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Special Delivery 3



Grayson

Marie Rochelle

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By

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ISBN: 978-1-4543-0013-7

Cover Artist: Shirley Burnett

Editor: Pam

Line Editor: Red Rose™ Publishing

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Prologue

Grayson Rane strolled around his office staring at the boxes piled against the wall by the door. He had tried for over a year to save his failing computer programming business. But after a while, he had to stop putting himself first and start focusing his attention on his employees.

They deserved a chance to leave with their benefits and the ability to find a new job. So, after reflecting about it for a couple of days, he decided to take Director Enterprises offer and he sold his seven year old business. Preston Scott and Stamford King had offered him a good price for it and he would have been an idiot not to take it.

However, it was still a lot less than he thought Rane Technology was worth in his mind. He was used to making three times that amount in a year with his corporation. Yet, with the way the economy was going he did good getting the price Director Enterprises had offered him.

“Mr. Rane, are you going to be okay?”

Glancing over his shoulder, Grayson spotted his secretary Trina Weaver behind him looking very professional in her black suit and matching shoes. Trina

had been with him from day one through the good and bad times.

Grayson couldn't have asked for a better or more loyal employee than Trina. One thing was for sure, he was going to miss her a lot; however, he was thrilled Trina was able to land another job with his letter of recommendation.

A job back in her hometown had opened up and she landed it on her first interview. Trina had been homesick for some time, so it was a good thing she was headed back home to her friends and family.

"Yes, Trina, I'm going to be fine," Grayson replied touched by his secretary's concern. "It's hard for me to believe this is the last time I'll be in this office. After working so hard to make my own business what it was for years. Now I'm going to be working for someone else again."

"I don't know if I'll be able to be an employee and not the employer," Grayson confessed.

"I have heard nothing but positive things about Mr. Scott and Mr. King," Trina said. "I know that it isn't going to be as bad as you think. Aren't you going to be the boss of your own department?"

He loved how Trina always tried to see the positive side of everything even in the worst situations. Her upbeat personality is one of the reasons she landed the job as his secretary over the more experienced applicants who had applied.

"Yes, that was part of the deal in the contract I signed, but you know how a

person can say one thing and then do another.” Grayson wasn’t sure if he believed everything Preston and Stamford was telling him, but he would find out the truth once he got there.

“I honestly don’t think this will be one of those situations,” Trina assured him. “I bet something good is going to happen to you once you get to your new job. Something you will probably never see coming.”

Spinning around completely, Grayson faced Trina and couldn’t help but smile at her. He was really going to miss talking with her and working late on new projects. She loved seeing how things came together at Rane Technology as much as he did...truthfully, he thought she might love it just a tad bit more than him, but he wasn’t bothered by it at all. Trina came up with some kickass ideas over the years which was why she got the paycheck she had.

Despite what his secretary was telling him, it was going to take him a long time to get used to his new position in life.

Trina was trying to be encouraging and he loved her for it, yet it still was going to be a huge adjustment for him. He was used to being the one giving the orders not taking them.

As much as Grayson hated leaving Boston and his job, he wasn’t going to start his new job with a negative attitude. Life was always changing and this was a change he was going to have to accept and deal with. His old life was over and he

should come to terms with it and move on with his future.

“I’m going to try my best to believe you. I need to take some of your positively with me to Director Enterprises. I’ll try my best not to worry about my new position,” Grayson said, hoping that he would be able to keep his word.

“Finally,” Trina sighed at him. “Now do you need me to help you with some of these boxes?” she asked pointing to the roll of them against the wall he was looking at earlier before she came into the room. “I can get someone from maintenance to help carry them to your car.”

“No, you go ahead and leave,” Grayson answered thinking how sweet it was of Trina to offer her help and technically she no longer worked for him.

“Enjoy your last night in town with your friends. Stop worrying about me so much. I swear I’m going to be fine,” Grayson promised as he came towards Trina. “You worry about me way too much. I ‘m older than you and I should be the one worrying about you.”

“I can’t help it,” Trina complained, tossing her hands up in the air. “We have worked together for seven years. You are part of my family. I have a right to be concerned about you. I know how you worry about things too much or overanalyze a situation when you shouldn’t. I want you to learn how to live in the moment more at your new job.”

