

"Why do you keep thinking about the negative?" Spencer asked. "Rishelle is going away with you. All you have to do is make sure that she falls in love with you all over again. Keep her every need satisfied and she won't be able to live without you. Don't show her how nervous you are. It's a bad idea and it won't work in your favor at all."

"You're right. I just don't want to push her even further away from me. I still love her so damn much. I care about her more than I ever did any of my ex-wives. She is truly the woman that I want to spend the rest of my life with." Ben knew that the first time he saw Rishelle and he screwed everything up by keeping his real job a secret. How did he know that she wouldn't have kept quiet if he had confided in her?

"Excellent. I'm glad that you see how perfect Rishelle is for you. She needs a man that can match her personality and I know you have it in you to win her over. Make this trip the romance part of your seduction and I bet Rishelle will be the one asking you to extend the thirty day trip."

"God, man, I hope you're right because I don't think I'll be able to let Rishelle go now that I have found her again. She brought so much to my life when

she was in love with me. There wasn't a day that I wasn't walking around with a permanent smile on my face. All of that went away when she walked out on me."

"I searched for her and never found a trace of her. I don't know how she did it, but Rishelle kept herself hidden from me until now. I'm a cop and have been for years and my not being able to find her makes me look stupid. I will ask her how she stayed in town for six years without me ever seeing her once."

"Like I said Rishelle is very intellectual. If she didn't want you to find her I'm sure that she did everything in her power to keep her whereabouts hidden from you," Spencer agreed as he got up from his seat and went to check the meat on the grill.

Ben hated to think that Spencer was right. Rishelle had been so hurt by him that she purposely found a way to stay away from him. He had spent so much money and countless hours looking for her. He would have done it again and much more to find her. He was supposed to be able to hunt anyone down and he failed at finding the person he wanted the most.

How was that possible? He was a detective and should have been able to find her without a single problem, but that didn't happen. Now, that he was lucky enough to have found her by accident, he wasn't about to let her leave him again.

“Thanks for all of your support,” Ben told Spencer as he placed their steaks on the plates. “I’m happy that Nicey didn’t mind me coming over here today. She’s really a good woman. I’m glad that I was able to help you find her.”

“Ben, you were a big help. If you hadn’t looked up her license plate, I wouldn’t have had a clue how to find her. Anyway, Nicey is working late today on updating her website for Pamper Me and her client’s appointments. She has been working late a lot this week. I might have to give her a little lecture. She knows how much I hate her driving way out here after dark.”

Chuckling, Ben waited until Spencer had plated their food before he said anything. “Are you really going to give Nicey a lecture?” He would love to be a fly on the wall for that little conversation.

“I think about it in my head several times a day, but I wouldn’t ever do it. I just want her to be a little more careful since she is pregnant now. I swear I think she’s on the go more now than she was before she got pregnant. I like having her home at night, so I can keep an eye on her.”

“Is there something wrong with the baby? Is that why you’re so concerned?” Ben knew how excited Spencer was about the baby. He remembered the phone call he had gotten at work a while back. Spencer had almost ruptured his eardrum shouting that Nicey was going to have a baby.

“No, everything is wonderful. We have an appointment next week to see what we’re having. Nicey is getting closer to her due date, so she’s ready to find out. I think the suspense is killing her.”

“So, what do you want?”

“First, I want the baby to be healthy and of course I would love to have a little boy. Nicey wants us to have a son too, but we will love a girl just as much. Would you believe that even my self-centered sister is excited about becoming an aunt? She wants to help with the nursery. Can you believe it?”

Ben was taken aback because the last time he heard Spencer talk about his sister and Nicey they weren’t getting along too well. Nicey was still upset about what Cindy had said about her on television. “Hell must have frozen over for the two of them to be civil to each other. I know how much the two of them can’t stand being in the same room with each other.”

“The situation between them has changed drastically since Cindy recommended some of her friends to Pamper Me. Nicey has paired up three couples in the past year and all of them are getting married next year. I think they have come to an understanding.”

“Cindy knows that Nicey isn’t going to take any of her diva crap and it works pretty well for the both of them. I can honestly say that I have a wonderful life now. I don’t work as much as I used to. I love getting home early and fixing

dinner for Nicey. I never thought something like seeing a smile on my wife's face would bring me so much pleasure."

Jealousy wasn't usually a part of his personality because he generally thought that life was going pretty good, but after hearing and seeing how happy Spencer was Ben knew that he had been missing out on something very important—love.

"I'm hoping that after this trip with Rishelle that I will have those same things in my life," Ben admitted. "I'm tired of coming home to an empty house. Hell, I don't even have a dog. I need more in my life now. I'm not getting any younger."

"I have all the faith in the world that you will get Rishelle to fall in love with you again."

"How do you know that?" Ben was dying to know the answer. He wasn't even sure that Rishelle would get in the car when he showed up tomorrow. Damn, he prided himself on being a confident man, but Rishelle was the one woman who kept him twisted up in knots because he cared about her more than anything in the world.

*I have to get myself under control because I'm not going to lose her again.*

"I know because you have the same unwavering look on your face that I had about Nicey and now she's my wife," Spencer answered.

“Thanks so much for being so optimistic about this. I need all the positive thoughts that I can get today because tomorrow I’m going to pick up Rishelle. I hope she doesn’t try to back out on me. I couldn’t hold it against her if she did. I haven’t given her many reasons to trust me.”

“She won’t. I think Rishelle is a woman of her word. When she tells you she’s going to do something she will do it.”

“I wish I had as much confidence in my love life as you do. I just want everything to go smoothly, but I have a very bad feeling that it won’t,” Ben said, worried about the future and what really would happen when he showed up at Rishelle’s house.

## Chapter Two

“Good morning, beautiful,” Ben complimented the second the door opened and he saw Rishelle standing on the other side. “Are you ready for the best time of your life?” He had been up half the night making sure that everything was properly taken care of at his family’s cabin.

All the cabinets were stocked with food and everything else they might need. He wanted to make sure there was no reason for them to go into town. All he needed now was for Rishelle to allow him to make up for his asinine mistake, so they could get started on their future.

“You’re early,” she said turning away from the door and going back into the living room. “I’m glad you were able to follow the directions that I texted you yesterday. I almost didn’t tell you my new address. I had to move out of the old house. It held too many memories of you there.”

Ouch...Rishelle sure knew how to cut to the bone, Ben thought but he kept his comment to himself. He didn’t want to piss her off before they even left.

“Didn’t you get the message I left on your answering machine last night?” Ben asked as he came into the house shutting the door behind him. He stopped in the room and glanced around surprised that Rishelle had completely redone the



theme of her living room. It looked nothing like her previous living room, but it was a new house, so why wouldn't she get new furniture?

Her previous tastes were mostly black and white but now it was more colorful with the red couch and matching loveseat. He loved how this room fit the personality that he thought Rishelle always kept a secret from the rest of the world.

"You have totally rethought your design scheme. It looks even better than your old house. I think it fits the fire I always saw lurking in your eyes. It was one of the first things that drew me to you."

"It's such a shame that it didn't keep you there," Rishelle bit back. "I guess I wasn't fiery enough and that's why you were having sex with your boss on her couch."

"Damn it! I wasn't having sex with her." He was trying to find a way back into Rishelle's heart, but all she wanted to do was keep them in the past. "Why won't you let that go and focus on how much we cared about each other before that day? I know you were in love with me. Shit, I was totally in love with you. You stayed on my mind twenty-four seven. I couldn't wait to get to work and see you on the days you didn't spend the night and we went to work together."

Spinning around, Rishelle opened her mouth to say something but then snapped it closed at the last minute and regained her composure. "How about we

just leave the past where it needs to be and get through these next thirty days? I'm sure you have a lot planned to keep us entertained."

Ben walked across the room until he was right in front of Rishelle. He noticed how the pulse in her neck sped up a little faster. He was thrilled to realize that she was lying to him. She might keep telling him over and over how much she despised him or how she couldn't wait until this trip was over and he was out of her life for good, but her body was giving her away. Rishelle was still attracted to him and he was going to use this piece of valuable information to work to his advantage.

"Sweetheart, I have numerous plans to keep you very entertained while we are away. Your hands are always going to be filled with something long and hard from the moment we get to the cabin and you are going to love it."

A sudden icy contempt flashed in Rishelle's captivating eyes. "Do you always have sex on your mind? I'm not about to touch any part of your body anytime soon Ben Forster, so you can get that crazy idea out of your head this instant!"

"I'm not talking about you touching my body parts" Ben replied, clearly confused by where the conversation was headed. "But if you wanted to I wouldn't stand in your way. I remember how soft your hands felt stroking my chest after we made love. I thought that was the best part of our lovemaking."

Instead of answering him, Rishelle grabbed a medium size suitcase off the floor and her purse off the couch. Ben noticed how Rishelle was literally biting her lip to keep from saying something to him as she stormed around his body toward the front door. He didn't care if she screamed at him again. He just loved hearing the sound of her voice and would do anything to keep her talking to him.

"What's wrong, sweetheart? Does the cat have your tongue? You are usually more vocal than you are today. Are you afraid that you might let something slip that you don't want me to hear?" Ben taunted, loving how Rishelle glanced over her shoulder giving him a frosty look. It only added fuel to his plot to make her fall for him again rekindling the love they once shared for each other.

"Can we just get going?" Rishelle asked as she continued to the front door. "The quicker I get to this place the faster I can get back home."

Ben hurried passed Rishelle and then stopped in front of her, so she wouldn't walk out on him. He grabbed the suitcase out of her hand before she could stop him. "You remember me well enough to know that I never do anything quickly. I love taking my time and going very slow. I think it only adds to the experience, don't you?" Before she could move, he planted a quick kiss on her mouth and then stepped away from her. .

"Come on, let's hit the road. We have a long drive ahead of us. I want to get to the cabin before it gets too dark."

“Don’t you dare kiss me again,” Rishelle snapped as she brushed around him. You have no right to do that.”

“Sorry, I can’t promise you that,” Ben answered as he opened the front door and paused in the entry way.

“Why not?” the question hovered in the air as Ben wrestled with whether he should tell Rishelle the truth or let her sweat it out on the long drive to his favorite getaway but in the end he decided to give her an answer.

“I can’t because I’m addicted to your mouth. I love the way it tastes too much to ever give it up.” Ben continued on out the door without looking back because he already knew that Rishelle’s mouth was opened in an adorable little O. Because anytime he said anything to shock her that is what she did. It had to be the cutest and sexiest thing he had ever witnessed in his adult life. Yeah, this was going to be one hell of a trip.

Rishelle might fight him tooth and nail for about a week maybe two if she really wanted to be stubborn, but in the end she was going to be his. He was beyond ready to settle down and start a family like his best friend Spencer, and there was only one woman he wanted as his wife-the firecracker behind him Rishelle Damian.

## Chapter Three

“Are you really not going to say a word to me for the entire trip to the cabin? I know you want to get something off that sexy chest of yours, so why don’t you just go ahead and do it?” Ben made a left turn and continued on the long drive that would be the first step into getting Rishelle back in his life.

He stole a peek at Rishelle from the corner of his eye and noticed that she was still texting someone on her cell phone. She had gotten on the damn thing the moment she got into the car and hadn’t stopped since they started the trip over forty-five minutes ago. It was getting on his nerves, but he wasn’t about to let her get the best of him. He knew the perfect way and he meant the perfect way to get Rishelle off the phone and talking to him.

“I should have understood that you would be a little scared to be alone with me for this long drive. Because I remember the last time we took a road trip together, it was for that concert and we ended up pulling over on the side of the road. Until that day, I never knew you had that side to you. I still get hard thinking about the way you seduced me with your tongue.”

Two seconds hadn't passed before Rishelle snapped her cell phone closed and flung it into her purse sitting next to her. "Did you bring that up just to make me get off the phone?" she asked, twisting around in her seat to glare at him.

Taking his eyes off the road for a second, Ben winked at the gorgeous and very infuriated woman now looking like she was about ready to punch him. He loved that he was able to get a rise out of Rishelle-it meant she wasn't as uninterested in him as she was trying to come across. He had gotten her off the phone. Now, he had to keep her off and talking to him for the rest of the trip.

"It seems like my plan worked, didn't it?" Ben taunted, bringing his eyes back to the road. He better stay focused or they were going to end up in a ditch out in the middle of nowhere.

"God, I hate that about you."

"At least you feel something. I can build on that while we are shut away from the rest of the world."

"We aren't going to build on anything. I only came with you to prove a point," Rishelle said looking away from him and out of the passenger side window.

"What kind of point are you trying to prove?" Ben was very curious about what he was up against. It was best to get it out in the open now, so he could get rid of it sooner rather than later, and he'd be able to work on rebuilding their relationship and making a life with Rishelle.

“I want to prove to myself I’m no longer that young, naïve woman who fell head over heels in love with you. I need you to see that I have grown into someone who no longer lives in the past. I can’t and won’t let you find a place in my heart.”

Ben’s hand clenched the steering wheel until his knuckles turned white. It wasn’t fair that his job had done this to Rishelle. She didn’t deserve to be in this kind of pain because of him. He should have been honest with her years ago and they wouldn’t be going through this torment right now.

He would be a happily married man with two kids already and hopefully another one on the way. Instead, he was single, miserable and dating women that never measured up to the woman sitting next to him.

God...he was used to dealing with convicted criminals, men who didn’t care about anyone else in the world and being around them never bothered him. He always thought of himself as a hard man who was able to handle any situation tossed his way. However, he was at a loss for words when he heard Rishelle voicing how she was still heart-broken over what she thought he had done to her.

Spencer was wrong. It was going to be a lot harder for him to win over Rishelle than it had been for his best friend to get his wife. He had too many open wounds that he had to stitch up with Rishelle before she would even think about allowing him another chance with her; and for that to happen, he would have to be completely honest with her.

Just thinking about it terrified the hell out of him; because once the truth was out in the open it might push Rishelle further away than she already was. He might not ever be able to get her back, but it was a chance he was willing to take.

“Sweetheart, I know you’re still hurting and I can’t apologize enough for that. But I want to be a part of your life again. You were the best thing that ever happened to me. A day hasn’t gone by that you weren’t on my mind. It was sheer luck that I was at Spencer’s party that night, because I was going to cancel at the last minute. However, I didn’t and it was the best thing I ever did.”

“Ben, don’t try to be all romantic on me now,” Rishelle said, cutting him off. “You ruined your chance to do that a long time ago. I can’t believe a word you say now. You’ve lost the trust I gave you and I’m not sure you that I can ever look at you the same way again.”

“I knew this was going to be a battle, but I’m not going to give you up without a fight. You know that there is reason that you or I haven’t married other people. We are supposed to be with each other and you know it“

“Now, I’m going to leave you alone for the rest of the drive, so you can think about what I just told you. I know you are going to fight me on this and I’m ready for it. However, you need to understand that I’m going to fight even harder because I believe in us and what we could have.”

“You’re serious,” Rishelle exclaimed, clearly surprised by his statement.



“I have never been more serious about anything in my entire life, Rishelle. I love you and I’m going to spend the next month proving it to you in each and every way that I can.”

## Chapter Four

Walking around the outside of the cabin while Ben took their bags inside, Rishelle got lost in the beauty of the nature surrounding her. She never knew that Ben's family owned a place like this several miles outside of town. They talked about stuff while they were dating those six months, but it never really got personal.

Maybe she was partially to blame because she got caught up in Ben too quickly. He had swept her off her feet so fast. They ended up sleeping together after only two months of dating. Was that really long enough to get to know each other and build something special? She had looked into his silver-gray eyes and lost any and all rational thoughts flowing through her mind.

Ben always found a way to make her do things that she shouldn't do-like going skinny dipping in the swimming pool in his back yard. Or the time they had sex in the rain on top of the hood of his car on desert road. Ben had always been a bad influence on her but she'd loved it back then. It had made her feel so alive and carefree like nothing or no one could ever hurt her, but all of that changed when she found Ben with his boss Victoria in her office.

Right then and there all of the hopes and dreams she had planned in her mind with Ben vanished without a second thought. She then made sure that if on the slim chance he had come looking for her that she wouldn't and couldn't be found. She had asked for her vacation time and took a trip to visit her family. She never told Ben where her parents lived. So she had stayed there with them a couple of weeks trying to mend her broken heart before she dragged herself back to work and packed up her belongings. Before she left for her short leave of absence, she had requested to be transferred to a different location within the company. She couldn't stomach the thought of seeing Victoria every day.

While Rishelle was getting ready to leave her old position for her new one, she had been totally surprised to find out Victoria had been arrested for embezzlement. Several of the employees told her how her former boss had gotten taken out in handcuffs the day after she left on her trip to get over Ben and his cheating on her.

She never got the full story and honestly she didn't give a damn about Victoria after finding her with Ben. Whatever that bitch got she had it coming to her after what she did, knowing that Ben was involved with her and had been for months. It served her right. What was that old saying? No good deed goes unpunished? Well. She got everything she deserved and a whole lot more.

Rishelle shook the bad memory from her head. *No!* She wasn't going to do this to herself. All of that stuff happened years ago and it was for the best that it stayed there. It was all behind her like it should be. Ben was trying to recapture something that was long gone and it wasn't going to work on her. The woman he knew back then was gone and a new stronger woman had taken her place.

"Hey beautiful, what are you doing out here? I thought you would be inside by now checking out your bedroom," Ben said, coming to stand next to her. "I placed your suitcase on your bed."

Turning her head a little, Rishelle looked at Ben. "We aren't going to share the same bed? I thought you brought me out here to seduce me back into your bed."

Rishelle gasped when Ben wrapped his hand around her arm and spun her around to face him completely. She couldn't look away from the fire burning in his beautiful gray eyes. She remembered this look. Ben always got it when he was on the edge of losing his temper.

However, he always brought himself back from the edge. It was scary and sexy at the same time. It was the bad boy side of him that had constantly thrilled her while they were dating.

"Rishelle, when are you going to listen to me? I didn't bring you here for wild, meaningless sex. I suggested this trip, so we can get to know each other

again. It has been years since we have been around each other, but the love I have for you never left. I'm going to show you how much we still have in common."

Placing her hand on top of Ben's, Rishelle moved his hand off her arm. She couldn't help the smile that touched her lips. Ben truly hadn't changed much over the years. He still thought he knew it all with that we can work it out attitude. She hated to admit it, but it was still kind of cute. He believed that the positive can always outweigh the negative, no matter what it may be. He never wanted to focus on the negative around her, but he was going to with this. There was no way around it.

"Ben, I'm saying that in your mind you might believe you care about me, but we both know that you aren't capable of loving anyone completely. Maybe if I had realized that sooner you wouldn't have broken my heart so badly," Rishelle confessed moving away.

A sparkle came into Ben's gray eyes right before he grabbed Rishelle pulling her into his arms. "I'm going to love proving you wrong. I'm capable of expressing and giving love like any other man. I'm not going to let you push me away this time. It took me six years to find you and I'm going to keep you," he promised, before giving her a quick kiss.

The kiss was so soft that Rishelle wouldn't have realized it had occurred if it wasn't for the faint taste of mint on her lips.

“You’re very sure of yourself Mr. Forster,” she taunted. “How do you know that you aren’t going to get shot down? I might not be the same woman you knew from your past. I could be a totally different female now.”

“What man isn’t sure when he’s going after something or someone he wants more than anything in the world?” Taking her by the hand, Ben tugged her away from the pond and back to the house. “Let’s get you settled in and then I can keep my promise to you.”

“What promise is that?”

“That I will have you holding something long and hard between your hands before the day is over.”

## Chapter Five

Rishelle glanced down at the fishing pole between her hands and then back over at Ben who was standing a short distance away from her. When he had kept promising her something long and hard to hold between her hands, she never would have guessed it would lead to her fishing for their dinner tonight. She should have known Ben was up to something because that was the way he was. He said one thing and usually meant something totally different.

“Are you having fun over there?” Ben said loud enough for her to hear him.

“Yeah, I’m having so much fun that I can’t stand it.” She was trying to relax because she had always loved going fishing as a little girl with her older cousins, but she couldn’t get her mind off of the fact that Ben was plotting a way to get her back into his bed. He was just being way too laid back and calm for her peace of mind. He simply wasn’t acting like the Ben she knew. She was almost too nervous to loosen up and get lost in the day.

Stop it! She mentally chastised herself.

She wasn’t going to let Ben do this to her. She hadn’t been in his presence in forever, so it wasn’t right that he was still able to yield this power over her body

and emotions. She was stronger now and she had to prove it to him and herself on this trip.

However, she couldn't stop her eyes from wandering back over to Ben. He was still as handsome as when she first met him. There were only a few gray hairs at the side of temples, but his body was still as rock-hard as any twenty-five year old. It was hard for her to believe that he was almost forty-two years old now.

Ben Forster was the type of man that would always look good no matter how old he was. He would keep women staring at him for years to come. It was a shame that a man as attractive as him didn't know how to make a relationship work.

If Ben had given them a real chance at falling in love with each other instead of spending countless hours in bed making love, she would have been more than willing to shown him how good true love could have been between them. Now, she was sure it was something they wouldn't be able to recapture.

Despite the fact it had been so long since she had been around Ben, the pain she felt catching him with another woman was still so excruciating to her. She should be over it by now, but it was still fresh for her. Would she ever really be able to get past her heartbreak with Ben to see if they could rebuild their past together?



“Gorgeous, are you so deep in thought that you don’t feel there is something on your line?” Ben whispered in her ear making her body shiver from the contact of his body against hers.

God, when had Ben come over to her? She had been so lost in her own thoughts that she was totally spaced out to everything going on around her. She better stay on her game or Ben might actually sneak his way back into her heart without even really trying.

Bringing herself out of her trance, Rishelle finally noticed that she did have a bite on her finishing pole. “Oh, I do have something,” she said, trying to pull the line in out of the water as fast as she could so Ben would move away from her. Having him this close to her was messing with her senses and not to mention ruining a good pair of panties.