“I know you think of me as a big brother and I love that, but please go ahead

and leave.” Grayson placed his hand on Trina’s shoulder and gave it a small squeeze. “I only have a few more personal items to pack up and then I’m out of here. I’m coming back this weekend with some buddies and they are going to help me finish clearing out my office.”

“It belongs to Director Enterprises now. I would love to know what they are going to do with it, but I can’t ask and I doubt they would tell me if I do.”

“Can I at least get a goodbye hug?” Trina asked. “I won’t get to see you anymore after this. My plane leaves at eight o’clock and you know I have to be at the airport early.”

Pulling Trina into his arms, Grayson gave her a long hug. She reminded him so much of his little sister. Both of them knew how to speak their minds and didn’t care if you wanted their opinions or not, they gave it to you anyway and expected you to take it.

“Come on. Let me walk you to your car,” he said ending the embrace. “I can come back and finish packing up the last of my stuff later.”

Trina shook her head. “You don’t have to do that. I can make it to my car just fine by myself.”

“I know, but I’m going to do it anyway. You know better than to argue with me when my mind is made up. Now let’s go and you can tell me about this new boyfriend. You know it’s a good thing you’re leaving because if you weren’t. I

would be finding out all I could about this guy making sure he was good enough for you.”

“Thad is a wonderful guy. He makes me feel like I’m the only woman for him,” Trina told him.

“He better,” Grayson said. Placing his hand in the middle of Trina’s back, he escorted her from his office for the very last time.

Chapter One

Grabbing an arm load full of clothes out of the dryer, Kendra Winstead carried them over to an oval table in the middle of the room. She hated doing laundry this late at night, but the session with her last patient ran a little longer than she had hoped it would. The only bad thing about doing her clothes was that the washer and dryer were located in the basement of her building.

She had been working like a dog for the past week. She already had a full case load, but after hearing about a five year old that had gotten attacked she couldn't turn the case down. Tonight was her first session with the child and it had gone horribly.

The little girl was withdrawn and unresponsive. She was court ordered for only thirty minutes sessions with her and tonight's was used to assure her that she was safe and no one would hurt her. However, Emma wasn't at a place to believe her. It broke her heart to see the lifelessness in the child's eyes.

This new case sent to her was difficult for her to deal with because of the age of the child. Adults and their problems were pretty cut and dry, but anytime she got a case that involved a child it made it even harder because she got so

emotionally involved.

Kendra only hoped that she would be able to break through Emma's walls sooner rather than later. There was a lot going on in that child's head and she wanted to reach her more than anything in the world. She still wasn't telling who had hurt her and if she didn't get it out in the open. It would be something that could haunt her forever.

Okay, she was home now which meant work was over. This was her personal time now and it was time for her to relax. She had to focus on getting those clothes folded and then get back upstairs. There was a piece of chocolate cake calling her name and calories be damned. She was going to enjoy every single delicious bite of it. Kendra picked up a purple towel from the pile of clothes and started folding it.

Kendra was halfway through her pile of clothing when she noticed a pair of her underwear was missing. She only had the bra in front of her but the matching underwear were nowhere in sight.

She knew that she had brought them downstairs with her because they were the last thing she grabbed off her bed before she made the trip down to the basement.

God, did she lose them in the elevator on the trip here? Where they still in the washing machine or did she lose them in the dryer? Just as Kendra was about

to turn around she heard someone ask behind her.

“Excuse, do these belong to you?”

Pivoting, Kendra eyes widened at the hunk standing behind her. She usually wasn't the type of woman to get blown away or weak in the knees by a handsome man. But the guy who was holding up her missing red underwear with his index finger was going to make her change her mind.

Slowly, her eyes ran the length of his body. He looked to be above average height maybe around six feet three inches or at least six feet four at the most, but not any taller. A perfectly sculptured face with dark brown hair that looked blacker than brown and a pair of sienna colored eyes that seemed to be looking right into her soul. He truly had to be the sexiest Native American man she had ever laid eyes on.