“Wait, you’re going to lose our dinner for tonight, if you keep pulling at it like that. Let me help you bring it in.” Wrapping his arms around her, Ben grabbed her pole in his hand and helped her fight with the stubborn fish under the water until two eight pound catfish were swinging on the other end.

“How in the hell did you do that?” Ben asked, staring at the two huge fish

“I guess I placed better bait on my hook than you did,” Rishelle laughed as she took the silver fishing pole from Ben and took the fish off the hook tossing them into a bucket behind her.

“You know that we both used the same bait. I was the one who placed the worms on your hook. I think I know why you got something and I didn’t.”

“What is the reason?” Rishelle couldn’t wait to hear Ben’s answer.

“You just have something about you that draws humans and animals to you.”

“If you say so,” Rishelle exclaimed as she handed Ben her fishing pole and picked the bucket up off the ground. “Now, we better get back to the cabin because you need to clean these babies and fry them up.”

“I thought you were going to fix dinner for us tonight,” Ben joked as he followed behind her.

“Not on your life Ben. I’m going to take a nice long shower to get this fish smell off of me, and I better come down to a delicious meal waiting for me.”

“What if you don’t?”

“You don’t want to find out what will happen to you, Mr. Forster.”

“I bet I’ll love anything you want to do to me. I do remember how much you enjoyed playing around in the bedroom.”

Rishelle stopped in her tracks long enough to look back over her shoulder at Ben. She couldn’t stop the sad look that passed over her pretty face. “I guess since I slept with you so quickly that you wouldn’t remember anything else about me, but

that.” Without bothering to wait for an answer, she continued on to the cabin with Ben trailing behind her.

## Chapter Six

*Why did I open my stupid mouth and ruin the fun I was having with Rishelle?*

Ben couldn't stop thinking about his stupid remark as he got the fish ready to grill outside. He had cleaned the fish before he went upstairs and took a quick shower. Now, he was outside trying to think of a way to get the light and fun side of Rishelle back. She was starting to open up to him on the way back to the cabin from the pond and he had to stick his size fourteen foot in his mouth.

Why couldn't he just go along with the flow? But no, he had to ruin it by pushing her too fast. Now, she might not even come downstairs for dinner tonight. He prayed that she did and he would take things as they came. Not how he wanted them to be or wished they were. It would take time for him to regain Rishelle's trust and love, but it would be well worth it in the end.

"I'm glad you're down here fixing my food. I would hate if you had changed your mind at the last minute on me," Rishelle teased from behind him.

"I will never change my mind when I give you my word." Ben placed the spatula next to the grill and then turned around.

His mouth fell open at the gorgeous picture Rishelle made standing there. She was wearing a pair of white shorts that were too damn small in his opinion

with a matching tube top that barely concealed her firm, brown, perfect breasts. If he had a choice he would rather feast on them instead of catfish any day of the week.

Damn it to hell!!

Why was she wearing something like that around him? He could barely keep from getting a hard on when she was around him completely covered up. She was doing this on purpose to punish him for what he had said earlier.

“Thanks good to hear,” she replied breezing past him over to the gas grill. “Is there anything I can help you with?”

Yeah, why don’t you let me take you back upstairs to my bedroom and let me make love to you for the rest of the night? Ben wanted to say the words so bad, but he kept them to himself. Moving his hand down to the front of his shorts, he readjusted his erection hoping the new position would give him some comfort because he wouldn’t find it inside Rishelle’s tempting body tonight.

“No, all I need you to do is sit down and let me take care of the rest. You caught these beauties for us. At least, I can grill them up for us,” Ben said, moving to stand behind Rishelle. He wanted to press his body into hers; however, he didn’t want to scare her away with his aroused state. He still had a ways to go with her before she would let him back into her bed.

“Are you sure?” she asked spinning around to face him. Titling her head back, she stared up into his eyes.

To hell with it!

Stepping closer to Rishelle, Ben slid his hand behind her neck running his thumb over her mouth messing up her light coating of lipstick. He was a man and he could only take so much temptation. “Do you know how much I want to kiss you? How I have been thinking about nothing else since you started talking to me?”

“We can’t do this,” Rishelle moaned trying to move her head away, but Ben tightened his grip on her neck.

“Baby, all I want is just one little kiss. I swear I’m not going to hurt you,” he whispered the words against Rishelle’s lips a second before he kissed her.

Rishelle wasn’t prepared for the kiss that Ben gave her. She thought it would be hard and filled with unleashed passion. However, his lips moved over hers slowly and thoroughly like he wanted to burn the memory of kissing her into his mind. It was the sweetest kiss she’d had in a very long time.

Just when she thought the kiss was over. Ben eased his arm around her waist pulling her against his hard chest. He flicked his tongue against the corner of her mouth asking permission to enter. She opened her mouth allowing his tongue

to slip inside. He ran his tongue over the top of her teeth making tiny shivers race down her spine.

Moaning in the back of her throat, Rishelle wrapped her arms around Ben's neck and got lost in the kiss. She knew that she should push him away, but it had been such a long time since a man had made her feel this *good*. She couldn't stop Ben if she wanted to because they always had this going for them. He knew how to stroke her body into a pool of heated emotions. All he had to do was touch her and she was ready to find the nearest bed.

"Sweetheart, you taste so unbelievable. I can't believe I went almost half the day without kissing you," Ben whispered against her swollen lips.

"I should be pushing you away from me instead of allowing you to have your tongue in my mouth."

"If you're upset by my tongue being in your mouth I can find a better way to use it," Ben threatened as he stared into Rishelle's eyes.

"Oh, you can. What makes you think I want you to do that?"

Easing his hand between their bodies, Ben cupped her breast in his hand running his thumbnail over her hard nipple. "This tells me way more than your words ever could." With one tug, her white tube top came down exposing her breasts to the warm night air.

"You are more exquisite than I remember."

“Stop lying. You haven’t thought about me over the years,” Rishelle exclaimed as her senses started to come back to her. She knew better than to let Ben get his hands on her body. She always lost control when he touched her. Ben’s fingers were always her biggest weakness.

“Oh, brown eyes. I have thought about you and this a lot.” Before she could pull her top back up, Ben’s tongue licked at her right nipple before sucking it into his hot mouth.

“SHIT!” Rishelle screamed sliding her fingers through Ben’s thick hair. He wasn’t playing fair at all because he knew that she loved having her nipples sucked. Not two minutes later, she felt his hands unzipping her shorts then two thick fingers were thrust inside her wetness.

Ben let go of her nipple and brought his mouth against her ear. “Let go, sweetheart. Show me how much you have missed me. I love how your body is responding to me.”

“No, I can’t,” Rishelle moaned shaking her head.

“Yes, you can,” he encouraged, adding another finger to her welcoming heat. “You know that you need this as much as I want to give it to you. You’re so tense and I only want to release the stress from your body. Come on...let me give you what your body is secretly craving.” He removed his fingers from her body.

“Don’t stop,” she begged trying to pull his hand back to where it was.



“I’m not going to stop. I just need to get these off of you,” Ben whispered shoving Rishelle’s tiny shorts down her legs until they pooled around her feet. “Take them off. You aren’t going to need them anymore.”

Seconds ticked by while Ben waited for Rishelle to decided to step out of the shorts and kick them away. He loved that he still had the skill to make her body want him, now he just had to work on her heart and she would be his again.

Ben wrapped his arm around Rishelle’s waist to steady her while the other hand returned to thrusting in and out of her tight body. The feel of her moist heat sucking at his hand made his cock get even harder and grow another inch against the front of his pants, but it wasn’t enough he needed more from her. He had to show Rishelle that no matter how hard she fought it; she wouldn’t be able to resist him.

“Wrap your arms around my neck and open your legs wider for me, sweetheart,” Ben commanded then nibbled at the side of her neck.

Rishelle quickly did what he told her and he tried not to shout with masculine pride. “Good job, baby. Now, I’m going to show you what we have both been missing for the past six damn years.” Adding another finger to the already smug fit, Ben worked his fingers in a circular motion causing Rishelle to push her hips down on his hand.

“Oh, Ben,” she screamed working her body at the same speed of his movements. “It’s too much. You’re killing me.”

The sweat dripping from her almost naked body dampened the front of his shirt, but he didn’t care. All he wanted to do was make Rishelle come apart in his arms and again later on tonight while he was buried deep inside of her body. He slid his hand away from her breasts and placed it on her hip to steady her movements.

“Baby, you aren’t dying, I promise you. Do you know how good you feel wrapped around my fingers? Just the scent of you is driving me out of my mind and making me want to taste you. I bet you are sweeter than honey. Rishelle, you are so fucking beautiful.”

“I...I...” Rishelle panted, but no other words came out of her mouth.

Removing his hand from Rishelle’s vagina, Ben eased it back up her smooth, silky skin until he was touching the side of her breasts. “Do you know how much I wanted to pull this top down and suck on your nipples the second you strutted outside? Did you wear this outfit on purpose to make my cock hard? Were you trying to drive me crazy with being able to look at you but not touch?” he asked, stopping the motions of his hand.

“Answer me,” Ben whispered by Rishelle’s ear as his fingers pulled at her nipples making them even harder. He rubbed his thick erection against her

drawing another moan from her luscious mouth. He eased three fingers back into her while he waited for her answer.

“No,” Rishelle finally answered.

“No. What?” Ben asked as he removed one finger from her.

She whimpered in protest as he pulled another finger out of her wetness. “I wasn’t trying to make your cock hard. Please don’t stop.” Rishelle wrapped her hand around his wrist trying to prevent him from taking out his last finger, but it didn’t work. He removed it as well, along with the hand he had on her breasts.

“I don’t believe you when you tell me that,” Ben said as he took a step back from Rishelle. He kicked off his sandals and then slowly removed his clothes until he was naked. “Do you know what happens when a gorgeous and fine as hell woman doesn’t tell me the truth?”

His cock twitched as Rishelle’s tongue ran across her full bottom lip while her eyes roamed all over his body. God, he had forgotten how hard she could get him just from a look. No...he wasn’t going to give up until she was wearing his ring on her finger.

“No, I don’t know,” she answered, drawing her eyes away from his erection up to his eyes. He loved the desire he saw in their dark depths.

“She gets made love to until she is too weak to move.” Closing the distance between them, he removed the tank top that was still on her body and tossed it on

the ground behind them. Ben picked up Rishelle and laid on her the checkered tablecloth covering the picnic table.

He covered her body with his and then ran the tip of his tongue down the side of her neck. “I swear that I could get lost in learning the different tastes of your body.”

“Why don’t you?” Rishelle asked as she ran her hands down his back and over his butt. “I wouldn’t mind at all.”

“I promise I will later on, but right now all I want to do is get inside of you.” Easing his thigh between her soft legs, Ben brushed the tip of his erection against her entrance before he worked it halfway inside of her. “Does that feel good?” Hell, he knew that he was about to lose his mind and he wasn’t even all the way inside of her.

## Chapter Seven

Rishelle had wanted to be so strong and prove to Ben that she would be able to resist him after all of these years, but she had been lying to herself. Ben had a way of making her feel like the most important woman in the world when they made love.

“Yes, it feels good and you knew it would,” Rishelle answered slapping his shoulder. She hated that Ben still had the ability to make her body melt just from a few well-placed touches and kisses.

“Baby, don’t get upset with me. You have the same amount of power over me,” Ben swore as he trailed kisses across her chest until his mouth stopped right next to her left nipple. As he drew her nipple inside of his hot, wet mouth, he slid the rest of his cock inside of her body until he was to the hilt. Removing his mouth, he watched as Rishelle’s eyes grew wide at the feel of him back inside of her body. It was like a homecoming to him.

Sliding his hands down her sides, he wrapped her legs around his hips locking them behind his back. He thrust his cock in and out of her body loving the way Rishelle was able to take all of his nine inches. God, the feel of her was scorching him making it almost impossible for him to even think clearly.

“Unbelievable,” Ben moaned as Rishelle arched her back drawing him even deeper into her. In all of the years they had been apart he never forgot how good it felt to make love to Rishelle. Making love always felt better when it was with the right woman. Taking the palm of his hand, he slapped it against the side of her ass.

Rishelle’s eyes connected with his and she shook her head. “No...stop that.”

Narrowing his eyes, Ben raised his hand and gave her another slap noticing how Rishelle’s eyes glazed over even more with passion. She was enjoying the pain/ecstasy he was causing in her body even if she wasn’t ready to admit it.

“You have to stop,” she cried, scratching at his back and sending rolls of pleasure down his spine and into his cock.

“Why?” he asked completely turned on by the sight of Rishelle’s breasts bouncing underneath him. He loved how big and perfect her nipples were. They reminded him of two drops of chocolate he wanted to suck for hours until he got his fill.

“It’s too much for me to handle tonight...I...” Rishelle’s voice trailed off as he removed her legs from around his waist and pushed them down on the table.

“Okay...I’ll stop this time, but I’m going to spank that ass of yours again before this month is over. It’s just too amazing for me not to.”

Ben couldn’t get over how tight Rishelle was. She was squeezing at his cock like a warm fist. This was so much better than the times he would be in his bed

alone at night with his fingers wrapped around his cock fantasizing about it being Rishelle's body.

He felt the picnic table moving beneath them and prayed that it would hold up because he wasn't about to stop making love to Rishelle. He had waited too fucking long to be back with her like this and a weak ass table wasn't going to stop him from making Rishelle scream his name. He wanted to hear how it sounded as it echoed through the woods for only the two of them to hear.

He could feel the beginning of his orgasm about to happen in the small of his back, but he didn't want to reach his pleasure before Rishelle did. This was about her as much as it was about him. Taking a peek at her, he noticed how her small white teeth were pulling her bottom lip into her mouth. It was a sign that she was almost there herself, but he had to push her over the edge first.

Dropping his head, he sucked one of her tempting ass nipples into his mouth and gave it a little bite then thrust deep inside Rishelle and finding her spot.

"Ben!" Rishelle screamed as her orgasm hit causing her back to arch off the picnic table and forcing more of her nipple further into his mouth.

Hearing the sound of his name coming from Rishelle's mouth sent Ben over the edge as his orgasm started in the base of his spine and worked its way through his body until he came hard and fast deep inside Rishelle's body.

## Chapter Eight

The next morning Rishelle woke up sore in places that she hadn't used for a very long time. She barely remembered Ben picking her up from the table and carrying her upstairs to his bedroom. They had made love one more time during the night before finally falling asleep. She lay as still as she could and hoped she wouldn't wake him up. She could feel his arm wrapped around her waist and his head against the side of her neck.

What in the hell had she been thinking last night by wearing that outfit? She knew that Ben's biggest weakness was her breasts and she purposely displayed them just to get him going. She never and she meant never thought they would end up having sex on of his family's picnic table out in the open. It was a good thing he didn't have any neighbors who lived close by or they would have gotten an eye full last night.

God, what was she going to do now? Would Ben think they were back together just because they had mind blowing sex? She should have stayed strong and walked away from him last night while he was getting undressed, but once she saw his body it all went downhill from there for her.



With the light dusting of dark brown chest hair, rippled abs, thick legs and that nine inch cock he was so proud of, Ben knew he had her at his mercy. Out of all the men she could have fallen for why did it have to be a bad boy named Ben Forster?

Why couldn't it be one of those safe and semi-nerdy guys at the accounting firm she worked at? None of them would want to have sex out in the woods. Hell, they probably had sex with the lights off. Yeah, she needed to go for one of those types instead of the man lying next to her with his morning erection poking her in the back.

Rishelle knew Ben was awake the moment his hand moved up her body and his fingers started playing with her nipples. He used to always wake her up like that when they were dating. She loved it then and she still loved it now, but she had to get out of this bed before Ben made her mind a mass of mush. She had to keep her wits about her or she was going to lose her heart to him again.

"Good morning, baby," Ben whispered by her ear.

"Morning," she mumbled, brushing Ben's hand off her body. Tossing the covers off her body, Rishelle climbed out of bed. Grabbing one of Ben's shirts off the back of the chair in front of her, she buttoned it up.

“What’s wrong?” Ben asked as she turned back around to face him. “Don’t you want to spend the morning in bed? I can get up later and fix us a late breakfast.”

“No, I need to shower and get dressed.” Rishelle tried not to notice how good Ben looked with his five o’clock shadow and the tent in the sheet proving how much he wanted her to come back to bed.

She blinked back the sudden tears that came into her eyes. She was going down the same road she had before with Ben. All he wanted to do was have sex with her, because she didn’t know how to tell him no. She was never going to have a committed relationship like Nicey had with Spencer. Ben just wasn’t that type of guy.

“Rishelle, what’s wrong?” Ben asked noticing the tears in her eyes. “Was I too rough last night? Tell me what’s going on so I can fix it.” He tossed back the covers and started to get out of the bed.

Holding up her hand Rishelle hoped to stop Ben from coming toward her; she wouldn’t be able to think if he touched her right now. “No! Stay in bed. There’s nothing wrong. I just need some time to myself. A lot of stuff happened yesterday that I wasn’t planning on and I need to get my thoughts together.”

“No,” Ben said as he got out of the bed. “I think we should talk about what happened last night together. I was as much a part of it as you were.”

Rishelle hurried towards the bedroom door and was about to touch the handle before Ben grabbed her arm spinning her back around to face him. “Rishelle, talk to me. Tell me how I can fix what is causing you so much pain.”

“Please just let me have a couple of hours to myself. I’m going to get dressed and go back down by the pond. I promise that we can talk after I get back I only want a few hours to myself.” She tried to keep her eyes on Ben’s face and not look at his erection that was still there and ready to go.

“I don’t think this is a good idea.” Folding his arms across his chest, Ben looked at her like he didn’t believe the reason she was giving him for her walk. She hoped that he wouldn’t fight her on this, and just let her go.

“I’m not leaving. I will be back. I’m only going for a walk.”

“Fine, I guess I can wait until you come back so we can have our talk, but I want you to know that I don’t regret a thing that happened between us last night. I wanted to be with you.”

“If I know nothing else, I do know how much you enjoy when we have sex,” Rishelle said, before going out the door and toward her bedroom at the end of the hall leaving a stunned Ben staring after her.



“Did you correct Rishelle after she told you that she thought you only wanted sex from her?” Spencer asked as Ben stormed around the living room with

his cell phone to his ear. He had been waiting for Rishelle to come back from her walk for over an hour and he was starting to get worried about her. However, after the comment she tossed his way before running off, he thought maybe she did need some extra time alone.

“No, I couldn’t tell her that I was in love with her after a comment like that. She wouldn’t have believed me.”

“Do you really have any deeper feelings for Rishelle than sexual ones? Maybe she’s seeing something that you aren’t.”

“Spencer, I’m in love with Rishelle. Hell, how many times do I have to tell you that? Why do you think I have been single for the past six years of my life? How could I ever think about being with anyone else after her? Shit! I really fucked things up by sleeping with her last night. I thought it would bring us closer but it actually put a bigger wedge between us. What in the hell can I do to fix this?”

“Ben, don’t freak out on me. Honestly, I don’t think you have hurt your chances with Rishelle. I think she’s just concerned about getting her heart broken again by you.”

“Did Nicey tell you that? What else has she told you about Rishelle when it comes to me? Come on man. You have to help me out here. I need to know what kind of olive branch to give Rishelle.”

“Without a doubt, the first thing you should do is stop finding ways to get her into your bed. You already know the two of you can steam up the sheets or an outdoor picnic table,” Spencer laughed.

“Hey, it isn’t funny!” Ben snapped. “I might lose Rishelle because of my lack of control. Do you really think it’s humorous? Did I laugh at you when Nicey dumped you over the phone after she found out about all of your lies?”

“No, you didn’t,” Spencer replied, sobering up instantly. “What can I do to help you?”

“There’s nothing you can do. I’m out here with Rishelle by myself. I have to think of something to fix what happened last night. I don’t think she believes I didn’t set out to sleep with her, but after seeing how good she looked in that tube top and shorts. I couldn’t fight the urge to touch her.”

“Ben, I know where you are coming from. I had the hardest time keeping my hands off of Nicey. It seemed like I wanted to touch her all the time. I’ll never forget our first kiss. It was then that I knew I wanted to be with her for the rest of my life. I just had to make Nicey understand that we were meant to be together forever.”

“Did you ever feel like it might not happen? I remember how hard Nicey was fighting you.”

“Yeah, I had my doubts. Nevertheless, I wasn’t about to give up. Nicey was worth everything I went through to make her my wife. Now we are expecting our first baby. I couldn’t be happier.”

Ben could hear the contentment in his best friend’s voice over the phone. He was more than envious that Spencer had the life he wanted. A loving wife who would do anything for him, but knew how to stand up to him anytime she wanted.

Nicey was the perfect addition to Spencer’s life. But, he already had two divorces on his book of mistakes, and the woman he was madly in love with wasn’t interested in becoming the next Mrs. Forster. Because she thought the only thing he wanted was them between the sheets and covered in sweat and that’s wasn’t true at all.

“What you are telling me sounds good and all, but I really don’t think I’m going to get the same happy ending as you. I’m not going to give up-I will fight for Rishelle to the end.”

“Why aren’t you telling Rishelle all of this?” Spencer asked him. “She needs to hear these words, not me. Nicey loves when I tell her stuff like that. She gets this look on her face that I want to keep there forever.”

“I have a past with Rishelle. She hasn’t forgotten about seeing me in Victoria’s office. She wouldn’t let me tell her the truth about what she saw. Shit, I was working undercover trying to win Victoria’s trust. She kissed me and shoved

me down on the couch right before Rishelle came through that damn office door. I'll never forget the broken hearted look on her face."

"From the way you're talking I'm beginning to think you aren't too sure where things are going to end up with Rishelle. Do you want me to ask Nicey to talk to her? She might find out something."

As much as he would love to know what Rishelle was thinking, he would rather hear it from her instead of another person. He had made this problem for himself and he was going to be the one who fixed it starting today.