“Yes, they are mine.” Walking up to the hunk, Kendra grabbed the underwear from the guy. Who in the world was he? Was he a new neighbor that she didn't know about? Why haven't she seen him before now?

“Where did you find them?”

“They were over there in front of the dryer,’ he said pointing over by the dryer she had used earlier. “Oh, by the way, my name is Grayson Rane. I just finished moving in and decided to do a quick load of laundry.”

“Did you move into 311?” Kendra asked as it dawned on her this guy might

have moved into the condo across from hers. She knew that an engaged couple had lived there and were planning on finding a house since they were expecting a baby in a couple of months.

“I didn’t know that the Sharps had moved out already,” Kendra stated staring into the dark eyes of the man watching her.

“How did you know the Sharps?” Grayson asked.

“Oh, I ‘m sorry,” Kendra said. “I should have introduced myself. My name is Kendra Winstead. I live across from them....or should I say you now.”

“Nice to meet you Kendra I’m glad to at least know someone now. It’s always so hard to introduce myself to new people especially neighbors.”

“I totally agree, Grayson.” Kendra knew that she to be getting back upstairs, but she was so taken with Grayson. The other single female tenants were going to trip over their feet when they found out that he was living here. He was *hot* in every since of the word.

Lord, she would be right behind them if she was looking for a relationship with an almost seemingly perfect looking man, but she wasn’t. So, she better snatch up her laundry along with her dirty underwear and take her butt back upstairs.

“It was nice to meet you Grayson and welcome to Twin Oaks.” She gave her new neighbor a quick smile and then hurried back over to the table where she had

been folding her laundry. She tossed the underwear on the top, picked up her basket and headed in the direction of the door.

“I enjoyed talking to you, Kendra. I hope we’ll be able to do it again,” Grayson said in that rich voice she was really beginning to like way too much.

“Who knows maybe we will.” Kendra continued on out the door without peeking back over her shoulder at Grayson, but she felt his eyes watching her.

Chapter Two

“What do you mean they cancelled their appointment for today?” Kendra asked as she strolled out of her office looking gorgeous in a black pencil skirt and long sleeved pin-striped top. “I’m supposed to see Emma three times a week per the court order. What is wrong with those people? Do you know why they aren’t coming?”

“Her father called and left a message that Emma was sick with a high temperature,” Mary Jane, her assistant told her as she looked away from her computer monitor. “I saw Emma when she was here yesterday and she looked the picture of health to me. She did look a little sad and withdrawn, but she didn’t look like she was sick with a cold or the flu.”

“We both know that Emma isn’t sick, her parents are probably telling her what to tell me and what not to say. I swear they need to let her open up to me. I’m not going to be able to get what I want out of her locked mind.”

“Emma is holding on to something and I need to free her of it. All I know is that she was abused or attacked in some form or way, but she won’t tell anyone who did it to her.”

“She shouldn’t have all of that hidden away.” Kendra didn’t like the fact Emma’s parents were playing with her like this. As bad as she wanted to see the little girl she didn’t want the child to be frighten in anyway, shape or form. So, she would just wait to see if Emma would show up her next appointment.

“Emma will be back. I know that her parents can’t be that unfeeling when it comes to their child. They are going to want her to get better so they will be back. I have a good feeling that they will do what is right.”

“Most parents don’t like other people especially professional people butting into their problems. Hopefully, Emma’s parents will get over it and bring her back here for you to see,” Mary Jane pointed out trying to be encouraging.

“I hope that you’re right because I would hate not to see Emma,” Kendra said. “Okay, I have been talking about myself and this job non stop. How did your date go last night?”

“Don’t ask,” Mary Jane sighed rolling her eyes. “I should have known that a man couldn’t have a killer body and brains to go along with it. I’m never going to date a guy I met while running through the park.”

Kendra knew that Mary Jane was looking for Mr. Right, but her friend had to stop dating every Tom, Dick and whatever his name might be that smiled in her direction longer than five minutes. She wasn’t going to find a good guy at the places she was looking.

“I told you a guy named Romeo wasn’t going to be good for you,” Kendra laughed. She still couldn’t believe a grown man would call himself that and not be embarrassed by it.