"Thanks for the offer, but I have to be the one to find out what is going on with Rishelle. It's the main reason I invited her to spend the month with me at the cabin. I made a mess of the best thing that ever happened to me and I'm going to fix it," Ben swore.

"All right, I'll leave it alone for now," Spencer said. "But if you need assistance with anything let me know. You helped me find the woman of my dreams and I want to return the favor."

"Thanks...that means a lot, but I need to get off the phone. Rishelle hasn't come back from her walk yet. So, I need to go and find her. I don't like thinking about her out the alone near the pond. I know its private property, but that doesn't keep some intruders away."

“Go and check on her. Call me again if you need me.” Spencer ended the phone call with a click.

Ben flung his cell phone down on the coffee table and ran his fingers through his hair. He wasn't going to let this happen. Rishelle couldn't be out there thinking of a way to leave him. He knew her main concern about him was he never truly cared about her and that the only thing they had in common occurred between the sheets. She was so wrong.

He wasn't ashamed he was attracted to her sexually, but he loved so much more about her. Last time they were together, he was an asshole and lost her but he wouldn't allow it to take place a second time. He had waited way *too* long to find the love of his life again and he wasn't about to give her up without one hell of a fight.



## Chapter Nine

“Why did I ever think I could have a meaningful relationship with Ben? All he wanted from me before was sex and that is all he wants now. I need to pack up my things and demand that he take me back home.” Ben wasn’t interested in putting a ring on her finger, so she had to stop things before they got deeper into a relationship with each other.

Rishelle sat down on a cement bench in front of the pond where she was fishing yesterday with Ben and thought back to the first day she had met him. She had been running late for work and decided to take the stairs instead of waiting for the elevator. She was rushing up the stairs and when she had made it to her floor; she had flung open the door and ran straight into Ben’s hard chest.

He had wrapped his arms around her upper arms, so she wouldn’t fall over from the impact. “Are you okay? Did I hurt you?” He asked, in a voice with a deep timbre.

Looking up, Rishelle could barely look away from the silver-gray eyes staring down at her. She was momentarily taken aback by the hunk in front of her. The black suit he was wearing had molded to every muscle in his body.

His white shirt was undone at the throat showing off his tanned skin and making her mouth water for a taste. The pure masculine scent of him had made her speechless. She had dated men over the years, but none of them looked like or even came close to the man touching her.

“Miss...are you okay?” the man inquired again.

“Yes, I’m fine,” Rishelle finally answered coming out of her state of shock. She had never gotten tongue-tied by a handsome man before, but this guy was doing that and so much more to her body.

“Good,” he smiled. “I would hate to think I had hurt such a beautiful woman.”

“I swear I’m okay.” Rishelle said moving back. She couldn’t stay here and get lost in this guy’s eyes because she had work to do in her office. “I really should get going.” She tried moving around the guy, but he didn’t move out of her way.

“Do you work here?”

“Yes, I’m an accountant,” Rishelle answered. “Why do you want to know?”

“Well, I just got hired as Victoria Lang’s assistant, and I will be starting tomorrow. My name is Ben Forster. I hope that we will get to see more of each other,” he smiled.

Rishelle found it impossible not to return his disarming smile. “I would like that.” She went around Ben’s amazing body and made her way toward her office.

“Hey, aren’t you going to tell me your name?”

“No.”

“Why not?” Ben yelled at her.

“It will give you something to look forward to for tomorrow,” Rishelle answered.



After that encounter, she practically ran into Ben every day at work and she loved the way seeing his handsome face always made her heart speed up and her palms sweat. She wasn’t used to a guy making her nervous, but Ben did. He was outgoing, sweet and sexy all wrapped up into one gorgeous package that was all hers. She was envied at work by all of the other women especially by Ben’s boss. Victoria told her countless times how she thought a man like Ben should be with her. She would go on to point out that she knew how to please a man of Ben’s status and how Rishelle didn’t have a clue.

Rishelle remembered wondering one night after she and Ben had finished making love, as she laid in Ben’s arms, if there was any truth in Victoria’s daily taunts. Was she really not woman enough to keep Ben from seeking another woman’s bed?

In her past relationships, she never doubted her sex appeal or her ability to keep a man without there being sex involved. Most guys like the thrill of the chase

and seeing if they could become her first, but with Ben it was different, even back then. He was almost too good to be true and it had worried the hell out of her. What if Victoria got her hooks in him and he dumped her?

She wouldn't be able to handle that. She was in love with Ben. She knew they hadn't known each other that long but she knew how she felt. Now all she had to do was to see what Ben's feelings were about her. God, not once in her life had she ever considered herself the type to let her world revolve around a man. But she loved the time she spent with Ben; he brought so much excitement to her rather well-balanced life.

"Why are you so quiet? What are you thinking about?" Ben asked kissing the side of her neck as his hand cupped her breasts.

"I love you," Rishelle admitted and then instantly felt Ben's body stiffen behind her. Great, she knew the word 'love' would put fear in him.

"Rishelle, I care about you too."

Turning around on the bed, Rishelle looked at Ben noticing the unreadable expression on his face. She didn't know what he was thinking. Did he not love her at all? Caring about someone and being in love with them was two totally separate things. She wanted Ben's love and anything less than that wasn't for her. She deserved the full thing from him.

“Caring about me isn’t the same as loving me,” she pointed out sitting up in the bed with the sheet against her breasts.

“You know that I told you about my two failed marriages. I’m not sure if I want to get that deeply involved with a woman again. Why can’t we just enjoy the way things are right now? We have a good time when we are out together and the sex between us is out of this world. I have never been with anyone like you before.”

Ben leaned forward to kiss her, but she turned and climbed out of bed. Rishelle squeezed her eyes shut to keep the tears from falling. How could she have been such a blind fool? She had fallen in love with a man who only wanted her for her body and nothing else.

God, she was such a dumb ass! Well, she was done with him. It was better that she found out his true feelings now rather than much later into the relationship. Her heartbreak would heal over time and she would find a man worthy of her love. She wasn’t going to stand by and let him use her anymore.

Rushing around the room, she picked up her scattered clothing and started to get dressed. She wasn’t going to stay here another minute with a man who didn’t see having a future with her.

“Rishelle, what are you doing?” Ben asked from behind her. He touched her on the shoulder, but she shook off his unwanted touch.

“I’m leaving. I need to get home. I think I have heard all I need to from you tonight,” she said stepping into her shoes. “I wouldn’t have gotten involved with you if I had known what you were looking for.”

“What do you think I’m looking for?” Ben demanded, spinning her around to face him.

“A fuck buddy,” she shouted back at him. “I have prided myself of never being the type of woman who didn’t need a man in my life to make me feel special. Let me tell you something else Ben Forster. I have never been lonely or desperate in my life and I won’t let you place me in that category now”.

“I want more than spending night after night in your bed. I want a future with a husband and kids. If I can’t get that with you then I will find a man who will give it to me. I’m sorry you had two bad marriages, but I’m not your ex-wives. I wanted to be with you because I loved you not for any other reason, but I see you don’t care about that.”

Brushing past Ben, Rishelle wrapped her hand around the bedroom doorknob and thought about how good it could have been between them if Ben had been willing to give them a chance. “I think it would be for the best if we kept the contact between us to a minimum at work and maybe you should give Victoria a chance. She is the kind of woman you’re looking for.” She then opened the door and rushed out without looking back at Ben.

The next night she had been working late trying to finish up one overly demanding client's taxes when she decided to get a cup of coffee, and as she was going past Victoria's office, she had heard some strange noises coming from inside.

She thought she was the only person left in the building besides the cleaning crew, so she decided to see what was going on. She didn't bother to knock, but instead opened the door and got the shock of her life. Ben was on the couch making out with Victoria.

"You didn't wait too long before you took me up on my suggestion," she accused right before Ben shoved a half-dressed Victoria off his body.

"Rishelle, it isn't how it looks," Ben swore as he jumped up from the couch rushing towards her. "Let me explain. I love you please listen to me."

Tears burned the back of her eyes as she shook her head. "Oh, you love me now since you got caught with that slut. Do you know that Victoria has laid her head on more pillows than a hotel mint? Stay the hell away from me!"



The wetness of her tears falling down her cheeks brought Rishelle back from the memory of catching Ben with Victoria. Just thinking about it still had the ability to tear at her insides and made her stomach clench tight knowing that Ben had cheated on her without so much as a thought to her feelings.

She brushed the tears away with the back of her hand. She wasn't going to waste them on Ben. He didn't deserve them. He wasn't going to sneak his way back into her heart again. It was impossible to steady her erratic pulse anytime she thought about Ben, but she had to be strong.

"I'm a totally different woman now than I was back then. I know how to take care of myself and have a fulfilling life without a man in it. Ben better think twice before he believes we are going to re-live the past. It's done and buried."

"I hope that isn't true because I want to be the man in your life."

As casually as she could manage, Rishelle asked. "What are you doing out here? I thought you were going to let me have some time alone?" She hated to admit how much Ben coming out here to find her touched her.

"I was concerned about you and I thought you might be hiding from me. I don't want you avoiding me because of what happened between us yesterday," Ben said as he came around the bench and took a seat next to her.

Rishelle was very uncomfortable with the fact that Ben had spoken the truth about the reason she came out here. "I'm not hiding from you. I was coming back to the cabin. I was just getting lost in my surroundings. It's really beautiful out here," she said, taking a peek at Ben and sucking in a quick breath.

Hell...why was life so unfair to her? What had she done to still be drooling and panting over a man who didn't want to put a ring on her finger? Ben was



sitting next to her wearing a pair of black shorts with a white shirt looking damn delicious and he knew it.

“Rishelle, you’re hiding from me and we both know it. Why don’t you admit it?”

Since Ben showed no signs of relenting on this, Rishelle knew that she would have to admit the truth. “You’re right. I was hiding from you until I could get myself under control. You don’t know how difficult this is for me.”

“How can I when you won’t share your feelings with me?” Ben questioned. “You keep so much bottled up inside of you. You have to let me in so I can fix what is wrong between us.”

“There isn’t anything to fix. We aren’t a couple and we never will be,” Rishelle pointed out. “I learned that some time ago and it has stayed with me ever since.”

“Baby, what happened between us back then was totally my fault. I take full blame for it. You offered me your love and I got scared, but you have to understand that I never cheated on you with Victoria.”

She was so sick of Ben lying to her. She knew what she saw, and Ben was making out with Victoria which only leads to sex in the end when it came to him. Anyone could have walked in on them, but it was her who caught them. “Why can’t you admit you cheated on me? Why do you keep denying it?”

## Chapter Ten

The hurt that still lingered in Rishelle's voice after all of these years cut deeply into his heart. How could he have not told her the truth back when they first started dating? He knew after their second date that she was a trustworthy person. She wouldn't have blown his cover. Now his decision was coming back to haunt him, and he hated the possibility that after he told Rishelle the whole story she might hate him even more, but she really had never been a part of the plan.

Running into her that day as she came out of the staircase had been the best surprise of his life. He had been attracted to her the moment his hands touched her body. She had stolen a piece of him that he wasn't able to get back and honestly, he didn't want it back. He loved the way Rishelle had changed his life for the better.

He simply panicked when she had admitted to being in love with him and gave her a knee jerk reaction that he instantly regretted, but he wasn't able to tell her because she left his house in such a hurry. Yet, the next night he had gone looking for her and got sidetracked by Victoria when she pulled him into her office.

She had gotten out of her clothes so fast and shoved him down on the couch that he didn't have a chance to react to her assault. Just as he was about to shove Victoria off his body, Rishelle walked in on the two of them and his heart had dropped to his feet.

"There is so much that you don't know about that night," Ben sighed as he ran his fingers through his hair. "If you would just give me a chance to explain I swear can make you see things my way."

"You keep telling me that, but you still haven't told me anything to make me change my mind about you. So, why don't you tell me now and maybe we can both get past this."

Ben didn't want to get into this now not after his conversation with Spencer, but he had to get all of this cleared up or he would be going around in a circle with Rishelle for the rest of the month about this.

"It's hard to start from the beginning since you don't know where it starts," Ben admitted. "I just don't want to tell you everything and push you even further away."

"Ben, I'm not going to ask you for the truth anymore. This is your last chance to come clean with me or I'm going to pack my bags and have you take me back home. Are you ready to tell me what I don't know about that day?"

His gaze returned to Rishelle again while he thought about her ultimatum before he decided it would be best for him to come clean. “I wasn’t sent to your company to be Victoria’s assistant. I was working there for another reason. All I was supposed to do was find out some things about her and then leave. I wasn’t prepared for how I felt when I ran into you that day, but after talking to you I knew that I had to get to know you better.”

“I’m confused. If you weren’t there to work as Victoria’s assistant why were you there?”

“I was working on a case for my job,” Ben answered wondering when Rishelle would figure out what he was telling her. “I had to find out some information about Victoria.”

Turning to face him, Rishelle looked at him like his words were finally getting through to her. “Are you telling me you were a cop?”

“I’m still a cop,” Ben corrected. “I was working on a case involving Victoria. I wasn’t the original cop assigned to the job, but got placed on it after another officer was taken off due to a conflict of interest. She was stealing money from the company. I was sent there to catch her in the act. The day you found her with me was the night I was going to arrest her, but she caught me off guard.”

“How did she catch you off guard?” Rishelle asked a hint of skepticism in her voice.

“Victoria was quicker than she looked. She was out of her clothes and had me down on that damn couch before I could stop her. I finally wrestled her off me at the same time you decided to come through the door.”

“I can’t believe this. Everything you told me while we were dating was a lie. How do you expect me to trust you now?”

“No, I told you the truth while we were dating. I have been married twice and I don’t have any children. I did care a lot about you back then and my feelings for you haven’t changed. I’ve told you before that I tried to find you for months, but everywhere I looked I ran into a dead end. It was like you had disappeared off the face of the earth. I had given up hope of ever seeing you again until Spencer’s party. I tried to find you for months. It was like you disappeared off the face of the earth. I had given up hope of ever seeing you again until Spencer’s party.”

Ben was dying for Rishelle to believe him. He wanted to start over with her, but it wouldn’t happen unless she truly wanted to give him another chance. He would prove to her this time that they had more going for them besides mind-blowing sex.

“After finding you with Victoria I needed some time alone to clear my head, so I took a trip to get myself together,” Rishelle said. “When I got back to work I heard about Victoria being arrested and you were nowhere to be found.”

“Did you wonder at all what had happened to me?” Ben inquired.

“I just thought you were upset that Victoria was gone, so you quit. How was I supposed to know you were a cop working a case?”

“Well, you know the entire story now, do you think you can look past my deceit and give me a chance to make things up to you?”

“I honestly don’t know,” Rishelle said matter-of-factly. “You have told me so much. I need time to process everything.”

“Do you have a problem with me being a police officer? I know for a while Nicey didn’t like that I was, but she got over it after she married Spencer.” Ben hated to think his job would keep him from the woman he loved more than anything on this earth.

“No, that isn’t why I need time to think about us.” Rishelle confessed as she stood up.

“What is it?” Ben asked jumping up. “Tell me so I can fix it. I want us to be together.”

“I’m worried you are trying to recapture a past that we both might have gotten caught up in. What if we start dating and then realize we aren’t meant for each other. I’m thinking about a ring, marriage and kids. I want everything that Nicey has.”

“I haven’t heard you bring any of that up. Not when we were with each all those years ago or now. I can’t put anymore time into a man that isn’t on the same

path as me. I can forgive you about the Victoria thing since I know the entire story now; however, I won't give you my heart if you don't want it forever." Rishelle walked away from him and headed back up the path that led to the house.

## Chapter Eleven

“How are things going with Ben? Have the two of you made up? You know that I think you need to forget about the past and move on with the future,” Nicey told her over the phone.

Sitting down on her bed, Rishelle looked out the window at a chipmunk hunting for food out in the back yard of the cabin. The setting around here might be considered peaceful, but she didn’t feel tranquil at all. She was torn between giving Ben another chance or a man who could truly love her. It was hard to think about Ben not being in her life after she had found him again.

“I guess things are okay,” she answered, honestly.

“You don’t sound happy. What is wrong? Did things not go well when Ben told you the truth about Victoria? I thought you would be able to forgive him after he told you.”

“You knew all along about Ben and never told me?” Rishelle couldn’t believe that her best friend would keep something so important from her. God, she couldn’t count on Ben to be there for her and now Nicey wasn’t on her side either.

“Calm down,” Nicey interrupted. “No. I didn’t know about Ben and his past with you until today. Spencer told me about what happened. I don’t think it’s all



that bad. You should give him another chance. I think he really cares about you. Are you going to give him another chance?”

“Nicey, you are a romantic and it has gotten worse since you’ve gotten married. You don’t realize that everyone isn’t made for a happily ever after like you have with Spencer. Some of us will continue to date frogs and never find our own Prince Charming.”

“Rishelle, you’re thinking too much about this. Just have fun with Ben and get to know more about him. I swear that it would be worth all the energy that you put into it. I never thought when I saw Spencer in that parking garage that he would end up being the love of my life.”

“God, I knew he would,” Rishelle said. “If you could have seen how your face would light up when you talked about him. It was only a matter of time before his romantic tactics won you over. I had to admit that it took a lot longer than I thought it would.”

“You think Spencer was romantic with me?” Nicey chuckled. “What do you think was romantic-the bag of underwear he brought me?”

“Lingerie can be very sexy. Sometimes it leads to new and exciting things, but the man has to make the first step. Spencer did-time and time again when it came to you. I thought it was so sweet how he went after you and never gave up until he won your heart.”

“My husband was pretty persistent in winning my heart, wasn’t he?” Nicey laughed. “I thought he would get scared away by my constant no’s but that seemed to make his pursuit of me even stronger.”

A bitterly cold despair settled in the middle of her lonely soul. Nicey didn’t understand; that is how she wanted Ben to go after her. He still hadn’t proven to her that she was more than a good sexual partner to him. Her tough exterior was a way to keep people from seeing the real her, and it had worked for years keeping people at bay, but now she wanted love and happiness in her life.

“I liked that Spencer knew that he was in love with you and didn’t give up until he won you over. It was very sweet and I’m a little jealous.”

“Rishelle, don’t give up on Ben. We both know how much he cares about you. Just give him some more time. It might take him a while since he has been through a couple of bad relationships, but I have no doubt that he wants to make a life with you,” Nicey said, trying to give her some encouragement. “Can you at least meet him halfway?”

“Why should I meet him halfway? I wasn’t the one who started our involvement out on a lie. I was honest with him and look where it got me. I have a broken heart along with horrible trust issues. I was doing better when I didn’t know that the two of us still lived in the same town.”

“Listen, you know how much I hate lies. You remember how much Spencer lied to me about who he really was and I broke up with him because of it. However, if I hadn’t forgiven him, I wouldn’t be married to the most loving and understanding man in the world. It takes a big person to forgive and work through their problems.”

Rishelle sighed as Nicey’s words rattled around in her head. The knowledge of what her best friend was telling her twisted and turned inside her mind. Maybe she wasn’t giving Ben the opportunity he needed from her. She was just as much to blame as he was when it came to the hot sex they had last night outside and again after Ben had carried her to his bedroom.

“Fine, I’ll give Ben the benefit of the doubt and try to start things on a clean slate, but he has to stop tempting me all the time. He knows how weak I get around his hard ass body. If I’m going to try to change, so should he.”

“Good luck with that,” Nicey snickered. “I tried to resist Spencer and the more I did the more I fell into his arms. Enjoy that the two of you have hot sex. There is nothing wrong with it, but build on it. Don’t let it be the only thing the two of you have in common. Get to know each other more and I swear to you everything will fall in place. Before you know it, I will be at your wedding.”

Her pride kept her from arguing with Nicey, but she didn’t see the church and all the trimmings in her future when it came to Ben. She wasn’t a quitter, so

she would stay here the rest of the month with him. Yet, she didn't see anything changing between them. Ben was determined to stay single while she was looking for marriage and everything that went with it.

"Are you listening to me?" Nicey asked bringing her thoughts back to their conversation.

"Yes, I hear you and I'm going to work on all the stuff you told me, but right now, I need to go and find Ben. I need to talk to him about some things."

"Don't over think this trip. Have fun and enjoy yourself. Let your hair down and don't be so rigid about things. This is your time to spend with the man of your dreams." Nicey ended the call quickly before she could say anything else.

"It so easy for her to say that because she isn't here getting her heart broken by the man she's in love with," Rishelle complained to herself.



Stepping back from the door, Ben rested his back against the wall outside Rishelle's bedroom as he processed everything he just heard her talking about with Nicey. Didn't she know that's why he brought her up here to the cabin so they could have a romantic getaway and get familiar with each other again?

*Why wasn't she listening to the words he was telling her?* She was the only woman for him. He wasn't interested in anyone else, but her.

Well, he was going to have to kick it up a notch because it sounded like Rishelle was only going to go through the motions with him until she could leave and find another man to take his place.

Just the thought of another man's hands on his woman's body made him see red. No, Rishelle was wrong. He was more than ready to take that walk down the aisle again but only with her. He wanted to get married as much as she did probably more and he was more than determined to prove it to her.

## Chapter Twelve

“I’m concerned that this little getaway Ben planned with Rishelle isn’t going to turn out like he wanted. I don’t think she’s ready to forgive him yet,” Spencer told Nicey as he watched her cook dinner for the two of them.

“Can you blame her for still being a little upset? For years, she thought that she knew the man she was in love with and now he tells her this totally different story about his life. I know how it is to be lied to and it does take a little time to get over it,” Nicey said adding the pasta to the water.

“Is there still a part of you mad at me for lying to you when we first started dating? I thought you had gotten over it.”

Nicey checked the chicken on the stove and then recovered it with the lid because it wasn’t quite done enough yet. “Sweetheart, I’m not upset with you anymore about what happened when you were trying to date me,” she laughed walking up to Spencer. “Do you think I would have married you if I had any qualms about your love for me?”