“I found out last night that Romeo wasn’t exactly what his name led me to believe his was.” The disgust was plain and clear in Mary Jane’s soft voice.

“Oh, what happened?” Kendra rested her hip against her assistant’s desk and waited for her to continue with her story.

She thought she had bad luck when it came to relationships and men; however, Mary Jane’s love life was truly ten times worse and that even included the good guys she had tried so hard to date, but turned out to be bad boys in disguise. Hopefully, one day Mary Jane would be able to pick out the bad apples from the good ones.

“First off, his name isn’t Romeo but Stanley and to make matters worse he doesn’t have a car, so I had to pick him up.”

“I wouldn’t say those are the best qualities in a guy. He shouldn’t have lied about his name or having a car.” Kendra was trying to make the best out of a bad situation. If she remembered correctly, Mary Jane had dated worst guys than this. So, what was the big juicy secret Mary Jane was keeping from her?

“Thanks for trying to be nice, but you know that isn’t right and it only gets better,” Mary Jane complained, leaning back in her seat. “Wait for it... Romeo still

lives at home with his mother in the basement. He tried talking me into going back to his mother's place for a little extra loving. Can you believe the nerve of him?"

"Lord. I couldn't get away from him fast enough. I've dated a lot of losers, but this is the first time I've gone out on a date with a grown man who was still living at home with a parent."

"You have to be kidding me," Kendra exclaimed, trying not to laugh. "He really wanted you to go back to his mom's house and have sex with him? Whew, I'm glad that I'm done with dating for a while. I would hate to run into someone like that. I might not have been as nice as you were."

"All I have time for right now is work and more work."

After the words left Kendra's mouth a pair of dark eyes and a killer smile flashed before her face. She had looked for her handsome neighbor this morning when she left for work, but she didn't see him. Surprising, she was actually a little disappointed. Grayson Rane was a very appealing man. She wouldn't mind sharing a cup of coffee with him sometimes.

"Kendra, okay...what has put that look on your face?" Mary Jane tapped her on the knee with her finger before waving it underneath her nose. "I haven't seen that look on your face since David."

Getting off the desk, Kendra pulled her skirt down and fixed the sleeve of her shirt. She hadn't thought about that two timing bastard in over four years

maybe a little longer. She wasn't going back down that path not even if someone paid her to do it. She thought he was the one and he turned out to be the worst thing that had ever happened to her.

He actually tried to blame his cheating on her. He told her that she spent too much time worry about strangers instead of trying to fix their failing relationship. David was actually the one that caused things to fail between them because of his insecurities.

"It's nothing really," she hedged, trying to avoid the conversation all together. Why would she bring up a man she only meet once and for less than five minute? Grayson Rane wasn't worth mentioning to Mary Jane.

Yeah...keep believing that lie, her mind mocked.

"Don't try that with me. I have known you too long for that. What is up with you?" Mary Jane's eyebrows shot up to her hairline as she leaned across the desk.

"You met a guy, didn't you?" she grinned. "Tell me about him. Where does he rank on the hotness scale?"

"I haven't met a guy and besides you are too old to be still using the hotness scale. We aren't in college anymore. Hell, we haven't been in college for years."

Mary Jane fell back in her seat making it move some under her weight.

"Why are you trying to lie? I know you like the back of my hand that is why we get

along so well. So, you better spill it now before Mr. Kent shows up for his appointment. You know how cranky you get after dealing with him.”

“I don’t get bad-tempered after dealing with any of my patients. I treat all of them with the same respect and kindness.” Kendra knew she did her job in an outstanding manner and Mary Jane couldn’t say that she didn’t.

“Kendra, you know what I mean about him. He thinks that you are his girlfriend since the day he laid eyes on you,” Mary Jane retorted. “Now, let’s shove Mr. Kent to the side until he shows up. Tell me more about this new man that you’re interested in, but trying to deny that you aren’t. You should know better than that and especially being a psychologist.”

“Grayson Rane,” Kendra blurted out the name before she knew what was happening. Damn! Mary Jane wasn’t going to let this go until she answered her.

“Damn, is that his name? Is he as sexy as his name sounds? I would love to meet the man behind a name like that. You are always so lucky running into the hottest guys and then you never go out on a date with them when they ask you out.”

Kendra was about tell Mary Jane that her opinion wasn’t true when the door to her office swung open and in walked Peter Kent looking like he was ready for a board meeting instead of a weekly appointment with his shrink.

He was wearing his usual three hundred dollar suit, equally expensive tie

and handmade alligator shoes. One time Mary Jane told her that Peter reminded her of Antonio Sabato, Jr. and she was right. He did have a certain air about him.

It was such a shame that one characteristic is what made most of the women he tried to date not want to go out with him. Peter's inability not to accept the word no from a woman didn't help him out either when it came to the opposite sex.

"How is the most beautiful doctor in the world doing today?" Peter asked as he moved his hand from behind his back displaying a boutique of gorgeous wild flowers.

"Mr. Kent, didn't I tell you that you couldn't bring me flowers anymore to our sessions? It's very unprofessional."

"No, you told me not to bring you roses anymore, so I brought you these wildflowers instead. The woman at the flower shop said that they should make you fall in love with me." Peter held the flowers in front of her until she finally took them away from him.

"Mary Jane will you please find a vase for these and place them on the table by the front entrance so everyone can enjoy them."

Standing up, Mary Jane took the flowers from Peter and then looked in her direction. "I think a vase is in the storage room. I'll go and get it." Her assistant gave her another searching look and then moved away from her desk heading for

the storage closet.

“Thank you so much, Mary Jane,” Kendra said before giving her attention back to Peter who was watching her with an intense look. “Why don’t we head to my office? We can start this session where we ended the last one.”

Turning around, she went back in the direction of her office, going inside Kendra waited for Peter was seated before she started to close the door. She had to make sure that he was comfortable or he wouldn’t open up to her.

“Kendra, wait a minute,” Mary Jane called out to her.

“What is it?”

“Don’t close it all the way. I want to hear what going on in there just in case you might need some help.” Mary Jane placed the vase on the table and then took a seat behind her desk. “You might need my help.”

Kendra nodded at Mary Jane and the left the door cracked part way. Peter had never been a threat to her, but it was better to be safe than sorry. Moving away from the door, Kendra picked up her notepad off the side of her desk and then took a seat across from Peter.

“Mr. Kent, how about you tell me how the meeting went with your parents last week?” Kendra asked as she started her appointment with her first patient of the day.

Chapter Three

“How is your first day going? I hope that my husband isn’t driving you crazy and it’s not even lunch time yet. He’s a wonderful man, but he can be a bit of a perfectionist when it comes to Director Enterprises.”

Moving away from the window, Grayson looked at the attractive young African American woman standing in the middle of his new office. He was pretty sure he knew who she was despite the fact that he had only met her once.

“Good morning, Ms. King. How are you doing this morning?” Grayson asked as he took a seat behind his desk.

“I’m doing well, but you didn’t answer my question,” Syeshia pointed out as she took a seat in front of him. “Were you thinking about your great escape already? I noticed how you were looking out the window? If you don’t jump, I can promise you that things will get better at Director Enterprises.”

He couldn’t help but smile at Stamford’s wife. Syeshia’s sense of humor was very cute. It was a quality that he liked and enjoyed in a woman. “No, I was just waiting for a meeting with your husband and Preston. I think they will be here pretty soon.”

“Oh, the orientation,” Syeshia said. “I forget about how they do those together now for the upper level staff members. Are you nervous? The two of them can be very intimidating when they team up.”

“I’m fine with it. I’ve been getting along with Preston and Stamford just fine. I know we are going to have a wonderful working relationship.”

“That’s great. I’m glad to have you as part of our family,” Syeshia said and then smiled at him.

Grayson wasn’t about to confess to his boss’ wife how unhappy he still was with his lack of position with his new job. He was trying his best to be positive, but it was really hard for him to go from boss to employee in a matter of days, but he had to get use to it or he would be without a job.

A man’s pride was a hard thing to swallow, but he could do it.