Pulling his pregnant wife on his lap, Spencer gave her a light kiss on the mouth. “Yes, I think you would have still married me.”

“Why do you think that?” Nicey asked, leaning away from him.

“Because I would have been so pitiful and sad without you that your tender heart wouldn’t have let me suffer too long without you,” he laughed then winked.

“With the way you act sometimes I forget that Cindy is the actor in the family and not you. You are just too much.” Nicey wanted to be mad at her husband for his overconfidence, but she couldn’t, because he was the man she loved with everything in her heart and then some.

“Speaking of my sister, are you and Cindy really getting along better now?” Spencer asked worried. “I know for a while I couldn’t leave the two of you alone in a room without a screaming match happening, because my sister can get a little bossy and pushy at times.”

“No, we are doing a lot better. I just had to show her that she wasn’t going to rule me like she did everyone else around her. At first, she thought I was playing until I showed her I wasn’t and we have come to a better understanding of each other. I think she wants to take me baby clothes shopping next week. Do you want to come?”

Shaking his head, Spencer slid Nicey off of his lap. “Baby, I love you and you know that, but I would lose my mind going out shopping with you and my sister. Going with you every once in a while is bad enough, but the two of you together will give me gray hair.”

“Hey, I wouldn’t do that.” Nicey pouted placing her hands on her hips.

“Yes, you would and you know it.” Getting up from the chair, Spencer ran his hand over her round stomach. “Now, I don’t want you or my sister buying my son anything pink or purple. I know Cindy will want to do something crazy like that.”

“We don’t know the sex of the baby yet. How can you be so sure that it will be a boy and not a girl?”

“I knew when I saw you in that parking lot that you would be my wife, and I have the same feeling about the baby. Now, I need to go in my office and check my emails. Call me if you need any help with dinner. I don’t want you trying to reach or get something that you can’t.” He gave Nicey a stern look because he knew how independent his spunky wife was. She would try doing it first before she asked him for any kind of assistance.

“Fine, I will call you if I need some help, but I doubt I will,” Nicey finally agreed. “Go on and answer your emails.”

Spencer pulled Nicey to him and gave her a long, sweet kiss. Lifting his head, he gazed into her eyes. “I love you.”

“I know you do.” Nicey moved out of his arms and patted him in the middle of the chest. “Go on and get out of here. I’ll finish doing this and maybe later we can go for a walk near the fish pond.”



“I like that idea. Count me in.” Spencer looked at his wife one last time and then left the room heading toward his office.

## Chapter Thirteen

Since she was such a horrible morning person, Rishelle lay in the comfortable bed with her eyes still closed and went over in her head for the fifth time what Nicey told her on the phone yesterday. Maybe her best friend was right and she needed to take pleasure in each day she spent with Ben.

It wasn't like they were two strangers trying to find each other again. They had been in a relationship before. They had a little bit of a past with each other. She knew things about him that other people may not know unless everything he had told her wasn't the entire truth.

No, she wasn't going to believe that. Ben had been honest with her all of those times they had been together. The best part of their relationship to her was when they would curl up against each other after they had made love in Ben's big bed and just talk to each other. Back then it seemed like he was trying to prove something to her, but maybe he was showing her a side of himself that he never showed anyone else.

Okay, she was going to try and truly enjoy herself while she was here with Ben. This place is too beautiful not to enjoy and relax. This mini vacation would be a dream to most women, especially being away with someone as handsome as Ben

Rishelle thought about this as she stretched in the bed, debating whether or not she should stay in for another ten minutes. In the end, she decided to get up and start her day.

Rolling over, Rishelle opened her eyes and gasped at what had been placed on the other side of the bed. Sitting up, she fixed the pillows behind her back and continued to stare at her surprise. How in the world did that get there? She knew it wasn't there last night when she went to bed. When did Ben have the chance to come in here and place it there?

She prided herself on being a light sleeper, but she apparently wasn't that light a sleeper because she didn't hear him sneak into the room during the night. Honestly, Ben could have done it early this morning and she wouldn't have known.

Picking up the pink rose, she brought it to her nose and took a little whiff. She was stunned that Ben had remembered how much she loved pink roses. She had three pink rose bushes in her backyard and she was planning on planting another one when she got the chance.

"What is that?" She had gotten so caught up in the pink rose that she almost missed the card next to it. Rishelle picked up the card and read the message written on the inside.

*Sorry about the other day. I hope we can start over.*

*Love,*

*Ben*

A warm feeling started flowing through her body at the thoughtfulness of Ben's gesture. He was trying to show her that he was listening to what she had told him. A part of her wanted to run, find Ben and throw herself into his arms. However, the more logical side of her personality shook off that notion pretty quickly, determining that it might be better to take things slower and see where things could go from there.

"I don't have to go overboard with my thank you, but I can at least give him a kiss for doing something so sweet and thoughtful." Tossing the covers off her body, Rishelle got out of the bed and headed to the bathroom for a shower taking the rose with her.



Twenty minutes later, Rishelle came out of the bathroom wrapped in a thick white robe and stopped in her tracks at the sight of her made-up bed with a huge black box with a silver box placed in the middle of it.

"What in the world has he done this time?" Screaming, she raced over to the box and picked it up. It was slightly heavy, but not heavy enough to be something breakable.

"Why is Ben doing all of this? Is there something going on that I don't know about?" Rishelle asked as she looked around the room. Ben was full of surprises

today and she had to admit she was beginning to enjoy every single minute of it. “I wonder what this new card is all about.” She took the card off the box and read it.

*Could you please put on what is inside and meet me downstairs?*

*Love you,*

*Ben*

“I’m getting so spoiled today. I’m not going to know how to act if he keeps doing stuff like this.” Rishelle tore open the box and then pulled out the gorgeous red dress with polka-a-dots. It was exactly her size. “I can’t believe he remembered what size I wear.”

She even noticed a pair of white sandals at the bottom of the box. God, what was he trying to do to her? She wasn’t used to this side of Ben. He was behaving totally different from the man she left sitting by the pond yesterday. What happened to cause such a change in his personality? Sure, he had been attentive before, but it was nothing like this. It was almost like he had morphed into a totally different man.

“Rishelle, stop it! Don’t over analyze everything,” she scolded herself. “I’m going to do as the note instructed and go with the flow. If Ben has something planned, then I will enjoy it and have some fun.” She laid the dress back down on the bed next to the box, so she could get dressed and see what else Ben had planned for them today.

If she was truly honest with herself, she couldn't wait to see what else he was going to toss her way. This day was turning out to be way more exciting than she thought it would when she first woke up this morning. Ben was shocking the hell out of her with all of these surprise gifts and she wasn't about to tell him to stop either.

As Rishelle took off her robe and started to dress, she couldn't remember the last time she was this excited about something, but she knew it had been a very long time. Maybe Ben was going to make sure she didn't regret coming here with him after all, but she wasn't going to give in just yet. He still had a lot to make up for but he was slowly beginning to mend some of the scars on her heart.



"I'm not going to go upstairs and see what is taking her so long," Ben mumbled to himself as he paced back and forth in the living room waiting for Rishelle to come down stairs in the dress he'd had delivered to the house while she was still sleeping. It had taken a lot of extra money on his part, but the shop in town finally gave in and had someone bring it out here.

He would do whatever it took to make Rishelle see how much she meant to him. He wasn't interested in another woman. Shit, he had tried dating other women over the years, but he finally just gave up after he realized what he was

doing. How could he put a knock-off into the mold of the perfect woman that he wanted and already knew existed out there?

He had truly given up his search for Rishelle because it was like searching for a needle in a thick haystack. Everywhere he went turned out to be a dead end, or it would only give him a little hint to her whereabouts, but nothing concrete until Spencer.

That night, he had been given so much of his life back when he saw Rishelle there. Hell, he didn't care that she had run from him like an axe murderer was chasing her. No, he had found the love of his life again and this time he wasn't about to let her go without a damn good fight.

For the longest time, he thought Spencer had been wasting his time chasing after Nicey like a love sick puppy. What man in their right mind would do something like that? He wasn't about to admit back then that he had been secretly resentful of what Spencer was finding with Nicey. Now, he was man enough to see what his best friend had in his life now was exactly what he wanted in his-with Rishelle.

"She better watch out because I'm not going to let her leave me broken hearted again. I want her to become my wife and I will do everything in my power to make it happen."

“Did I take so long that you had to talk to yourself as a form of entertainment?” Rishelle joked behind him.

Turning around, Ben’s eyes widened at the stunning vision behind him. He had always loved when Rishelle wore red while they were dating, but he had forgotten how good it looked against her skin. The color made her smooth, silky brown skin shine even more. She was almost too perfect to take out, but he was going to do it because he was going to show Rishelle that he knew how to be romantic.

“You look even better than I thought you would,” he praised as he walked across the room and gave her a quick kiss on the mouth. If he kissed her any longer than that, they wouldn’t leave the house for the rest of the week and he had to show Rishelle that he wanted more than a hot, satisfying night from her. He wanted to know more about her hopes, dreams and desires so he could make them come true.

“I have to say that you look very handsome yourself,” Rishelle complimented touching the front of his black polo shirt. “So, what are we going to do today?”

‘I thought we would go to a special place that I love going to when I just want to think and unwind after a long day. I used to go there a lot when you broke up with me. It helped me get through it when I thought I wouldn’t.”

“Ben, are you trying to seduce me with your words?”



“No, I’m just being honest with you. There hasn’t been a day that has gone by that you weren’t on my mind. I told you that I am in love with you and I mean it. However, I plan on showing you today some of the love I feel for you.”

Rishelle had no clue how much he wanted this moment with her. He had seen too much, witnessed too many painful scenes with his job. All he craved now, was to spend the day getting to know the woman he loved even more than when he first met her.

“I want to spend this time with you too, Ben. I think we need all the days we can get together.”

“Wonderful, let’s go.” Grabbing Rishelle by the hand, Ben led her out of the house and to the parked car. He helped her inside before closing the door and making his way over to the driver’s side.

Once he was on the inside, Ben started the car and pulled away from the cabin. On the drive to their secret destination all he could think about was Rishelle and how good it felt to be with her again.

All those lonely nights he spent in his bed, wondering where she was or who she was with were in the past now and he wasn’t about to go back there again if he had anything to do with it.

This was his time to prove that he was the man in her life and would be for the rest of their lives. He would never consider himself a patient man because he

loved getting things done at a fast pace, but he wasn't going to do that with Rishelle this time. The first thing he had to do above everything else was regain her trust. He didn't know what a rare gift he had, until he lost it over a stupid misunderstanding and Rishelle walking in on a situation she wasn't supposed to be a part of.

“What are you thinking about so intensely? You seem like you were a million miles away.”

Ben wasn't going to tell Rishelle the truth because he didn't want to bring up the past and put her on guard all day. He loved her being so carefree and open around him. He didn't want her thinking about her comments before speaking. Today would simply be enjoying a day as two friends; not a day of romance to win over the woman he was still madly in love with.

No, he was going to start out with one baby step at a time.

“I was thinking about how glad I am that you came along with me today. I thought you might turn me down,” Ben confessed.

Rishelle placed her hand on his thigh and gave it a light squeeze. “Honestly, I considered turning your invitation down because I wasn't sure what was going to happen if I agreed to come with you. You have a way of surprising me with everything that you do.”

“So, I went against my better judgment and decided not to over think your request. I just want to take pleasure in today. I know that I have a bad habit of doing things like that and I want to stop doing it because it takes all of the fun out of life.”

## Chapter Fourteen

“I can’t believe that you did all of this,” Rishelle gasped as she walked around the room that looked exactly like the place they had gone on their first date. The small restaurant that she had suggested they go to had been the best time of her life. She had thought about it for days after it was over.

“I’m glad you like it,” Ben said, as he pulled out her chair for her. “I thought about our first date for a while after it was over. I’d never had that much fun on a date before. I knew after I dropped you off at your house that I wanted a second date with you.”

“You never told me any of this when we were dating,” Rishelle exclaimed as she took a seat at the table. “I didn’t think it made an impact on you at all.”

“Why do you think I asked you out on a second date?” Ben questioned as he sat across from her.

There would have been a time that she wouldn’t have told Ben what she was thinking because she was used to keeping her most inner thoughts to herself, but she was trying to change her ways. She was going to open up to Ben more and just handle anything that came her way because of it.

“I thought you asked me out again because you found me attractive. I’m used to men wanting to date me because of the way I look and I usually turn them down, but there was something about you that made me want to get to know you better.”

“Were you glad that you went out with me again?”

“Yes. I was because I wanted to get to know you better. Our first date only scratched the surface. I was very intrigued by the way you answered my questions. You gave me just enough, but not too much to let me fully know all about you. I guess that came from you being a police officer. I wasn’t aware of the reason back then, all I knew was I found it very sexy.”

“Would you still find me very sexy if I was to tell you everything about me?”

Ben asked right before a waiter came up carrying two covered trays.

The waiter placed one tray in front of Rishelle and the other one in front of Ben before walking away to take other customers’ order in the quaint establishment. This entire day was bringing so many memories back from her past with Ben. He was doing a hell of a job making her see the reasons she had fallen so hard for him in the first place.

“Did you order for me?” she asked, looking at the covered serving plate. She was dying to know what was underneath the lid. However, she wasn’t going to come off as overly eager.

“Yes, I did. Why don’t you remove your top and see what is underneath it?”

Ben suggested waving his hand towards her tray.

Rishelle didn’t need a second invitation before she lifted the lid. After she glanced down and saw what was on the plate her eyes flew across the table and connected with Ben’s. She was so impressed that it was making her speechless which was a hard thing to do.

“How in the world did you get the cook to serve this?” Rishelle asked looking down at the grilled hot dog, with barbeque potato chips and a can of grape soda.

This had to be one of her favorite cheat meals when it came to her diet. She was totally dumbfounded that Ben even remembered that she had told him about this. Ben was pulling out all of the stops today when it came to their date and she was touched as hell.

“I did a little security work for the owner last month and this is his way of repaying the favor. I remember how much you loved hot dogs and chips, so I was lucky enough to get the Paris trained chef to fix hot dogs in his kitchen.”

“I bet that went over really well with him,” she laughed.

“After, I told him I was trying to win back the woman I loved. Phillip was on board with me. He told me that he was a romantic at heart. So, he did it for me and wished me luck getting you back in my life.” Ben’s comment hung in the air

between them and Rishelle didn't know what to say, so she just let it go over her head for the moment.

"Now, you know that I can usually eat two of these wonderful things," she said, picking up her hot dog and taking a good sized bite out of it.

"I know that's why I told Phillip to fix some extra ones and keep them on the stove just in case you wanted another one." Ben removed the lid from his food and took a nice bite out of his hot dog covered in sauerkraut, ketchup and mustard. While Ben was chewing he watched Rishelle as she opened her chips and soda before shoving a couple of the barbecue flavored treats into her mouth.

He loved when a woman enjoyed her food and Rishelle loved every single bite of her hot dog which was topped with relish. There was no doubt in his mind that she was going to be getting another one after she was finished with this one.

"You are so bad to be doing this to me," she scolded waving a chip in his direction.

"What can I say?" Ben shrugged. "I like giving my woman what she wants and I believe in doing that with you."

"Yes, you have." Rishelle took a sip of her grape soda and then placed the can back down on the table. "Are you ready to take this date to the next level?"

Ben was reaching for his coke can when Rishelle just shot the question out to him. “What kind of topic do you want to bring up?” He took a sip of his drink while he waited for Rishelle’s next move.



## Chapter Fifteen

“I want to know about your life. What is your favorite color, food, drink, television show? What did you do for fun when you were a little kid? Do you come from a big family or small one? We never got to talk about this stuff when we were together for that short period of time. All I really knew about you was that you had been divorced twice and the rest of your life was and still is a huge mystery to me.”

“Sweetheart, I’ll answer all of your questions, but only on one condition,” Ben replied as he thought about where he wanted to start first. He wasn’t going to hide anything else from Rishelle this time. His entire life was going to be an open book when it came to their relationship because he needed to do everything to regain the trust he had already lost with her.

“What is the condition?”

“I want you to do the same thing for me. You have to open up to me as well. It just can’t be a one way street. We both have to make more of an effort than we did before. I think it would be the fair thing to do.”

“I guess that I can do that,” Rishelle reluctantly agreed. “I’m pretty sure that my life is a lot less exciting than yours since we have different careers, but I’ll tell you as much as I can.”

“Why don’t you want to tell me everything?” Ben questioned. “Are you hiding a big huge secret that I should know about?”

“No, I’m not hiding anything from you,” Rishelle answered very quickly. “I only meant that if I tell you everything you want to know now, there won’t be any surprises left for me to tell you in the future.

“Okay, that is understandable. I agree with you on that point. I do like a little mystery when it comes to my woman. So you can tell me the things you want to now and save all of the juicy stuff for later.”

Rishelle sat up straighter in her chair as she stared at Ben. Why would he say that to her? Did he know something about her that she wasn’t aware of? No, he was probably just trying to tease her and she wasn’t used to that side of him.

“Are you going to go first or should I?” Rishelle inquired as she let her suspicions ease from her body.

“I’ll go first because I feel that there is more I need to get off my chest than you do,” Ben said.

“Well, start taking it off Officer Forster. I love when a man likes to take stuff off, especially when he is as hot as you are.”

“Keep flirting with me like that and I might have to flirt back,” Ben teased.

“I’ll remember that.” Rishelle couldn’t believe how much pleasure she was getting from her time with Ben today. It was like they were actually having another first date.

“I’m going to get this conversation back on topic because I can’t afford to start thinking about how good it would feel to kiss you right now. I promised myself that I would be good with you on our date and that is what I’m going to do. No matter how much other parts of my body want me to do something different.”

“Go on. I swear that I’ll try my best to be a good girl,” Rishelle swore.

“Don’t try too hard, because I like the little hint of bad girl that you let peek through every so often. You have no clue how much that turns me on.”

“Ben...”

“Fine, I’ll tell you my childhood memories and tales from my past. I’m the fourth kid out of six children. I have three older brothers, one younger brother and one younger sister. I had a pretty normal childhood. I played a lot of sports as a kid-from football to baseball and even a little wrestling in high school. I guess I was popular with most of the students from middle school all the way through my college years. I don’t remember a time that I wasn’t dating someone.”

“Of course you wouldn’t.”

“Why would you say that?”

“Please,” Rishelle sighed “Ben, you’re a good-looking man now. So, I can only imagine how all the young and innocent high school girls dreamt about dating the handsome All-American jock.”

“I’ll let you know that I was more than brawn. I had brains too and was the valedictorian of my class. I set the goal to be that when I started high school and of course I achieved my goal. Once I set my mind on something, I always reached every goal I set for myself.”

“That’s a wonderful way to be, but why have you been married and divorced twice? What happened with those two women? Were you not in love with them?”

“I think the first divorce happened because we both were too young to understand the responsibilities of taking care of a household. I got married my sophomore year of college and was divorced by my senior year,” Ben answered truthfully.

“The second divorce?”

“My second marriage happened the second year after I joined the force. I don’t think Melissa Jo understood all that went into being the wife of a cop. She wanted out before the marriage even got started and I was pissed as hell back then, but after looking back on it. I can’t blame her. She wanted the loving husband and a house full of kids. She didn’t want to be worried that when I went to work the phone would ring with bad news.”

“How long were you married to Melissa Jo?” Rishelle wanted to get all of the information that she could out of Ben while he was being open and honest with her. She had waited so long for this.

“Less than eight months,” Ben admitted. “I think both of our families agreed that we shouldn’t try any kind of marriage counseling because it wouldn’t have done any good. The love between us was long gone. I’m not quite sure if we ever were in love with each other in the first place. I think it was something that just occurred because our families were more into it than we were.”

“I have never been married and I don’t think it’s in the cards for me,” Rishelle said.

“You never know what might happen. I never thought Spencer wouldn’t get married and now he’s happily married with a baby on the way. I swear Nicey put some kind of spell on him.”

“You think my best friend tricked Spencer into putting a ring on her finger?” Rishelle inquired ready to defend her girlfriend if she had to.

“Don’t read more into my comment than there was. Honestly, I think Spencer was the one who placed a spell on Nicey. She was totally out matched when it came to my old buddy. He fell hard for her the second he laid eyes on her and he wasn’t going to let anyone stand in the way of him winning her heart. I think they are so good together.”

“I think you’re right. I have never seen Nicey happier than she is being married to Spencer,” Rishelle chimed in. “Okay enough about the love birds back to you. Finish telling me about yourself.”

“I believe I have told you all there is,” Ben exclaimed.

“There has to be something more than you just told me. You seem like a very adventurous guy. I can feel you are keeping something good to yourself.”

“Let me see. My favorite drink is bourbon and coke. I usually have one about twice a month to relax after a long day at work. I love lasagna with garlic bread. I can’t get enough of the stuff, but I have to work out extra hard not to get a potbelly or love handles. I watched Batman and Superman cartoons all the time as a kid. I thought I could fly once when I was about six. So, I tied a sheet around my neck and jumped off the top of my dresser.”

“Oh my god...what happened?”

“I broke my arm and my mother was scared and mad at me all at the same time. I got grounded for a week and couldn’t go to the fair with my older brothers. I never tried to do something like that again. I learned my lesson pretty well.”

“I bet you did. It sounds like you were a handful back then. Your poor mother probably worried about you more than your other siblings.”

“She still worries about me. She asks me when I’m going to give her some grandkids to spoil because she isn’t getting any younger. All of my other siblings

are married with at least two kids a piece. I'm still single and no children. I think they are taking bets on how long it will take me to marry again."

"You want kids," Rishelle asked, clearly stunned.

"You seem shocked by my comment. Yes, a part of me does get very envious when I see my siblings with their kids, but I push it to the side. I'm an uncle and that will keep me happy for a while, but yes I do want to give marriage another shot and have some kids of my own with someone I care about. What about you?"

"What about me?" Rishelle hedged. .

"Do you want to get married and start a family?"

"At one time I thought I had found the man that would be my husband, but it turned out that I was wrong. Instead of starting a family with him, I had to get over him breaking my heart."

"Rishelle, don't." Ben reached across the table and placed his hand on top of her softer one. "I can't apologize enough for what happened between us back then. I take full responsibility for it."

"I know. I'm sorry that I even brought it up again. I don't want to ruin the excellent time we were having with each other."

"No, don't feel that way. I want you to be able to tell me anything when it comes to us. I can't let there be any walls between us this time. We need to be

completely honest and open with each other since we are getting a second chance.”

Ben wasn't about to let Rishelle retreat from him. They need to know what the other person is thinking, so there wouldn't be any more misunderstandings between them. Rishelle was the woman he was going to marry and stay married to for the next fifty years. All of his past marriages and divorces had happened to make him see what true love is and how good it could be when he finally found it.

“I hope that you mean everything you are telling me. I don't want to get emotional involved with you again and have the same outcome as before. I won't allow myself to be used by you a second time.”

Ben brushed his thumb against the side of Rishelle's hand since he hadn't let it go. “Honey, I can make a promise to you that I'm not about to break. I'm in this for the long haul. You are the woman I want to be with and I'm going to do anything and everything I can to make you see that.”



## Chapter Sixteen

Despite the fact, Rishelle had been trying to push Ben away at every turn she really wanted to believe that he was still in love with her. He had grabbed a piece of her heart all those years ago, and as much as she tried, she wasn't able to get it back. However, she didn't want to spend the rest of her life wondering if she had made the right decision about the man she was with. She wasn't ready to give up all of her independence to be with Ben or any other man.

In the past Ben had a bad habit of constantly trying to run her life. She didn't let him do it then and she sure as hell wasn't going to let him start now. Ben needed to get it through his head that she was her own woman and did what she wanted anytime her mind was set on it.

"How about we not get into all of this now?" she suggested hoping to avoid an argument.

"When are we going to get into it?" Ben demanded. "Do you know that I feel like I'm still fighting the memory of the guy you made me out to be in your mind? You're mad at the Ben you thought I was. I want to put him in the past and get to know the man you can fall in love with."

Rishelle shook her head. “You’re wrong. That isn’t how I see you at all.” She moved her hand away from Ben and then stood up. “I’m going to find the restroom. Why don’t you pay the bill and we can meet outside?”

“I can do that but this conversation isn’t over.” Ben wasn’t going to let Rishelle push everything they accomplished today to the back burner. He was going to continue to break through that concrete shell she had built around her heart.

“I know it isn’t. I wasn’t expecting it to be,” Rishelle answered honestly before leaving in search of the restroom.



Ben signaled the waiter over to his table and asked for the check. He was so pleased with the way everything was going until a few minutes ago. Rishelle had looked so content until he brought up their past. *What in the fuck was wrong with him?* He wasn’t ever going to be able to win Rishelle back if she continued to hold on to the feelings she experienced when she ‘caught’ him with Victoria.

He had invited her on the trip to make her fall in love with him again but so far he wasn’t doing a good job at all. Shit!, The only thing he had accomplished these last couple of days was to make Rishelle find reasons not to forgive him, so they couldn’t have another chance at love. If he didn’t change what he was doing

and soon, Rishelle was going to pack her bag and ask him to take her home. He couldn't let that happen!

"Here, you go sir," the male waiter's voice said breaking into his thoughts.

Ben looked over to his left and noticed the waiter standing there with his bill. Damn, his senses should have been sharper with him being a cop and all, but he didn't even hear the guy walking up to him. Taking the bill out of the waiter's hand, Ben pulled out his wallet, found his credit card and handed everything back to the young guy waiting for him.

"Here you go," Ben said.

"Thank you, sir I'll be right back." The waiter hurried away and Ben let his thoughts travel back to Rishelle. She was still so beautiful. All day, he had fought the urge to lean across the table and kiss that perfect mouth of hers until she was senseless, but he didn't do it. It was hard keeping his feelings at arms' length, which he was fighting extremely hard to do. He wanted to show Rishelle how drawn he was to her still, but he was going to wait just a little while longer. Not much longer, but a day or two wouldn't hurt.

He would try it Spencer's way; however, if he didn't get anywhere with that. It was going to be back to his way of things and that meant kissing and touching Rishelle's perfect body anytime he wanted. God, it was hard to be the good guy here. Especially when she brought out the bad boy side of him so much more since

he had gotten back into her life. Why in the world did he think he could go days without having Rishelle in his life?

From the corner of his eye, Ben spotted the waiter coming back over to his table with the credit card and his receipt. He was pleased that this time the server hadn't gotten up on him without him noticing.

"Mr. Forster, I hope you enjoyed your meal and please come back again." The guy handed him his credit card along with the receipt.

"Everything was perfect. Please thank the chef for doing the special meal for me and my girlfriend," Ben requested, as he got up from the chair.

"I will Mr. Forster," the waiter told him and then left to take another customer's order.

Ben made his way through the crowded restaurant oblivious to the appreciative stares he was drawing from the married and single females inside the restaurant. He only had one thought on his mind and it was Rishelle.

## Chapter Seventeen

Sitting in the car next to Ben on the way back to the cabin, Rishelle peeked at him from the corner of her eye and wondered what was going on with him. He wasn't acting like himself at all. He had barely touched her through the surprise meal that he'd had prepared for them. Even when he helped her into the car, he only kissed her on the cheek.

She knew he was trying to prove there could be more than sex between the two of them, but he didn't have to stop being affectionate with her altogether. She wanted Ben to do more than try to get her between the sheets, but she still had to know that he found her desirable too. Sometimes she felt like she was in a ping pong match with her feelings when it came to Ben. He was still everything she wanted in a man despite the fact he hadn't been completely honest with her

"Ben, I really had a fantastic time at the restaurant," Rishelle said as she slid across the seat closer to Ben.

"Baby, I'm glad that you did." Ben took his eyes off the road, winked at her and then looked back. "I thought you might like doing that. I have to admit that I enjoyed it myself."

“I have to admit that I was disappointed by one little aspect.” Taking her hand, she placed it on Ben’s thigh. She noticed how his leg slightly jumped at her touch, but he didn’t take it off. “I was hoping you would do something else.” Rishelle then ran her hand up and down the inside of his leg and noticing the slight bulge that started to appear in the front of his slacks.

“What did you want me to do?” Ben choked as her fingers traveled further up his leg until the tips could trace the outline of his cock.

“You don’t know? We used to be able to read each other so well, but I guess we can’t anymore.” She started to move her hand, but Ben quickly removed his hand from the steering wheel, grabbed hers and placed it directly on the hard erection now tenting the front of his pants.

“Don’t move your hand,” he moaned. “I like how good your touch feels. Now tell me what you want and I’ll be sure to do it.”

“Maybe it wouldn’t be a good idea while you are driving,” Rishelle said and then gave his erection a little squeeze. “We could get into a lot of trouble.”

“A little harmless trouble never hurt anyone,” Ben said as he turned down the dirt road that led to their cabin. “Just tell me and I’ll see what I can do.”

“I was thinking about how much I wanted you to kiss me back at the restaurant. I miss having the taste of you on my lips.” Unzipping Ben’s pants,

Rishelle slipped her hand inside and ran the pad of her thumb over the head of his cock. “Oh, you’re so hard,” she moaned.

“Rishelle, do you know what you’re doing,” Ben moaned as he placed his hand over the top of hers. “I’m trying my best to be a nice guy here, but if you keep that up. I won’t be able to stop myself.”

“I want you, Ben. I miss how good it feels to have you buried deep inside of me. Have you forgotten how perfect we fit together?”

Rishelle gasped as the car came to a sudden stop and Ben removed her hand from his pants. “Get out of the car and go stand by the side of it.”

“What are you talking about? Why do you want me to do that?” she asked confused.

“Baby, just do as I ask and it will make perfect since in a few minutes.” Wrapping his hand around the back of her neck, Ben yanked her to his body and planted a hot kiss on her open mouth.

The kiss seemed to linger for hours instead of a matter of seconds. Rishelle loved how good it felt to have Ben’s hard lips pressed against hers again. As much as she tried to fight it or deny it, Ben knew how to make her body sing. Pressing her chest closer to his, she wrapped her arms around Ben’s neck and got more into the kiss.

“You need to go,” Ben breathed against her slightly swollen lips. He removed her arms from around his neck and then eased his hands slowly down her body and cupping her breasts in his palms.

“I love your breasts. They are so firm and perfect. I could touch them forever and never get tired of learning how good they feel in my hands.”

Rishelle shivered at Ben’s light caress. She wasn’t going to be able to do anything he wanted if he didn’t stop touching her and whispering sweet compliments to her. “Ben, I can’t leave unless you let me go.”

“What if I have changed my mind and wanted you to stay in the car with me instead? I’m not sure if I want you to leave me or not, sweetheart.”

“Baby, I’m more than happy to stay here if you want me too,” Rishelle confessed leaning into his touch some more.

Ben brushed his thumbs over her nipples one last time and gave her another small kiss. “No, go ahead and do as I asked earlier. I want to do something with you.” Moving away from her body, he waved a hand towards the passenger’s side door.

Placing her hand on the handle, Rishelle looked back at Ben wondering what he was up to. He was constantly surprising her with changes in his way of thinking about things. He was such a complex guy, but it was what attracted her to him the most.



“I’ll be waiting for you.” Opening the car door, Rishelle got out closing it softly behind her.

## Chapter Eighteen

Sitting inside the car, Ben ran his fingers through his hair trying to calm his racing hormones down, but it was getting harder and harder to do when it came to Rishelle. He would rather get out of this vehicle and have his way with her. Rishelle was the woman for him and the more time he spent around her the clearer it became. Why did she make him feel like he was a horny teenager all over again? Never in his life had he fought this hard to get a woman's attention and part of it was a turn-on while on the other hand it pissed him off to no end.

Rishelle knew that they were a perfect match for each other and they should be back at the cabin making each room their own special paradise, but it wasn't happening. He felt like he was moving too slow when it came to getting her back. He wasn't used to a woman making him work this hard for her attention. It wasn't like the two of them haven't already been together and knew that they were matched better than a hot dog at a baseball game.

For some odd reason, Rishelle acted like she didn't want him back in her life, but that was a lie. At certain times, she would give him this look like she wanted to tell him something, but at the last minute would change her mind.

Ben closed his eyes and rested his head against the headrest. He was so ready to put a ring on Rishelle's beautiful hand; however, he could tell she was still a little nervous about him. So, she would probably give the ring back and run right back out of his life. But he was willing to wait however long it took for her to have faith in him again.

"I can do this. I'm a patient man and I know how to make Rishelle fall in love with me again. A love like ours only comes around once in a lifetime, and my life isn't over and neither is hers. She is meant to become my wife and the mother of my children. It will happen." Opening his eyes, Ben sat up and shook off any apprehension that still may be lingering in his system. He was ready to start regaining the ground that would let him get back into the woman's heart that was everything to him. Hopefully, it would be before this spur of the moment getaway was over.

Getting out of the car, Ben walked over to Rishelle wrapping his arms around her waist and pulling her closer to his body. The warmth from her eased into him making him realize that he wanted to be able to do this every day for the rest of his life.

"Ben, what are you doing?" Rishelle asked wiggling around in his grip. "Why did you want me to get out of the car?"

“Stop moving. I’m not going to hurt you. I just wanted to hold you in my arms and I couldn’t do that inside the car. Do you remember the last time we got out of a car on a deserted road like this one?”

“We had sex on the hood of your car,” she whispered so low that he had to lean down to hear her.

“I used to dream about that one incident for weeks after you walked away from me. I couldn’t get it out of my head. I have never experienced anything like that in my adult life. God, it was so hard on me going about my life without you in it. There’s nothing I wouldn’t do to spend my life with you, Rishelle. I care about you so damn much. I know that you can’t believe that right now, but I couldn’t keep it in any longer.”

“Ben, I can’t get into this with you.” Rishelle tried to get out of his grasp, but he just held onto her even tighter.

“Stop fighting me. I didn’t bring you up here for that. Will you at least try to see it from my point of view? I swear that I’m not trying to play games or hurt you again.”

“What do you want me to see from your point of view?” Rishelle questioned. She thought she had been pretty fair to Ben since they came up here. He was making it harder on her all of the time because he kept trying to make her fall in love with him again because he hadn’t realized she was still in love with him.

“I need you to open up to me more. Tell me if you’re pissed at me while we’re here together. Yell and scream at me. Get all of this hidden anger you have out in the front. I would rather feel your passion and anger anytime of the day, but your polite indifference is what kills me. I would rather you feel something than nothing at all.”

Rishelle hated that Ben was right. She hadn’t truly been trying to get past the events that broke the two of them up. She wasn’t the type to hold a grudge, because she felt like it was a waste of energy and time. Life was too short to hold things over people’s hand. Maybe if she really forgave Ben, she would be able to move on with her life and get back to her job.

“Please let go of me,” Rishelle said. She waited for Ben to release her from his light grip and he finally did. Turning around, she faced him so he could understand what she was telling him.

“Ben, I have forgiven you for the past. I wish you would believe me, but I still don’t think we can get back together. Too many years have passed between us and we are two different people now. I think it might be for the best if you take me back to the cabin, so I can pack. I want to go home. I don’t think this trip is turning out the way either one of us thought it would.” Moving around Ben, Rishelle went back to the car and got inside to wait for him.

“FUCK!” Ben screamed!!!

He wasn't going to lose Rishelle. He would keep pursuing her until she saw the light. He couldn't go back to the lonely existence he had made for himself. After seeing how happily married Spencer was, and his excitement about the new baby on the way made him see every single thing he was missing from his dull life.

Ben was dying to go back to the car and tell Rishelle under no certain terms were they going to leave before the month was up. But he couldn't do that because he had made her a promise and he was a man of his word; however, he would suggest that they hold off on the long road trip until tomorrow morning. He needed tonight to sleep on a new plan of action to win his way back into Rishelle's heart.

"I can do this," he told himself as he made his way back to the car. He wasn't about to quit until he had used up all of his playing cards and then he might think of something new to pull out of a better deck. Without a single doubt in his mind, Rishelle Damian, in the end, would become Mrs. Ben Forster and all of this fighting will be well worth it.



Back at the cabin, Rishelle paced around her bedroom upstairs wondering if she was making the right decision about leaving so early into her trip with Ben. They had only been here close to two weeks and she hadn't given it her all, but she

was scared to let her guard down now. Six years ago, it wouldn't have mattered if she let Ben back into her life for a hot affair; however, now she couldn't do it.

"God...why did I let Nicey talk me into doing this? She knows that I can't be around Ben with the way I feel about him. I haven't dated a man in six years because of him. I can't continue to let him ruin or rule my life. I have to get over him. We need to have another talk." She went towards the bedroom door, so she could go find Ben downstairs and have a talk with him, but the ringing of her cell phone stopped her half way there.

Spinning on her heel, Rishelle walked back over to the bed and grabbed her cell phone out of her purse. "Who is calling me?" She quickly checked the caller id and her heart dropped at the number she saw displayed there.

"Mama, what's wrong?" Rishelle asked answering the phone.

"Rishelle, you need to come home now," her mother told her in a panic.

"Is there something wrong with Ford?" Lord, she should have listened to her first mind and not come here.

"Sweetheart, he got stung by some bees while playing outside and was rushed to the hospital. I'm calling you from the waiting room. Rishelle, it's not looking good. I didn't know Ford was allergic to bee stings."

“Oh God,” Rishelle cried. “I’ll be there as soon as I can. Please call me again if anything changes. I knew I shouldn’t have left him. If anything happens to him, I’ll never forgive myself.”

“Rishelle, just get here as soon as you can,” her mother pleaded before hanging up the phone.

Without wasting a second, Rishelle quickly packed up her clothes and ran down the stairs to find Ben. He had to take her to the hospital! She couldn’t be too late. Ford was going to be okay. He was too young to die.

“Ben, where are you!” Rishelle screamed the second her feet hit the bottom step. “BEN!”

“What in the hell is wrong?” Ben asked running out of the kitchen. “Why are you screaming my name? Did something happen?”

“Yes, I need to leave. You have to take me back home right now. I can’t stay here until tomorrow.”

“I thought we decided to stay until tomorrow,” Ben said, a frown wrinkling his forehead. “Why the rush to get back home all of a sudden?”

“Listen, I can’t talk to you about this. Where are your keys?” Glancing around the room Rishelle spotted them on the table near the front door. She ran over and snatched them up before opening the front door. She was halfway out when Ben yelled her name.



“Rishelle...stop! Tell me why you are in such a damn hurry to get back into town,” Ben demanded.

“I have to get back to Ford. He needs me.”

“Who in the fuck is Ford? Is he the boyfriend that you conveniently forgot to tell me about?”

“No...he’s our son.”

## Chapter Nineteen

*Son...he had a son?*

Ben couldn't get over the bomb that Rishelle dropped on him before screaming he needed to get her to the hospital. He still didn't know how they managed to not get pulled over for breaking the speed limit.

Of course at first, he thought Rishelle was lying to him; wouldn't he have been able to feel if he had a son out there. He couldn't think about the fact that he had missed the first six years of his little boy's life.

Ben had tried to get Rishelle to talk to him once they pulled into the parking lot, but she was out of the car and racing for the entrance before the car had even come to a complete stop. He couldn't leave his car in the middle of the parking lot, so he had to take care of it before he chased after Rishelle to see what was going on.

After Ben parked the car and made sure the alarm was set, he followed Rishelle into the hospital, still in shock over the possibility that he was really a father. Something he'd wanted to be most of his life, but it wasn't an event any of his ex-wives had ever been interested in at all.

Walking around the hospital for about ten minutes, he finally found Rishelle talking to a woman who looked like an older version of her. He came up on her as she was questioning the woman about what happened.

“Mama, what is going on? How did Ford get stung by bees? I’m confused. Was he somewhere he shouldn’t have been?”

“Rishelle, he was outside playing with the neighborhood kids by some weeds and flowers near the edge of the park. Everything was going okay and then I heard him scream and a few minutes later he ran up to me crying about how some bees had stung him on his cheek. I could tell instantly that something was terribly wrong because of the swelling, and he started to have a horrible dry cough.”

“I got him in the car as fast as I could and drove like a mad woman to the hospital. By the time, I got here he was sneezing and wheezing so badly that the nurses had to come out to get him. God, when I saw the hives start coming out is when I called you.”

“He was going into anaphylactic shock,” Ben said interrupting the conversation.

“Who are you?” Rishelle’s mother questioned glaring at him. “Why did you even come with my daughter?”

“Ben Forster, I’m a friend of Rishelle’s,” he answered not quite sure if he should introduce himself as Ford’s father since he still wasn’t sure what was going

on with that. It would be best if he kept that part of his identity to himself for a while.

“Mama, let’s not get into it about Ben right now. Can I see my son? I want to see him.”

“The doctor is still with him. He told me to wait here until he got everything under control. The last time I spoke to him he was going to give Ford an injection of epinephrine. The doctor told me it was a hormone that will stimulate the heart and relaxes the airways.”

“Oh my God, my son could die,” Rishelle screamed. “I need to see my son. Where is the damn doctor?”

Ben hated seeing Rishelle so distraught and he didn’t know what to do, but he was going to help her as best he could. “Rishelle, why don’t you take a seat? I’m sure that the doctor will be out to tell us something as soon as he can about Ford.”

Rishelle spun away from her mother and glared at him so hard that he almost took a step back from her but he didn’t.

“Ben, you can’t tell me what to do when it comes to my son. You haven’t been here for five and half years of his life. I raised him without your help. Ford doesn’t even know you’re his father. So, don’t jump into the role now. Why don’t you just run away like you are used to doing. I can promise you that I won’t try to stop you.”

Ben knew that Rishelle was getting hysterical because their son was very sick and now wasn't the time for them to be fighting with each other. "Sweetheart, you're upset, so I'm not going to get into an argument with you; however, I do want to talk to you later."

"Ben..." Rishelle stopped talking to him when she saw the doctor coming towards them.

"Mama, is that the doctor who was taking care of Ford?" Her attention was totally off of him now and back on finding out more about what was going on with their son.

"Yes, his name is Dr. Morrison. Please let him have good news about my grandson," Rishelle's mother said with hope in her voice.

Ben felt like his hands were tied. He wasn't about to do anything because he hadn't been a parent to his son. Hell, he would make sure that changed as soon as possible. However, right now he would hold his tongue until the right moment came along. Rishelle wasn't going to push him out of her life or his son's. He was going to be a part of their lives from now on.

"Are you Ford's mother? I'm Dr. Morrison. I was the doctor on call when your mother brought in her grandson." Dr. Morrison said as he stopped beside Ben.

“Yes, I’m Ford’s mother, my name is Rishelle Damian. How is my little boy doing? Is he going to be okay? I didn’t even know that he was allergic to bee stings.”

“Ford is doing a lot better. We finally got the medicine to work against the anaphylactic shock. We placed him in a room overnight just to be on the safe side,” Dr. Morrison informed her. “Ford is in room 3568. I’ll let you go see him because he’s still a little upset. I’ll come by later on to tell you about the medicine he is going to need to take for now on.” Dr. Morrison touched Rishelle on the arm and then walked away from them.

The doctor wasn’t gone two seconds before Ben watched Rishelle rush past him and over to the elevators with her mother right behind her. He wasn’t going to stay down here and not see his son. A child he had been dreaming about having for years and never knew was already out there waiting for him.

## Chapter Twenty

Standing at the side of the bed, Ben stared down at the sleeping little boy and the resemblance to him was shocking. He was at a loss for words. Rishelle had a baby all of those years ago and it was his son. Why hadn't he tried harder to find her? He should have looked for her day and night until he found her. He had missed so many important milestones in his son's life that he would never be able to see again.