“I’m glad to be here too. I’m optimistic that I’ll feel right at home after a while,” Grayson replied secretly wondering would that ever happen.

“I know you will. Everyone who works here is family from the moment they walk through the front door,” Syeshia assured him.

Grayson didn’t say a word to dispute what Syeshia told him. He only smiled at Syeshia because he didn’t want to hurt her feelings. Because she came across like a very nice woman, it wouldn’t be right of him to put her on the spot like that.

“Syeshia, are you in here giving Grayson your welcome to Director

Enterprise's speech?" A voice interrupted. "I thought you had already left for your doctor's appointment until I heard your voice as I was walking towards Grayson's office," Stamford said walking into his office.

Grayson watched as Syeshia got out of her seat and gave her husband a kiss on the cheek. It was amazing to see the total change in Stamford's whole demeanor at his wife's romantic gesture. He secretly wondered would he ever experience that kind of deep love for anyone.

"Stamford, I was enjoying your wife's company. She's a very sweet woman. You're lucky to have someone like her in your life. I know it makes me upset at my single status."

Stamford shook his head. "I see Syeshia has already fooled you with that cute smile of hers," he laughed then kissed his wife on the temple. "She can be very tough when the time calls for it."

"Stamford, you aren't supposed to tell all of my secrets," Syeshia scolded patting her husband lovingly on the chest. "I think I better go to the doctor and see how our little guy is doing."

Grayson saw the undeniable love between the couple in front of him and he shoved down the loneliness he usually got when he saw two people in love. It was something he had been wanting for a while, but never had been ever to achieve.

"Do you want me to go with you?" Stamford asked.

“No, it’s just a regular check-up for the baby. There’s no need for you to go, but can you pick up dinner?”

“I think I can handle that. I’ll stop at the new Southern place you like so much. I’ll even get some breadstick for you. I know how much you love them.”

“I knew I married you for a reason,” Syeshia said before glancing away from Stamford back over at him. “It was nice talking to you again, Grayson.”

“I enjoyed our conversation too,” Grayson replied. “Have a good doctor’s appointment.”

“Thank you.” Syeshia kissed Stamford one last time before she left his office shutting the door behind her.

“You really do have a lovely wife,” Grayson complimented.

“Syeshia is my world. I don’t know what I would do without her in my life.” Stamford sat down in the seat his wife just occupied and crossed his legs.

“Preston is going to be a few minutes late. He’s at home spending a little more time with his son since he has to work late tonight. Have you ever been married? Do you have any children?”

“No to both questions. I guess I haven’t found the right woman yet. I think I’m too much of a work alcoholic.”

Stamford nodded his head. “I used to be that away. I thought about work seven days a week until Syeshia came into my life and then after our first meeting.

My entire outlook on life changed and then all I wanted to do was make her a part of my life which made work take a back seat to everything.”

“I swear when the right woman comes along she can do that to you. Before you know it you will be thinking of different ways to propose to her. Mark my words.”

“The woman you are supposed to be with is probably right around the corner or right in front of your face and you don’t even know it,” Stamford told him.

Grayson thought back to his meeting with Kendra in the laundry room down in the basement. When he first walked inside and spotted her standing there folding up her clothes he had been momentarily speechless. She was truly breathtaking with her medium-mocha skin and thick black hair pulled back into a thick bun at the nape of her neck.

He had wanted to make his presence known sooner, but he couldn’t stop staring at her. To him it was like they were in their own private world where no one else could bother them. But undoubtedly, if she caught him watching her it would have come off as a little creepy.

As he was about to make his presence known when he noticed her searching through her clothing for something and that is when he glanced around and spotted her sexy underwear lying on the floor.

He quickly made his way over to them and snatched them up. He had been looking for an ice breaker and was lucky enough to get one handed to him without much work on his part.

Kendra was a good-looking woman and he wished he could have talked to her longer. However, after she grabbed her underwear away from him. She made a mad dash for the door leaving him down there alone wondering would he get to see her again.

For the past couple of weeks, he only went to work, came back home and worked well into the morning. Now, the first woman to grab his attention probably was taken.