"I really have a son," Ben whispered touching the back of Ford's hand. He blinked back the tears that suddenly filled his eyes. "I can't believe this. He's so beautiful."

"Yes, Ford is your son," Rishelle said as she watched him from the other side of the bed. "I'm surprised that you aren't more upset at finding out about him this way. I was debating back at the cabin if I should tell you about him or not."

"Because of what happened all of those years ago or did you think I wouldn't believe you?" Ben asked as he took another look at his son.

"A little of both I guess," Rishelle admitted, honestly. "Didn't you wonder why I was fighting so hard for you to stay away from me? I had to keep you away

from Ford. He had been asking about his daddy a lot more now, and I have tried my best to change the subject, but he is beginning to catch on.”

“Where you ever going to tell me you were pregnant back then?”

“Yes, I was.” Rishelle brushed a lock of dark brown hair off of Ford’s forehead. “I had swallowed my hurt and showed up at work to let you know, but you were nowhere to be found. You hadn’t even left a forwarding address. So I just left it alone after that, I thought you didn’t want to be found by me. I wasn’t going to chase you down and put you in a situation you may have been trying to avoid. My mom stepped up from the moment I told her I was going to have a baby. She was thrilled to death that I was giving her a grandchild. She didn’t let me down.”

“Shit! I didn’t let you down either, Rishelle,” Ben snapped. “I was never given the chance to be a father to our son, but now that I know, I’m going to be there for him. As soon as Ford is out of the hospital the two of you can move in with me. We’ll have a simple private wedding; Spencer and Nicey can stand up for us.”

“I’m not going to move in with you or marry you either. Have you lost your mind?” Rishelle snapped, and then lowered her voice when Ford moved in his sleep. “Ford and I are staying put, so you better get used to the idea. We have been doing fine without you and it will stay that way. I can’t just bring you into Ford’s life out of the blue.”



Ben crossed his arms across his wide chest and stared at Rishelle from the other side of the bed. "You better get used to the fact that I'm not going to spend another day without my son in life," he yelled, shocking Rishelle.

"Why are you screaming at my mommy?" a small voice asked.

Rishelle and Ben's eyes swung down to Ford in the bed. He was wide awake now and staring at them. "Who are you?"

Ben's heart filled with love at he stared down into a pair of eyes a shade darker than his own. He didn't know anything about his son, but he already loved him with everything in his soul. He wasn't going to keep who he was a secret from him.

"I'm your fath..."

"He's a friend of mine," Rishelle jumped in cutting him off as he was about to tell Ford the truth. "Don't worry about him for now. How are you feeling? You gave your grandmother and me quite a scare. Don't you ever do something like that again?"

Bending down, Rishelle kissed Ford on the cheek and he didn't even complain about her treating him like he was a baby. She knew then that her little boy wasn't feeling good because hated for anyone to see her kissing him.

"Where is grandmamma?" Ford asked looking around the room.

"She went home to get your pajamas. She'll be back later."

“Is she bringing back the ones with the police cars on them?” Ford asked, hopefully.

“You like police cars?” Ben inquired getting involved in the conversation ignoring the look Rishelle gave to him.

“Yes, I love police cars. I want to be a cop when I grow up. They are so cool!” Ford grinned. “I want my mommy to get me a police car cake for my birthday next week.”

“How old will you be?”

“I’ll be six. I can’t wait. I think grandmamma might even get me a puppy.”

“Ben, can I speak to you outside in the hallway for a moment?” Rishelle asked him. “Ford, I’ll be right back.”

“Okay, mommy,” Ford replied. “Bye Mr. Ben.”

Ben hated the felling he got when Ford didn’t call him Dad and was about to correct him, when Rishelle grabbed him by the arm and pulled him the rest of the way out of the room. She dragged him down the hallway until they were standing in front of the snack machine at the end of the corridor.

“What in the hell are you trying to do? Why are you asking my son so many questions?”

“I’m not telling you again to call Ford our son,” Ben warned. “I wasn’t doing anything to him. I do have the right to talk to him. I want to get to know him

better. You've had five and a half years with him. I have had less than thirty minutes. Do you think that is a fair trade?"

Rishelle hated the way this situation was getting over her head. She never expected Ben to find out about Ford like this. But now that he knew, he wasn't going to let it go. She needed time to think. Everything was going *too* fast. What happened today was too much for her to take.

"Can you please leave?" she asked rubbing her temple. "I can't deal with you and Ford at the same time. The both of you at once are too demanding on my peace of mind. I need time to think."

Ben wanted to point out that he had every right to stay, but Rishelle was right. Ford needed her with him more than the father he didn't know, so he would leave for tonight. However, this wouldn't be the last time his little boy would see him again.

"I'm going to leave for tonight, but I will be back tomorrow. If Ford gets released before I get back in the morning I want you to call me." Taking out his wallet, Ben pulled out a business card and gave it to Rishelle. "Call this number."

Rishelle held the beige card between her two fingers debating if she really would use the number printed there and then decided it would hurt her more in the long run if she didn't.

"I will call you."

Bending down, Ben brushed a soft kiss across her lips, “Thank you for making me a father. Ford is the son I always wanted and I already love him.” The words were said with such warmth and a loving tone. He looked at her intently, then turned on his heel and strode down the hallway.

Rishelle chewed at her bottom lip wondering what in the hell she was going to do now. Ben wasn’t denying he was Ford’s father. In fact, he seemed thrilled he had a son and that she was the mother. Nothing about tonight was turning out the way she imagined it would.

She had to make sure Ford was okay and get him back home, because she needed to talk to Nicey about all of this. Her best friend would have some kind of advice for her, but what worried her was it might not be something she wanted to hear.

## Chapter Twenty-One

“I’m a father,” Ben said over and over as he paced around the plush office. “I have wanted to be a parent for the past five years of my life and I am. Why in the hell didn’t I move heaven and earth to find Rishelle all of those years ago? I could be married now with Ford and probably a couple of more kids.”

“Why don’t you take a seat?” Spencer suggested pointing to a chair in front of his desk. “You’re going to wear a hole in my new carpet.”

Taking the seat he was offered, Ben rested his head against the back of the leather chair and closed his eyes. “Do you know that I haven’t gotten a good night’s sleep since I found out about Ford? God, I haven’t even been able to go into work, so I took a leave of absence for a month. I need to get things worked out with Rishelle.”

“Does Ford know that you’re his father?”

“No, Rishelle wants to wait a little while longer before she tells him, but it has been a week since he got out of the hospital and I don’t know how much longer I can wait. I was over there yesterday to see him and he’s the greatest little boy. God, I already love him so much.”

“I do find it hard to believe that you’re a parent before me. Nicey is stunned you’re Ford’s father,” Spencer admitted. “When is Rishelle going to tell Ford the truth about who you are? I know he’s bound to have questions since you have come out of the blue into his life. If he is anything like any other five and a half year old boy. I think he’s old enough to know.”

“I want to tell him for his birthday which is on Saturday, but I haven’t talked to Rishelle about it. I’m going to her house after I leave here. God, I thought the reality of finding her again would be too much for me to handle, but I was so wrong.”

“How did it feel when you saw your son for the very first time?”

“It was like I had been handed the best gift in the world. I have always heard people say that your life changes when you become a parent and they weren’t lying. Ford has changed my life. I think about him and Rishelle all of the time. I want to get married, but Rishelle isn’t up for that. I think she’s barely holding it together as it is.”

“But you are going to propose to her?”

“Hell...I was going to ask her to marry me while we were at the cabin. I would have agreed to a long engagement as long as she said yes. Now, I’m dying to get married even more. I have waited so long to have a real family and Rishelle and my son are it. I can’t love any two people more than I love them.”

“I wish you the best of luck getting Rishelle to walk down that aisle,” Spencer said.

“Thanks, I’m going to need it because not only do I have to win her heart back. I have to get my son to accept me too,” Ben replied.



“Nicey, what in the hell am I going to do now?” Rishelle demanded as she picked up the policeman teddy bear off the floor and placed it on the couch.

“Where did you get that cute bear? I know Ford must love it too death. You have told me how much he loves police officers and police cars,” Nicey said rubbing her belly.

“Ben gave it to him the day he came home from the hospital and it’s seldom out of his sight. I had to fight with him to keep him from taking it to school with him today. Ben hasn’t been in Ford’s life that long, and my son already thinks he the coolest man alive because he’s a cop.”

“Rishelle, Ford is Ben’s son too. Why didn’t you tell me about this after you saw him at the party Spencer had? I wouldn’t have told anyone about it,” Nicey swore.

“All I could think about was getting out of that party and back to my son. I was stunned to see Ben there. I tried not to think about him over years, but he had

always been a thought in the back of mind and seeing him like that just sent me into panic mood. I'm sorry."

"You have nothing to apologize for. I should have been more honest with you," Rishelle said, as she continued going around the room and picking up Ford's toys. "I was hoping Ben would just forget he ever saw me. He could have gone on with his life and I could have done the same thing with mine."

"Were you serious when you told me that you had a relationship with Ben?" Nicey laughed. "Because you sure don't act like you know how your man is and the things he will do for the people he cares about the most in this world. He's constantly following through with anything and everything Spencer or I tell him about. Shoot, I can still see the look in his eyes when he first saw you. It was like you gave him his life back."

Rishelle placed the last of Ford's toys into the toy box by the wall and then joined Nicey on the couch. "See, that is what I'm worried about. I don't need Ben to take over my life. Ford and I are doing just fine without him. Once I let Ben in I would never be able to get rid of him, and my son will finally have the father he has been asking about since he was two years old."

"Is that what you're really frightened about?"

"What else would be bothering me?" Rishelle asked, confused.



“Maybe you’re scared that Ben will take some of the love Ford has for you and your little boy won’t love you as much. I’m not saying any of that is true. I’m only giving you my opinion.”

“Okay, I’ll admit that I’m a tad bit nervous about revealing who Ben is to Ford, because he took to his father so quickly in the hospital. It was almost like he knew who Ben was without me saying a word. What if the connection continues to build between them?”

“Fathers and sons are supposed to be close. I know anytime the baby hears Spencer’s voice he will kick more, but I know my baby loves me just as much as him. We are both on an equal playing field. It will be the same way with you and Ben. So, when are you going to have the ‘talk’ with Ford?”

“I’m not sure. Ben is supposed to come over later and we will discuss when the best time will be.”

“I wish you the best, and I know it’s going to turn out so much better than you think. Things always have a way of working themselves out. Look at me. I thought I would be a work alcoholic for the rest of my life and when I least expected Spencer came into my life. Just don’t be so quick to blow off Ben.”

“Remember he wanted you before he found out about Ford. Now that he knows the woman he’s in love with is also the mother of his child, you won’t ever

be able to toss him into your past again. He's here to stay whether you like it or not."

"Nicey, will you stop with your positive thinking. I'm having a major crisis," Rishelle complained. "Not only do I have to find a way not to fall in love with Ben anymore than I already am. I also have to tell Ford that Ben is his father. Shit! I'm in way over my head."

"I suggest that you do the easiest one first," Nicey suggested as she stood up.

"Which one is the easiest one to you because I sure in the hell don't know?"

"Tell Ford about Ben and let the two of them work on their relationship. Because Ben will do everything he can to make sure you love him more than you already do. So, I'm just going to sit back and enjoy this. I need something to keep me entertained until the baby comes."

"Nicey Carlton, my screwed up personal life isn't going to be any form of amusement for you until Spencer Jr. comes. I will not let you make fun of me no matter how much I love you."

"Why do you and Spencer think the baby is a boy?" Nicey asked rubbing her stomach.

"Come on. You are going to have a boy because Spencer is the type of guy to give you five kids and only the last one would be a girl," Rishelle teased feeling relaxed for the first time in a very long time; since Ben popped back up in her life.

“Fine, pick at me see if I care,” Nicey laughed, as she opened the front door and stepped out on the porch. “Just remember what I told you. Give Ben and Ford a chance to bond. Ben is a terrific guy and I really believe he loves you and is sorry for what happened. Let your doubts go and find love with him.”

“I’ll think about it.” Rishelle gave Nicey a hug and stepped back. “Drive carefully and let me know when we can go out to dinner. We haven’t done that in forever.”

“Spencer is working late one day next week. Let me ask him what day it is and we can have a girl’s night at my house. You can pack a small bag and stay overnight in the guest room.”

“Sounds good to me I can let Ford spend the night with my mother.”

“Ford might want to spend the night with Ben instead,” Nicey pointed out as she moved off the porch and then got into her car. Her best friend waved at her before she pulled out of the driveway and headed down the street.

“God, it’s hard for me to think about telling Ford that Ben is his father. How can I even think about allowing my son to spend the night with Ben?” Rishelle asked herself as she went back inside shutting the door behind her.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

“Ford isn’t here. He wanted to spend the night with his grandmother and I wasn’t going to tell him no. If you had gotten here about twenty minutes ago you would have gotten to see him,” Rishelle told Ben as he came inside her house. He was late and she wondered what he had been doing. It wasn’t like Ben to be two minutes late let alone twenty minutes.

“Sorry. I had to take care of something at home first and I wasn’t able to leave until it was taken care of. I’m upset that I missed my son. Do you think it will be okay if I took him to the park tomorrow? I would love for us to go as a family. I want Ford to get used to having me around.” Ben took a seat on her couch and rested his arms along the back.

“Saturday’s are Ford’s soccer practice. It’s from nine to twelve. You’re welcome to come to it if you want too. I think he will like having you there since he has taken such a liking to you. Usually Ford is pretty shy around strangers, but for some reason he doesn’t react that way with you.”

“I was shy at that age too. My parents would have to drag me out of my shell at the dinner table, but I grew out of it and so will he. Have a seat. You look

strange standing there looking at me by the door. I promise that I won't bite unless you want me too," Ben teased.

Coming across the room, Rishelle took the empty seat next to Ben. "This isn't something to laugh about Ben. I'm worried about how Ford is going to take it when I tell him you are his father."

"I'm not laughing at the situation," he corrected. "I'm not the type to make friends very easily. I think that besides Spencer, I might have one other guy at the station I'm close to. I have had a few good friends over the years but we went our separate ways and I have loads of associates because of work, but you and Ford are my family."

"I used to look at the pictures the guys would place on their desks of their family's and now I can do that. I never thought it would happen, but here I am with a handsome little boy and a woman I'm crazy about."

Rishelle had to bring Ben back to the conversation at hand. He was getting too far off track for her. "How about we tell Ford first and then we can talk about a picture of him to put on your desk?" It was hard for her to share Ford with Ben since she had been the only parent in his life for so long, but he had as much right to him as she did.

Ben moved his arm off the couch and wrapped it around her waist pulling her closer to his body. "I know you heard me. I want a picture of you and Ben together. You're just as much a part of my life as my son."

"I want you to share your hobbies, interests and anything else you want with me. Who knows we might have a lot more going on for us besides a handsome son we both care about? You have brought more passion into my life these last few weeks than you might realize. I used to gravitate towards the more dangerous cases to fill the void in my life, but I don't have to do that anymore."

"Ben, you can't replace one obsession with another, and Ford doesn't need to be some substitute for you. He's a little boy who has always dreamt about meeting his father. Now, that he has the chance, you're talking about showing him off like a..."

"Proud father," Ben said cutting her off. "I would bet you have several photos of Ben at your job. I just want to do the same."

"You're right I do."

Leaning closer, he brushed his mouth over hers before she could move. "How about we schedule an appointment with a photographer and get a family portrait done? I have a nice space on my living room wall that would look wonderful with a family photo of us."

WHOA! Ben was planning things that he shouldn't. First, they had to tell Ford and take the situation from there. "Let's take a step back. You're moving too fast for me. I need time to absorb everything."

"What happened to the spontaneous woman I used to know?" Ben questioned as he slid his hand through her hair. "Why not take a jump back over to the wild side with me? I swear I can make you keep your worries and fears to a minimum. You make me feel *good*. Let me repay the favor to you."

He nibbled at her bottom lip before drawing it into his mouth to soothe away the sting. Rishelle squirmed around on the couch trying not to let Ben seduce her with his light foreplay. She didn't invite him over here for that.

"Do you know how much I love that I can be myself with you?" Ben breathed against her mouth. "Even when I was working with you five and a half years ago, I felt like I could tell you anything, but I chickened out at the last minute. Now, I wish that I hadn't, because we wouldn't be going through all of this extra drama."

"Ben...I can't..."

"Shhh..." He whispered softly. "All I want to do is kiss you. Let me do it." Ben's tongue traced the soft fullness of Rishelle's mouth drawing her more into him than she wanted to be. "Damn, baby you taste so fucking good."

*You don't taste so bad yourself*, Rishelle thought to herself as she wrapped her arms around Ben's neck leaning in closer to him. His kiss was slow and thorough,

like he was going to get lost in every single taste of her mouth. Ben took control of her mouth with a demanding mastery that scared the hell out of her. She had to stop this before it went any further. He came over here to talk about Ford not giving him a brother or sister in nine months.

“No,” she moaned, shoving at his chest. “We need to stop.”

Raising his mouth from hers, Ben gazed into her eyes. “I don’t want to. I think we get along better when fewer words are spoken between us to mess things up.” He moved back to kiss her, but Rishelle turned her head and Ben’s mouth ended up brushing her cheek.

“I’m not going to give up on you. I will win you back,” Ben promised her before he eased back from her. “Since you don’t want to make out anymore I’m going to assume we can get back on the subject of our son.”

“What time is his birthday party going to be Saturday? I think we should tell him after the party that way he will be able to enjoy his day. How about we have the party at my house? It’s more than big enough to accommodate six year olds and their parents.”

“Thank you for the offer, but I think it should stay at my house. Ford wants to have it in the backyard and I don’t think we should do too much too soon when it comes to him.”



“Am I doing too much too soon when it comes to you?” Ben asked, staring into her eyes. “I’m trying to move slowly, but it’s hard to do when most of the time all I want to do is kiss you.”

Rishelle didn’t want to feel anything, but Ben’s words did make her feel good. “This isn’t about us as at the moment.” She had to keep the focus on Ford and building his relationship with his father. Nothing else mattered but making sure her little boy could handle learning that Ben was the daddy he has been wanting.

“You aren’t going to shut me out of your life.” Ben brushed the back of his hand across her cheek.

“I never said that. I want you to be a part of Ford’s life. “It’s your right.”

“There’s no doubt; I will be a part of Ford’s life. You’re the one I’m talking about.” Ben moved back into her personal space again blocking her in with his body. “I’m talking about being with you, loving you, waking up with you in my arms every damn morning like a man is supposed to with the woman he loves.”

Fight this. Don’t let him win you over, her mind thought.

“Ben...” she started.

“For once, shut that pretty mouth of yours up and just let me kiss you.” Ben captured her lips with his.

## Chapter Twenty-Three

The kiss was like Ben powerful and all consuming. If Rishelle thought that Ben might pull back, she was terribly mistaken. Instead of breaking away from her, he flipped her over so her back was touching the couch and his hard body was positioned above her the way it should have been for the past twenty minutes.

Why did she waste all that time with words when she could have been with him like this? Ben was the kind of man who made sex seem like an Olympic sport. The more you practiced it, the better you got at it.

Lifting his mouth so their lips were still almost touching but not quite, Ben stared down into her eyes and the desire she saw in his scared the hell out of her. “Are we on the same page? If you want me to stop you have to tell me now, because if I kiss you again, there will be no stopping me. I’ve been fighting my need to be with you since I walked into your house.”

“I can’t lie. I have been daydreaming about how it would feel to have you buried deep inside of me too. The night we made love outside at the cabin has been replaying in my mind over and over. It was so risqué. I haven’t done anything like that since I became a mother.”

“You better not,” Ben growled. “You’re mine! I would toss any man’s ass under the jail if he even thought about touching my woman.”

“How about we stop talking and make out instead?” Rishelle suggested before she reached for the hem of Ben’s dark blue T-shirt and yanked it over his head tossing it to the floor. “You have such an amazing body.” She raked her nails lightly over Ben’s chest loving how his big body shivered under her touch.

“Baby, yours isn’t too bad either.” He pulled the zipper down on the front of her turquoise cashmere sweater until her matching bar was showing. “You look delicious in that color. It looks so sexy against your skin, but I think something else will captivate my attention even more. With a flick of his wrists, he unhooked the front of her bra and her breasts sprung free. Taking his hands, he cupped her breasts running his thumbs over the already hard nipples. “You were always more than a handful, but they look riper and fuller since you had my son.”

“Ben, my breasts don’t look that much different,” Rishelle laughed, softly.

“That is what you think, but I see the difference. Your nipples are darker and they went from the size of raisins to blackberries. It gives me more to suck on and love.” Lowering his head, Ben ran his tongue over her right nipple and then slowly sucked it into his warm mouth.

“Absolutely delicious,” he mumbled around her nipple as he eased a hard thigh between her legs and pressed his thick cock against her.

Rishelle could feel the heat of Ben through her jeans and it was driving her *crazy*! Why did he constantly tease her like this when she wanted to get down to business? Ben knew how much she loved being with him and he was holding out on her on purpose because she took so long to give in.

“Can’t we just get to the good part?” She complained. “I have missed you so much. I swear I think I’m addicted to you.”

Ben nursed on her nipple a few more seconds before he finally let it go. Taking her hands, he pulled them above her head until her breasts slapped together. “Beautiful, addiction is a good thing, don’t get me wrong. However, something else is so much better in my opinion. I mean so many people get caught up in the release they are craving so bad that they forget about the fun part of getting there — foreplay.”

“I don’t want to be guilty of skipping all of your sensitive zones just to jump ahead to getting the ultimate release. I’d rather touch and love your body slowly working you up until you can’t take it anymore.”

Ben ran his free hand down her stomach loving the smoothness of it. His hand stopped right above her jeans loving the fact that she carried their child inside of her. He would love to have another baby with her. Hopefully, after everything was worked out she would be open to giving him another child after they were married.

He unbuttoned her jeans and then pulled down the zipper until her turquoise underwear peeked out. "I think learning the shape of your lover's body is more important than anything." Getting off the couch, Ben quickly removed the rest of Rishelle's clothes and then recovered her body with his.

"Have you ever noticed that when I run my hand down the side of your neck your breathing speeds up?" Ben moved his hand to trail Rishelle's neck. "I find it sexy that you're so responsive to me. It makes my pleasure kick up another notch."

"I can't help how good you make my body feel. Sweetheart, you have skills and I'm glad that I'm the only woman who gets to experience them."

"Let me see if I can make you love them even more," Ben said, before he lowered his mouth back down to hers.

He stroked the gently growing fire that had been burning in her since he showed up at her door. Why was she fighting this? Moaning, Rishelle wrapped her arms around Ben's wide shoulders because she was powerless to resist the vitality Ben radiated. It drew her like a magnet.

"Do you know how much I love being with you like this?" Ben questioned as he slid his hands down her sides and then eased them between her ass and the couch cushions.

"I can feel it," Rishelle replied rubbing her wetness against the denim covering his throbbing cock.

“Woman, you’re tempting me way too much for us to make love out here on this couch. No matter how comfortable it is to sit on. I’d rather be in a big comfortable bed when I get to love you.” Ben got off the couch and then picked her up into his arms. “Care to tell me where the bedroom is?”

“It’s straight down the hall and the first door on your right,” Rishelle replied.

“Let’s go. I don’t know how much longer I can be a gentleman with you looking so hot and naked in my arms.” Ben left the living room and took off in the direction of her bedroom.

Inside the bedroom, Ben laid Rishelle gently down on the bed and stepped back. He wanted to just look at the woman he had been in love with for the past six years. Everything he did after the day he left Rishelle lead up to this moment.

It was a long, hard wait but it was all worth it now. He finally understood how Spencer fell in love with Nicey and never wanted to let her go. He felt a possessiveness for Rishelle that he shouldn’t, but he wasn’t about to let her go.

She looked like an angel with her thick, dark-brown curls spilling down to her shoulders. He had forgotten how much he loved how her breasts made his mouth water just for a small taste, or how her stomach wasn’t completely flat; that was the ultimate turn-on for him. Rishelle’s complexion was the perfect example of creamy milk chocolate and he had a horrible sweet tooth.

“Do you know how perfect you are?”

“I’m not perfect, but thank you for thinking so. Since you have gotten your fill of my body, how about you get naked for me? You know how much I love looking at you officer.”

“Detective,” Ben corrected as he kicked off his shoes slowly pulled down the zipper on his jeans and then yanked them off along with his boxers.

Rishelle sucked in a breath as she slowly allowed her eyes to take in the perfect male specimen standing before her. She was so glad there was a full moon tonight because that was the only light she needed or wanted.

She had seen Ben nude before, but today for some reason, he looked sinfully gorgeous. Hot and hard were the two words that popped into Rishelle’s mind as she continued to gawk at Ben.

His long, thick cock curved slightly against the fine dusting of hairs on his stomach and her body grew even wetter with anticipation. Ben’s body was so sculpted that he could pose as a nude model for extra money on the side if he wasn’t in the criminal justice field.

“Have you gotten your fill of looking at me?” Ben asked as he moved closer.

“I’ll never get tired of seeing you naked.” Rishelle confessed as she got on her knees and ran her nails slowly through Ben’s chest hair.

“Baby,” Ben moaned as he grabbed her hands. “I’m not going to be able to do what I need to if you keep touching me.”

“Are you sure?” Rishelle pouted. She got one of her hands loose and stroked it down the length of Ben’s thickness loving the fact she couldn’t wrap her hand around the width of him. It made her want Ben buried deep inside of her even more.

He uttered a harsh groan and reached to remove her hand, but stopped when her thumb brushed over the head.

The corner of Rishelle’s mouth pulled up into a seductive smile as a low groan erupted from the back of Ben’s throat. “Do you like that?” she asked as she repeated the movement liking how the pre-cum leaked from the small opening.

“Hell yeah!” Ben groaned, but he removed her hand anyway.

“What’s wrong?”

“Baby, as wonderful as that feels I have plans and coming in your hands isn’t one of them.” Ben gently pushed her back on the bed and eased her legs apart. “Damn, you’re so fucking beautiful. I swear I was addicted to you after the first time we made love.”

Dropping to his knees, Ben leaned into her wetness and took a long slow sniff. “I swear there’s no better scent than yours.” He ran his tongue along her vagina drawing some of her cream into his mouth.

“Sweeter than whipped cream,” he whispered taking another lick.



“Oh damn,” Rishelle whimpered running her fingers through the silky strands of Ben’s dark hair. ‘You always make me feel so good.’”

“Do I?” Ben questioned as he got up and covered her body with his larger one. “How about I try to move that good up another level or two to excellent?”

Ben slowly eased his cock into Rishelle until he was completely in. He loved how her walls clamped down on him like she never wanted to let him go.

“Hmmm...You’re so...” Rishelle panted as he eased his erection out of her and then thrust back in.

“So what?”

Leaning down, he pulled her full bottom lip into his mouth sucking on it drawing a soft mewling sound from Rishelle. Ben nibbled on it a few more minutes before releasing it. He loved how his woman was watching him through partly closed lids. Even that couldn’t hide the desire and need he saw hovering there. Rishelle was his! He just had to make her see it.

“Tell me. Do you want me? How bad do you need this?” He sped up his movements making the headboard bang against the wall. Fuck! He wanted to come so bad, but he couldn’t and wouldn’t until Rishelle did.

“You know,” she moaned. Rishelle slid her hand down his back to cup his ass. “More...God...I need more!”

Masculine pride surged through Ben's body at hearing Rishelle beg him to make love to her. He had been her first all those years ago and now he was going to wipe any other man after him from her mind. Ben knew that he was being irrational, but he didn't give a damn.

"I'll give you more as soon as you admit you're mine." He slowed down his thrusts making Rishelle's eyes snap open. "Tell me."

"I'm not anyone's property."

Ben slowly eased half of his cock out of Rishelle's wonderful warmth. "Are you sure about that? Really sure?"

Her breath hitched in her throat when he licked the tips of his fingers and then brought them back down to toy with her nipples. "It's such a shame that you aren't mine because I would love to finish making love to you."

Ben was barely holding it together. The walls of Rishelle's pussy had a tight hold on the part of his cock still buried inside of her. He wasn't going to be able to continue this much longer. His little game was meant to torture her but it was slowly making him lose his mind.

"Tell me!" Ben demanded, harshly. He needed to hear Rishelle admit that she wanted to be his. He *had* to hear the words.

"Yes!" Rishelle yelled, pushing her hips up so his cock went back inside of her.

The control that Ben had been trying to hold on to broke as he held Rishelle's hips thrusting deep into her welcoming heat. He was taken aback by her openly honest response to him. Her head was thrown back against the pillows, eyes shut tight and her mouth was open with soft moans pouring from her swollen lips.

The sight of his woman in the heat of pleasure sent him further over the edge. Sliding his hands beneath her ass, he held Rishelle still as he gave her steady, hard thrusts.

"Ooh, God!" she screamed "Yes!"

Ben let go of her ass to hold Rishelle's arms down to the bed next to her head as he continued to pump into her. The only sounds in the room were Rishelle's cries as she came down from her orgasms; Ben's heavy breathing and their slick bodies coming together.

He couldn't hold on any longer. Ben clamped his mouth down over Rishelle's swallowing her cries, but that only lasted for a few minutes. Then he threw his head back and growled deep in his throat as his seed poured from him into the stunning woman he was making love to.

## Chapter Twenty-Four

Ben lay on his back with a sleeping Rishelle lying partially on his chest. She had been asleep for a couple of hours now, but he had stayed awake after the amazing love making that had happened between them.

He wasn't going to be able to let her go after tonight. Rishelle was the woman he had been waiting all of his life to find, and it only took several bad relationships along with two failed marriages.

She was the only woman that he had dated who was able to size up any situation instantly. Her charm and approachable attitude was one of the main things that drew him to her. He hadn't forgotten how the men at her job always found a way to get Rishelle's attention and when she smiled at them. It was like they were instant buddies or a member of the 'I love Rishelle fan club'.

But all of that was over now because he was back in her life and he was her man. Ben hated to think about the other men who had been in Ford's life while he was out of the picture for all of those years. He had missed milestones in Ford's life. It was something that he wouldn't get back; however, he was here now to see the rest of them.

A part of him knew that Rishelle wasn't going to keep the truth from him, but the other part of him was worried if Ford would accept him as his father. Rishelle had built a wonderful life for his son and herself without him in it. How would Ford react to having another parent in his life, and a father at that?

The more he was learning about the woman she had become-surprisingly; he liked how she had evolved into a strong and confident woman. He hoped that Rishelle was through with her "*still-looking*" stage, because he was beyond ready to settled down and give Ford a little brother or sister to play with. He was at the perfect age to be a big brother.

In his opinion, Rishelle's engaging wit, loving spirit, playfulness and down-right sexiness would make her a wonderful wife. She had it all in one perfect package. He knew in the past he hadn't been the best sounding board when she had wanted to discuss any problems. Because he had been too focused on his case, but that was the past and now was the present. He would be willing to sit for hours and listen to anything Rishelle wanted to tell him.

On their last date together, before that horrible incident in his bedroom and then Rishelle catching Victoria trying to seduce him in her office after hours; she told him something, but back then he was too dumb to understand and appreciate what a good woman he had.

She had told him that she understood who he truly was and she loved him

anyway. God! What was his problem! He should have dragged Rishelle to Las Vegas and married her that same night.

Ben took one final look at Rishelle before he snuggled closer to her and closed his eyes. The last thought on his mind before he fell asleep was that he wasn't going to blow his amazing second chance with the woman next to him. Before she knew what was going on Rishelle would be married to him.



“Grand mama, hurry up. I want to tell mama about the puppies we saw at the pet store Ford yelled as he got out of the car and ran toward the front door. I want to get the black puppy with the white patch over his left eye.”

Katrina Damian got out of her car and hurried after her overzealous grandson. She loved Ford so much, but she doubted Rishelle was going to buy him a puppy for his birthday. Her daughter just didn't have enough time between work and raising Ford to take care of a dog, and she didn't have enough room at her house for a dog either.

“Ford, I'm coming. Don't knock on the door like that. I have a key to let us in.” Katrina grabbed her grandson's hand before he could knock again. “You shouldn't be in such a rush young as you are.” She unlocked and barely had the door open before Ford rush through it.

“I have to rush. We need to get the puppy before someone else does.” Ford complained going toward his mother’s bedroom.

Katrina stopped in her tracks as she noticed all of the clothes thrown around the room and it quickly dawned on her that her daughter wasn’t alone in the bed. She rushed after Ford and stopped him just as he was opening the door to his mother’s bedroom.

“Wait Ford,” she whispered. “Why don’t you go into your bedroom and see if can find that video you thought you had left at my house? I’ll talk to your mother about the puppy. Let me see if I can make her at least go and see the puppy.”

Ford stepped back and stared at her like she was trying to hide something from him. “Are you really going to try?”

“Yes...now go.” She shoved Ford toward his room and waited until he went inside before she peeked through the opened door. Katrina gasped at the sight of Rishelle in the bed with a man. She didn’t even know Rishelle was seeing anyone. What in the world was her daughter doing? She had to get Rishelle out of that bed and into the living room or kitchen before Ford came back here looking for her and saw something that he shouldn’t at five and a half years old.

“Rishelle,” she whispered loudly hoping her daughter would wake up and hear her. Her daughter moved a little on the bed, but she didn’t open her eyes.

Katrina glanced back at Ford's room hoping that he wouldn't come out looking for her. Easing into the room, she went over to the bed, shook Rishelle and then hollered as low as she could. "Wake up!"

Rishelle's eyes flew open. "Mama, what in the hell are you doing in my bedroom?"

"You better be glad it wasn't Ford. He was on his way in here to tell you about a puppy he saw at the pet store. I saw the clothes lying on the floor in the living room and almost didn't get to him in time. Young lady, you need to get dressed and have your friend out of here by the time I get back from the store with Ford."

"I'm sorry...I didn't know that you would be back so early with Ford." Rishelle sat up in the bed with the sheet held against her chest. "I'll get dressed and get Ben up too."

"Ben...Are you talking about the man from the hospital?" Katrina frowned, pointing to the man whose back was still turned to her. She wasn't quite sure, but she had a feeling that he wasn't asleep anymore, but wide awake listening to them.

"Why would you be sleeping with a man you haven't seen in years? I know you said he was Ford's father when we were at the hospital, but is it true? Why is he showing up now after all of these years?"



“Mama, he didn’t even know about Ford until then because I never told him, but I can’t go into this now. We need to get dressed and out of this bed before my son comes back.”

Katrina’s eyes narrowed at her daughter. “You better know what you’re doing because I don’t want you or my grandson hurt by this man.”

“I’m not going to let anyone hurt my son. You know me better than that. Now can you please get Ford out of here? I can’t let him find Ben here this early in the morning.”

She had been expecting a lot of things, but that confession wasn’t one of them. “Okay...I need time to process all of this. I’m going to take Ford to the video game store and get him that game I promised him for his birthday. When I get back, the two of us are going to talk.”

Katrina went to the door and hurried out before she started asking her daughter more than twenty questions.

She would inform her to tell Ford the truth about Ben today instead of after his birthday party.

“You handled that situation with your mother walking in on us pretty well,” Ben said touching her on the shoulder. “She didn’t seem that upset.”

“First, my mother didn’t *‘walk in on us’*. She came in here to wake me up so my son wouldn’t. So, you need to put your clothes on and leave. I need to go

somewhere.” Rishelle got out of the bed and went into the bathroom closing the door behind her.

## Chapter Twenty-Five

Walking down the beach, Rishelle let the wind blow through her hair while she contemplated how her life had changed so unexpectedly in the last few weeks. She *never* imagined that Ben would show back up out of the blue. She was content being alone, working as a CPA and raising Ford. She hadn't given a passing thought to having a relationship anymore.

The last time she had really talked to Ben, he wasn't interested in building a family with her. He was happy being a confirmed bachelor because of his past and all of the bad relationships he had been involved in. She had gotten that loud and clear while being hit with the realization of how much he cherished his freedom and wasn't interested in getting married again. She wouldn't call him squeamish to commitment, but he hadn't been looking for a walk down the aisle.

Now after he found out he had a son. All he could talk about was the three of them becoming a family. She still cared about Ben a lot. But she wasn't going to let Ben get close to Ford only to become antsy for new excitement that didn't involve a woman and child and then disappear.

Rishelle didn't want to focus only on the bad things when she thought about Ben. He had so many other wonderful qualities that she loved. He had a

knack for turning anything bad into something good. For the short period of time they had been dating, Ben constantly showed her how to turn every opportunity into a possibility and never think she wasn't good enough for something.

He sparked inspiration in her with his clever solutions to the tiniest of problems that she thought might ruin her day. If she had to use one word to describe Ben, it would be cavalier— he never let anything get him down...well at least he hadn't until she had caught him with Victoria.

“Why am I still holding on to the past?” Rishelle asked herself, as she sat down on the sand watching the waves dancing around in the ocean's blue water. “Nicey finally opened her heart up to Spencer and she is madly in love with him. I miss having that connection in my life. Ben is the man I want the house and kids with. He has always been the man I dreamt about starting a family with, but I won't settle for someone who isn't going to give me one hundred percent of his time and emotions. I don't deserve anything less than that and neither does my son.”



“I haven't talked to you in a couple of days. How is everything going with you and Rishelle? The last thing you mentioned to me was telling Ford who you really were.” Spencer took a shot at the basketball hoop and missed. “Damn...I used to be able to make that. What happened?”

“You’re getting old,” Ben teased as he grabbed the ball and made his shot.  
“You’re out of practice.”

“Stop teasing me and tell me what is going on.”

“I’m still madly in love with Rishelle, but now I think she is the one with the commitment phobia. It’s scaring the hell out of me. I’ve tried to give her space, but every time I’m in touching distance of her we end up making love. I think she’s a goddess. She can do no wrong in my eyes. I swear if I could put her on a pedestal, I would, but she isn’t listening to me when I give her compliments or try to show her how much I care. I’m about out of ideas.”

“You aren’t giving up are you?” Spencer asked as he shot the ball and made the basket this time.

“HELL NO!” Ben shouted. “Rishelle is means everything to me and if I have to move heaven and earth, I will do it. I was a fool once to let her slip through my fingers, but I’m not going to let it happen to me twice.”

“That’s good to hear. I thought I might have to give you a lecture about what a good catch Rishelle is for you. I can always see a change in you and I like it.”

“I’m enjoying the change too. Do you know that Rishelle is the only woman who has made me chase after her? When most women find out that I’m single and a cop they are ready to drag me to the nearest bed, but she isn’t like that. Rishelle

keeps me grounded. I love how she makes me think during the conversations we engage in. I'm just not listening and adding something when I find a spot."

"We debate. I find that so sexy and very appealing. Rishelle is more than a beautiful face and knock out body to me. I want more than just amazing sex from her. I'm dying to build a life and have more kids; however, the closer I get the more she pulls away."

"All I can tell you is don't give up. I know you feel like you aren't going to get your dream, but in the end you will. I can't tell you how good I feel when I roll over in the middle of the night and find the love of my life lying next to me. You will experience the same feeling when Rishelle finally believes you mean the words you're telling her."

"How much longer do I have to wait? It's killing me," Ben complained.

"Whatever you do, you can't rush Rishelle. She has to work through her issues with you at her own pace. If you push her too hard, she will leave you."

"It's hard for me to let her take her time when I want to do the same thing you did." Grabbing the ball from Spencer, Ben went and took a seat on the park bench ignoring the two women that walked past him with tennis racquets in their hands.

"Do what like me?" Spencer asked the second before he joined Ben.

“I have this huge proposal that I want to do on Valentine’s Day. Don’t you remember how I helped you set yours up? It turned out amazing. I want the same thing for Rishelle, but with my little added spark to it.”

“Whoa!” Spencer uttered stunned. “Valentine’s Day is only about a week away. Are you sure that Rishelle is ready for something like that? She might not take your proposal seriously.”

Ben was exhausted waiting around for Rishelle to make up her mind. How many more ways did he have to show Rishelle that she and Ford were meant to be with him? It was all he could do not to pack up her and their son’s belongings and move them into his house. But he knew that Rishelle would throw a fit if he did that. She needed to be romanced a little more, not man handled.

“Rishelle is going to take me seriously. I’ve been fighting battles for as long as I can remember, from my siblings to my job. I’ve lost some, but I won more than I lost. I will do everything in my power to show her I mean every word that I’m telling her.”

“Okay, I believe you. What can I do to help you?” Spencer asked.

“I’m still working on one or two things. Tomorrow is Ford’s birthday and Rishelle is going to tell him that I’m his father, so I can’t do anything else until I see how it reacts after learning the truth.”

“Kids are tough. I’m sure he’ll love having a dad. I think you’ll make an excellent father.”

“Thanks. I hope you’re right. How is Nicey doing? I have hogged all of the conversation talking about me and my problems. Do you know what you’re having?”

A huge grin spilt across Spencer’s face. “It’s a boy. We found out yesterday. I wanted to know months ago, but Nicey wanted to wait closer to the due date, so I agreed with her. She’s just as happy as I am.”

“When is the baby due?”

“In about three weeks. Nicey’s doctor told her that he wanted her to work more from home instead of being at the office late at night, so when I left her she was in bed with a laptop working on the Pamper Me website. I’m going to stop by her favorite restaurant after I leave you and take something home for dinner.”

“I never imagined you becoming such a family man, but you look so content,” Ben said, looking at his best friend.

“I’m the happiest I have ever been.”

“I can tell you are but give me three weeks and I will be able to tell you the same thing.”



Spencer loved the confidence he heard in Ben's voice. This was the guy he knew would be able to make Rishelle understand how much he cared about her- no matter how long it took.

"Just remember you aren't trying to win Rishelle over with words. You need to make her see and feel how much you are in love with her. Whatever you did to get your ex-wives, do exactly the opposite when it comes to Rishelle and I don't doubt you won't have her back in your life."

"Thanks, but I know for sure I'll never make the mistakes I did with my ex-wives with Rishelle. She's my everything and I will prove it to her." Ben got up from the bench and patted Spencer on the shoulder. "I need to head home and take a shower before I go and see Rishelle. I have a little surprise for her."

"Have fun and don't give her too much too soon. It's the quickest way to scare her off," Spencer yelled after him.

Ben continued on to his car wondering how Rishelle was going to react to his little surprise. It might be too soon to do something like this, but he didn't care. He had to do it now or he might not get another chance too.

## Chapter Twenty-Six

Rishelle took the cookies out of the oven and placed the last batch inside while Ford sat at the kitchen table and licked the spoon clean. When she was a kid, she always thought eating off of the spoon was the best part when she helped her mother cook. She was closing the oven when the door bell rung.

“I’ll get it,” Ford yelled, tossing the spoon back into the bowl on the table. “Maybe it’s Ben. He hasn’t been here in a long time.” Ford rushed past her straight for the front door in hyper speed.

“Ford, don’t you dare open that door. We don’t have a clue who’s on the other side.” Rishelle hurried after Ford trying to catch him before he could open the door, but she wasn’t fast enough.

“Hi, Ben,” Ford said. “Where have you been? I haven’t seen you in a long time.”

Rishelle stopped behind her son and took in how gorgeous Ben looked in his white T-shirt and shorts. It had been almost seven hours since she last laid eyes on him, but it seemed so much longer. Lord, she was horrible when it came to missing him.

“Ford, Ben does have to work,” Rishelle said as she moved her son away from the door. “He can’t spend all of his time with us. He might have something else going on his life that we don’t know about.”