Great! His luck was just going from bad to worst. Because there was no way Kendra wasn't already in a committed relationship because she was too amazing not to be in one.

"I guess you don't need to hear my speech because from the look on your face. You have already found your dream woman," Stamford commented cutting into his thoughts.

"No, I haven't found anyone," Grayson corrected quickly embarrassed to have been caught daydreaming about his pretty neighbor and someone that he barely knew. Kendra probably had forgotten all about him and it was for the best if he did the same thing.

“You say that, but I don’t believe you. I know the look very well. A woman has gotten your attention. I say you should go for it. You never know what might happen unless you try.”

Grayson didn’t want to be rude but he felt a little strange discussing a woman that he barely knew with his new boss. He wasn’t the type of person to let everyone know what was going on in his personal life.

“I’ll remember your advice,” he said giving some kind of answer so there wouldn’t be any kind of awkward silence between him and Stamford.

Leaning back in his chair, Stamford grinned at him. “Sorry about all of the relationship advice. I guess I want everyone to be as happy as I am since I have found the love of my life.”

“However, I promise not to get personally involved with your business outside of the workplace. Well, not at least until you have been working here for at least six months. Does that sound good to you?”

Grayson hated to admit it, but he liked Stamford’s dry sense of humor. It reminded him of his younger brother Braxton. “Sounds good,” he replied wondering what other surprises awaited him at Director Enterprises before the day was over.

“Good, now let’s get started and what we don’t finish my partner Preston can go over with you.”

Grabbing a pad and pencil from the side of his desk, Grayson got move comfortable behind his desk and tried not to show his true feelings about being an employee again instead of a boss like he was at his former job.

‘I’m ready to begin whenever you are.’

Chapter Four

Kendra tried not to think about the long day she had at work today as she dragged her worn-out body onto the elevator. She really needed to stop working sixteen hours day, but her patients depended on her and she wasn't about to disappoint them.

Most of them had no one else to talk to about their problems but a professional. She wouldn't know what she would do if she turned one of them away and something happened because of it.

Right now, Emma was the biggest case she had on her appointment book. As much as she tried she couldn't get the little girl to open up about what was going on inside of her head. She knew that Emma had experienced something horrible and was keeping it all bottled up inside her tiny body.

Relaxing against the wall of the elevator, Kendra wondered how in the world she would get through to Emma and gain her trust. She might be getting more done if Emma's parents cared more about her, but both of them acted like there was nothing in the world wrong with their little girl.

She wondered why they were trying to deny Emma got attacked. It was

something more going on with them than they were letting on. She was amazed that the court system had even placed Emma back in the home, but if Emma wouldn't tell the doctors or anyone else what happened. The court had no reason not to send her back home to her uncaring parents.

No, she was positive with everything in her that Emma had went through or seen something very traumatic for a little girl as young as her. All she had to do was find out what it was and everything else should move in the right direction of her breaking through Emma's shell.

God only knew what else might come out of Emma's young mind once she opened up the flood gates. Children that young had a way of holding things inside because they didn't want to disappoint their parents or loved ones. She had to make Emma understand she could confide in her about anything.

No matter how bad it might be.

The elevator beeped signaling that she was finally at her floor and the doors opened. Kendra stepped out of the elevator making her way towards her condo. She paused for a minute in front of her new neighbor's door. She had been extremely busy at work today with her steady flow of clients, but Grayson Rane had occupied a small portion of her mind against her better judgment.

How could she not think about her attractive new neighbor? He was so good-looking with his dark hair and rich brown eyes that he would make any

intelligent woman lose her train of thought.

Sighing, Kendra took one last look at the closed door wondering what woman was lucky enough to call Grayson her boyfriend.

Hmmm...if she had any free time to date a handsome, well-spoken man it definitely would be Grayson, but it was a shame that she barely got eight hours of sleep at night and she hadn't run into Grayson again since their meeting in the laundry room two days ago.

Moving away from Grayson's condo door, Kendra went to her own door and unlocked it then went inside closing and locking it behind her. Sure, she lived in a secured building but a woman could never be too safe with her life.