“Don’t you want to be around us anymore?” Ford asked.

“Ford, I wouldn’t pick two other people I’d rather be around than you and your mom. I love the time I spend with the two of you.”

“Why don’t you come in?” Rishelle suggested. She pulled Ford back from the door, so Ben could come in. He closed the door behind him and before she could move he planted a kiss on her mouth.

“I knew you liked my mommy,” Ford said breaking into their moment.

Ben gave her another kiss and then stepped back looking down at Ford. “Are you upset that I like your mom?”

“No, I’m glad you do.”

She needed to put a hold on this conversation before it went any further. She could sense that Ben was about to tell Ford was more than he should know at the moment. Tomorrow would be here soon enough and her son would find out who Ben really was.

“Ford, will you please go in the back yard and finish picking up your toys? They are all over the ground.”

“Do I have to?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. Bye Ben,” Ford said then ran out of the room and out of the backdoor.

The second the door closed behind Ford Ben pulled her into his arms. “Do you know how much I have missed you?” Ben kissed her so quickly that she barely had time to react. The touch of his lips as usual, had an instantaneous effect on her mind and body. Wrapping her arms around his neck, Rishelle kissed Ben back with everything that she had in her. She loved him so damn much. She was trying to think of ways not to be with him.

“Baby, I love you,” Ben whispered against her lips. Rishelle was too startled by Ben’s confession to say anything at first. Stepping back, she looked up into his face and was taken aback by intense sparkling in his gray eyes. Ben had told her that he loved her before, but she never believed him because she didn’t think he knew how to love anymore. What was she supposed to tell him?

Rishelle was so surprised that she said the first thing that popped into her mind. “I care about you too.”

She heard his quick intake of breath as Ben moved back from her. “You only care about me? What in the hell is that? I’m ready to build a future with you and my son. How can you only fucking care about me?”

Rishelle stared at Ben with surprise, remembering how he was so against committing to another woman again. He was such an ever-changing mystery. “I don’t understand why you are so upset. Isn’t that what you told me before?”

“How can you ask me that?” His astonishment was obviously genuine and she regretted her jibe. He stared at her, complete surprise on his face. “I have done nothing since I found you again, but show you how much I love and adore you. You are my everything, but you still can’t let go of the damn past so we can move forward with each other. Do you how many times I have wanted to grab you and Ford and take you away from here but didn’t?”

“I was trying to be the good guy and let you work through your issues when it came to me, but it hasn’t helped me at all. You find these little ways to push me further and further away from you. You need to think long and hard about whether you want us to have a future together.

“I’m not about to leave my son. I will spend all the time I can get with him. He will know I’m his father. It’s only fair that I get to be in his life as much as you are. I wish we could raise him together under the same roof, but I’m beginning to see that you don’t want that.”

Her breath caught in her lungs as wave after wave of shock slapped at her. Ben was finally telling her everything she had been waiting to hear. He did truly

love her like she wanted him too. Now was the time for her to finally come clean and let him know how she felt about him. This had to be the best day of her life.

“Ben, we need to...” Rishelle got cut off in mid-sentence by the cookie timer going off. “Wait...right here. Let me get the cookies out of the oven and we can finish this conversation.” She hurried out of the room and took the cookies out of the oven. She placed them on a cookie rack then checked on Ford in the backyard, before going back into the living room only to find out that Ben had left without a word.

## Chapter Twenty-Seven

The sound of eighteen six year olds running and playing filled Rishelle's backyard as she finished decorating Ford's table for his birthday. She moved the police car cake around making sure it was centered in the middle and nothing else was around it to mess it up. She wanted everything to go perfectly today for Ford. He had been talking about today for weeks now and she thought the decorations were perfect. It had taken her a while to find plates and napkins with the right police car on them, but she finally did.

"Sweetheart, the backyard looks amazing. You put so much work into all of them. Is Ford excited about everything?" Katrina asked her daughter as she placed the finger food for the adults at the other end of the table.

"Yes. He's thrilled to death. He woke me up an hour earlier than usual this morning. I swear I'm so sleepy that I might end up taking a nap after the party is over."

"Have you heard from Ford's father? Is he still coming to the party?"

Rishelle hadn't seen or heard from Ben since he left without a word yesterday, but she knew that he would be here today. He cared about Ford way

too much not to show up. Ford hadn't stopped asking about him since the birthday party started twenty minutes ago.

"No. I haven't heard from him, but I know that Ben will be here. He loves Ford and wouldn't miss this day for anything in the world." She knew that Ben was pissed at her; however, he wouldn't take it out on their son.

"I'm glad you have that much faith in me about something," a male voice said behind her.

Spinning around, Rishelle saw Ben coming toward her with a large box. He placed it on the end of the table near the other mountain of birthday presents. Her heart skipped a beat at the familiar tingling in the pit of her stomach that she got the moment Ben came around her.

"Ben, I really never thought you wouldn't show up today," she said moving to stand next to him and away from her mother. "What's in the box? It's huge!"

"I got my son the gift he wanted for his birthday. Where is he anyway?" Ben asked, looking around the crowded yard.

"Over there with the clown dressed up as a cop doing magic tricks. The change in costume cost extra but the guy was happy to do it. Ford is having the time of his life."

"I'm going to let him know that I'm here. I'll be back." Ben touched her on the shoulder and then moved in the direction of his little boy.



Rishelle tried not to be hurt by the lack of kiss. She had gotten so used to Ben kissing her that when he didn't, she missed the hell out of it. After the party was over, she would pull Ben to the side and they would finish the conversation they had started yesterday in her living room.

"I have to take back my first thought about him," her mother confessed. "I thought he wasn't an upstanding man, but he loves you and Ford very much. He would make an outstanding husband for you. If your daddy was still alive he would agree with me."

"So, it shouldn't matter that Ben has been married two times already?"

"Sweetheart, you know that I wasn't your father's first wife. I never let that fact stop me from falling in love with him and having you. Are you going to hold that against Ben? What he did with his life before he met you truly isn't any of your business unless it was something criminal or immoral."

"Have you ever given a thought to how he is feeling? He knows that his rush to get married back then is keeping him from getting the woman he truly loves and wants to be with. Don't be so harsh to judge him until you have thought about all of the pros and cons."

"Pros and Cons..."

"You need to think long and hard about whether you will find a man better than Ben. Have you noticed he hasn't stopped looking over here at you despite all

of the single women flirting with him? Baby, he loves you. Now, it's time for you to stop and think if you love him as much." Her mother patted her on the shoulder and then walked away.

Yes...she loved the exciting, meaningful and promising way Ben had enhanced her life since his reappearance. Ben was fun to be around. He stirred sensations in her making her want to jump up and take life head on without any fears or doubts. Only a man that she loved could evoke those kinds of deep emotions in her and Ben was that man.

"I can't wait until I tell Ben what I feel for him. What I have always felt. He isn't going to believe it." Rishelle ran her hands down her jeans and fixed her hair into a tighter ponytail. She had to go over there and put her mark on her man before some of these so-called friends of hers thought he was free for the taking.

Going over to Ben, Rishelle slid her hand through his and smiled at him when his fingers tightened around hers. "I thought you would never get over here," he whispered into her ear. "I couldn't smile at these women anymore without it coming off as fake."

"I know how my friends can be. When they see a good-looking man all hell breaks loose. Half of my friends have been divorced for years and they are on the prowl for any single man that comes within touching distance of them."

"Am I a single man?" Ben asked, staring into her eyes.

“No, you aren’t and you better not let me think you are.”

A satisfied look sparkled in his eyes along with a look of promise for what was ahead for the two of them when they finally found a chance to be alone. “I’m glad to finally hear you say that I’m important to you.”

“You’re more important that you will ever know. How about we get this party moved toward the cake and presents?” Rishelle suggested. “I think it’s past time we tell Ford who you are.”

“Let’s do it.” Ben gave her a quick kiss and then stepped back.

For the next hour, Rishelle let Ford take pleasure in his party by having all of the fun he could with his friends and eating as much of his birthday cake as he wanted without giving him a lecture. His birthday only came around once a year and he deserved to have the time of his life.

When Ford started to open presents from his friends, Rishelle was taken aback by the variety of presents her son had gotten from his friends. It was like a veritable Toys ‘R’ us spread across the table. She knew that Ford would play with each and every item before the week was out.

She just had to make sure that he understood he shouldn’t always expect so many gifts every time he had a birthday party. Turning six years old was a huge milestone in a child’s life and that’s why he got so many gifts. Most of them came

from his overzealous grandmother, and she would have a talk with her mom about some of the presents.

As he got down to the last couple of presents, Ben helped escort some of the parents out to their cars with their sleeping kids. All of the sugar from the cake and punch, plus all of the running around had caused some of the children to nod off at the table long before Ford finished unwrapping the last of his birthday gifts.

Standing up from the table, Ford ran his hands across the top of Ben's present. Rishelle could see the excitement in her son's eyes. He was dying to open it up. "Can I see what's in this huge box? Can I? Please...?"

"Wait until Ben gets back. I'm pretty sure he will want to see you open it," Rishelle said then laughed when her son fell back down in his chair. "He has been gone forever. I'm dying to know what is in here."

"Well...forever is over. I'm back and you can open that box. I see you saved the biggest one for last," Ben teased as he walked up to her.

Ford didn't have to be told twice as he jumped up from the chair and tore the paper off the box. "Mama... look," he said pulling out two dog bowls, a leash and several doggie toys. He laid them out on the table for inspection. "Does this mean I'm going to get a puppy for my birthday?"

“Yes,” Ben answered. “We can all go to the pet store tomorrow and pick one out. He will have to stay at my house, but you can come and see him everyday unless your mother doesn’t like my idea.”

Rishelle didn’t know what to do. Ben had totally thrown her with the puppy idea. Ford was dying to get a puppy, and now Ben was giving their son his ultimate birthday present. There was no way she would break her son’s heart.

“Can I do that mama?” Ford asked, running up to her. “Ben will let us keep it at his house. Please let me do it.”

She couldn’t do this with Ford looking at her with his big gray eyes. She needed to talk to Ben alone. “Why don’t you go inside and tell your grand mama about the present Ben gave you for your birthday. I’m sure she will love to hear about it.”

“Okay, but don’t say no. I really want a puppy,” Ford told her before running into the house.

Rishelle waited until Ford was gone before she slapped Ben on the arm. “Why in the hell did you do that to me? You know I can’t take that away from him now.”

Grabbing the hand that hit him, Ben placed a kiss in the center of the palm and then tugged her into his arms. “I have a confession to make.”

“What kind of confession?”

“Ford was only twenty percent of the reason I suggested the puppy. I was hoping it might make it easier for you to agree to move in with me when I asked you. I think it’s about time Ford lives with his mother and father. I live in a huge house. It has more than enough room for me, you, Ford and a puppy.”

It was hard for her to remain coherent when Ben was so close to her. She found his nearness more than exciting. Rishelle started to answer Ben, but got cut off by the sound of her son’s voice standing a few feet away from them.

“I knew you were my daddy!”

## Chapter Twenty-Eight

“Ford, how did you know that Ben is your father?” Rishelle asked stunned that her son already knew the truth while she had been worried about how to tell him.

“I don’t have the same eyes as you, but I do have gray eyes like him. I noticed it the night I was in the hospital,” Ford said. “I wanted to ask you then but you seemed like you were upset with Ben.”

She was at a loss for words. Ford was a constant surprise to her and tonight wasn’t any different. He was definitely a little bit of her and a whole a lot of Ben. Her son just turned six today, but he was acting like he was sixteen years old instead.

“Are you happy that I’m your dad?” Ben asked jumping into the conversation.

“Yes. It was my birthday wish. I wanted you and mama to fall in love so the three of us could live together.”

Rishelle stood in shocked silence as she observed how well Ford was interacting with his father-like he wasn’t the least bit upset by finding out the

news. Maybe she had been making too much of it. She should give Ford more credit than she did. He was a very intelligent little boy.

“Do you think we can give our son his other birthday wish?” Ben whispered in her ear as Ford watched them very closely like he didn’t want to miss one thing that was going on between them.

“Ben, I love you but I won’t move in with you unless you are ready to commit fully to me and our relationship. I can’t have Ford tossed back and forth between houses.”

Moving closer to her, Ben ran the back of his knuckles down the side of her cheek. She remembered him doing that a lot when the two of them had been dating. “I love you and my son with everything I have in me. I never thought I could love anyone as much as I do the two of you. I wasn’t expecting to find the love of my life the day I started working at that accounting firm, but I did. However, I made a foolish mistake and let you go. I’m not big on repeating past blunders. So, Rishelle Damian, will you forgive me and do me the biggest honor in the world and become my wife?”

Minutes ticked by as Rishelle thought over Ben’s proposal. She already had a response, but she wanted to see him sweat a lot more before she told him yes. Just as Rishelle was about to give Ben her answer, Katrina ran outside with the cordless phone in her hand. “Rishelle, you need to get to the hospital!”



“What’s wrong?” Rishelle and Ben asked in unison.

“Nicey went into labor. She’s having her baby early.”

“Oh God, I need to get to the hospital. Nicey isn’t due for another two and a half weeks. Mama, can you take Ford back to your house for the night? I don’t know what time I will get back from the hospital.”

“Sweetheart, you don’t even have to ask. I’ll pack him an overnight bag and he can stay with me. Please let me know what happens, but I don’t want you driving to the hospital alone,” Katrina retorted.

“Rishelle won’t be alone. I’m going to drive her to the hospital,” Ben cut in. “She will be in good hands, but we better get to the hospital. I know that Spencer is going crazy with worry about Nicey and the baby.”

“Okay. Ford, listen to your grand mama and don’t give her any trouble. I’ll be at her house to get you in the morning,” Rishelle said before Ben grabbed her by the hand and pulled her to his car.



“Have you ever seen such a beautiful baby?” Rishelle asked Ben as he unlocked the front door to his house. “I swear Spencer acted like he wasn’t ever going to let me hold my godson. I can tell he’s a happy father. And did you see how good Nicey looked after just giving birth? Lord, I hate her.”

“I bet I know of a baby that will be even better looking,” Ben said, as he shut the door.

“Oh, you do?”

“Yes ours.” Ben pulled Rishelle into his arms and held on to her like he never wanted to let her go. “We already have one handsome little boy and I think it’s time for him to have a little brother or sister. I know you don’t believe I’m ready to take another walk down the aisle, but I am. I love you so much and I think you are just the woman to help me settle down into the family life.”

“Ben, I believe you when you tell me you want to get married again.”

“I have something to make you believe me even more. Wait right here.” Before moving away, Ben kissed her and then walked away from her.

“Are you going to tell me what it is?”

“No... you are going to have to wait and find out. I swear you will love it.”

Rishelle wondered what Ben was up to now. He wasn’t aware that she noticed how he looked at her at the hospital when she holding Nicey and Spencer’s baby. He had such a longing in his eyes like he was thinking about the time he had missed with Ford.

“I wonder what he’s up to,” Rishelle said to herself as she wandered around Ben’s living room. She noticed several awards hung on one wall, the door and a few other items placed around the area that involved his work, but there weren’t a lot

of personal knick-knacks or anything to make this place seem like it was lived in. Where were the pictures of his siblings or parents? It was so sparse in here that it could be used in a showroom as a layout for rentals.

Back at her house the place was filled with pictures of Ford, her mother and Nicey with Spencer. She hated that Ben had none of those comforting things here with him. Well, it wouldn't be this way much longer. She would have copies made of all of Ford's pictures, so Ben could add them all around the house and maybe she would throw in a couple of hers for fun. Why wouldn't she do something like that for the man she loved?

Rishelle turned back around when she heard Ben coming back into the room. She noticed that his hands were behind his back. Her curiosity was peaked more than she cared to admit. What was he up to now?

"Why are your hands behind your back?" she asked going up to him.

"Why don't you have a seat on the couch so you can find out?"

She was dying to know what was going on, so Rishelle sat down like Ben asked her to. God, she loved getting presents! It was even more exciting because she wasn't prepared for Ben to give her anything. Ben came over to her and stopped a few inches in front of her. Rishelle noticed the seriousness on his face and was very intrigued by what he was up to.

“Rishelle...From the moment I saw you and your beautiful eyes connected with mine; your captivating smile made my heart skip a beat. I knew you were the only woman for me. We were strangers when we spoke to each other, but after the first word left your mouth. I knew you were the one for me.”

“In my mind, I started building a future for us, but something happened and years kept us apart, but you were constantly in my heart. A day never went by that I didn’t think about you. I dreamt about you lying next to me in bed or you having a place in my life just like any man in love would do.”

“Did you know the day I met you that my life was changed forever? I don’t know how you crept into my heart and I never cared because I loved you so much. I lost you once and my heart almost stopped beating, but fate was good to me and brought you back into my life.”

“I want you to know that you are my reason for getting up in the morning. I’m not the richest man in the world, but what I have is yours and our son’s. From this day on, I won’t stop telling you how much you have given me without even trying. You let everyone have so much from your heart and ask for nothing in return. I have never had the pleasure of knowing a woman like you before.”

“Will you do me the honor of always walking beside me? I *never* want you to walk a step behind or in front. Because I want you to know that anytime you reach out for help you will always find my hand waiting to catch yours.”

“Rishelle Damian, I know I have asked you this before, but I mean this with everything in my heart. Will you marry me?” Getting down on one knee, Ben removed his hand from his back and opened up a small velvet box displaying a six and a half carat diamond ring. “I was going to do this on Valentine’s Day, but I couldn’t wait that long. If you bless me with a yes...we could be married by then. All I need is your answer, baby.”

Rishelle could barely see the huge diamond for the tears pouring down her face. She never thought in a million years Ben could say something so beautiful to her. He had just shocked the hell out of her. He wanted to get married in a week! Could she do something so out of her character?

HELL YES-SHE COULD!!!

“Ben...yes, I will marry you,” Rishelle screamed as she got down on the floor. Ben’s grin went from ear to ear as he slid the ring on her finger. “Damn woman, you sure do know how to make a man sweat it out. I thought you might actually tell me no again.”

“What if I had?” Rishelle questioned as she wrapped her arms around his neck. “What would you have done about it?”

“Oh...I had another plan up my sleeve and I hate to brag, but it was good if I have to say so myself.”

“Tell me what it was.”

“No, I don’t think so.” Ben said shaking his head. He got up off the floor, picked her up in his arms and then carried her toward his bedroom. “I have a way better idea of what we should do to celebrate our engagement. It involves you, me and what’s behind the door at the end of the hallway.”

“Do you think I will enjoy that surprise as much as the one a few minutes ago?” Rishelle teased.

“I’m pretty confident in saying yes, you will,” Ben promised right before he carried her through his bedroom door.

As Ben laid Rishelle down on the bed, he couldn’t get over how much his life had changed in a matter of weeks. He had gone from a bachelor envious of the extraordinary family life that his best friend Spencer was living to finding the love of his life again and learning that he was a man worthy of someone’s love.

He had dreamt about this for so many years and he always thought it would just be a fantasy that would never come true, but he got more than he could have ever wished for. He was in love and his love was returned by a woman who knew all of his flaws and loved him regardless. Ben secretly sent up a promise to spend every day being a good father, lover and most importantly the best husband he could to Rishelle because she didn’t deserve anything less.

## Epilogue

### *Valentine's Day*

*One week later*

Sitting outside on the chaise underneath the covered patio, Rishelle watched as Ford ran around the backyard with the golden retriever puppy that Ben got for him three days ago. He didn't go anywhere without Hoodie and she had to admit the two of them looked so cute together.

"See, I told you that the puppy wouldn't be too much for him," her husband said, as he slid behind her in the chair. He pulled her back against his chest and rested his hands on her stomach. "I think it's good for him to have some responsibility."

"Stop trying to sell the puppy to me. You know I fell in love with him the second Ford carried him inside the house. Now, I wasn't too happy to find him with my Jimmy Choo shoe twenty minutes later, but I survived."

"You're a good mother," Ben breathed by her ear. "I think you would be an even better mother to about four more kids. Ford really does need a sibling. We shouldn't let him get too spoiled."

Turning her head, Rishelle peeked at her husband from the corner of her eye. “No. I don’t think we need five kids. Besides, I’m not the one giving him everything he wants. Did he really need to go for a ride in the police car yesterday? What if something had happened to him?”

“Oh, Ford was fine. He loved that he got to turn on the siren,” Ben laughed. “Everyone at the station gave him something to bring home for his policeman collection.”

“I know. He showed me the stationery your boss gave him. I think he liked those four sheets of paper the best,” Rishelle admitted.

“Are you sure I can’t talk you into some baby making tonight?” Ben whispered in her ear changing the subject. “See...I came into possession of a new set of handcuffs I want to try out to make sure they are working properly.”

“Do I look like the type of wife that would like playing with handcuffs on Valentine’s Day?” A slow smile spread across Rishelle’s face because she could already guess her handsome husband’s answer.

“Yes, you do, especially if I let you use them on me first,” Ben grinned and then winked at her.

*The End*



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### Author Bio:

*The Queen of Tease:* If you want to read interracial romance stories that leaves you panting for more and turning the pages faster than you can read them. Marie is for you.

After reading her first “dirty” book as a teenager, Marie knew she had to become a writer. She started writing a few years ago because she wanted to reach for her dream. She writes her characters so her fans will believe in the Happily Ever After. She loves collecting bear figurines and reading a HOT book when she gets the chance.

You can find out more information about her and her work at the following places:

- Official Site: <http://www.freewebs.com/irwriter/>
- Official Blog: <http://shopdiva28.blogspot.com/>
- Official Yahoo Loop: [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/marie\\_rochelle/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/marie_rochelle/)
- Official Yahoo Discussion Loop:  
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### Awards

- Best Selling Author
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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 bestselling 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](mailto:marierochelle2@yahoo.com) or visit her website @ [www.freewebs.com/irwriter/](http://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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