Kendra kicked off her shoes moaning softly when her swollen and achy feet got lost in the plush carpet she had placed inside her condo six months ago. Yeah, coming home should feel this good every night.

But some days she hardly made it out of her shoes before her body hit the couch and her eyelids closed. Yet, tonight she would rank around a six instead of her usually nine which meant she wouldn't be too exhausted to cook a decent meal for herself.

However, today she made a conscience decision to cut her work load down so she could leave work earlier than usual and unwind. Before leaving this morning, she removed a steak from the deep freezer and placed it in the

refrigerator so it could be defrosted by the time she got home.

Just the thought of a grilled steak, baked potato with everything and a chef salad had her mouth watering for a taste. Her dream meal was going to have to wait for at least thirty minutes while she took a quick shower and changed into her favorite pajamas then she could start cooking.

God, she might even try to read a few pages of the new romance book she brought last week at Books-A-Million instead of allowing it to collect dust on her nightstand.

Walking away from the front door, Kendra noticed a message flashing on her answering machine and went over to see who it was. She pushed the red button at the bottom of the machine.

“Hello, sweetheart,” the female voice said. “It’s only your mom calling to check on you. I thought you were going to cut back on some of those long hours you seem to love working so much. Well, I’m going to give you a chance to do it.”

“I’m having a dinner party in two weeks and I expect you to attend. Don’t think about backing out on me like you have done the last three times I invited you. My friends don’t remember the last time they have laid eyes on my stunning daughter.”

“Also, don’t forget to bring a date. Wipe that look off your face. You know the look I’m talking about. I’m pretty sure there is some young man out there ready

to date a successful and attractive doctor.”

“Okay, I better go. I hear my cake timer going off. I’m baking a carrot cake for the church to raffle off tomorrow. Kendra, I love you and don’t forget about the dinner party the Friday after next at seven o’clock.” The phone call ended with a click.

Smiling, Kendra shook her head at her overprotective, nosy but loving mother who spent most of her free time cooking for the church. Or throwing parties for her friends and family and squeezing in being a part-time matchmaker for her daughter’s love life which wasn’t really necessary.

“I’ll call her tomorrow to back out of the dinner,” Kendra said to herself as she made her way towards her bedroom. Her work load was overflowing and she wouldn’t have any time for a break to visit with her mother and her friends because she already knew the questions they would ask her.

When are you going to get married? Don’t you want to have babies? Who are you dating? Don’t you think you should move back home to be closer to your mother and so on.

She was so used to the questions that the last time she visited her mother. She answered all of the questions before one person could ask her the first one.

Tonight was going to be all about her and no one else. In the past three months, she hadn’t left worked before seven o’clock. Turning in the direction of

her bedroom, Kendra started unbuttoning her jacket.

She was done thinking about work and her mother's dinner party. The only thought in her mind now was if she could find something good on television to watch while she ate her dinner.

Chapter Five

Grayson raised his hand for a second time to knock on Kendra's door and then dropped it again. What was wrong with him? He barely knew his neighbor but he was about to knock on her door and ask her one of the craziest questions in the world.

Maybe he should just go back over to his house and do his laundry tomorrow night. It wasn't like he didn't have other shirts inside of his closet to wear to work tomorrow. However, he was already wearing his last pair of clean underwear.

He didn't realize how much he missed having a housekeeper and regular staff until now. He never understood how much they did for him when he had his old job. Ms. Gracias would have his clothes done and placed back inside his closet or drawer ready for him.

Learning how to deal with his once successful business going under, along with a huge pay cut, lack of cleaning lady and losing his house along with the other perks he was used to having, was making him a little crazy.

Grayson hoped that Kendra would be able to help him because had to get all

of his clothing washed and done while it was still early and get back upstairs. He needed to finish up the small stack of paperwork he bought home from work for his early meeting again with Stamford and Preston.

Rane Technology never had as many meetings as Director Enterprises. After thinking about it, he usually called everyone in for a staff meeting about every two months. A lack of communication could be one of the reasons his corporation went under.

Yes, his business made money for the first five years, but it might have made more if he had kept his staff working as a well oiled machine like he noticed at Director Enterprises. Well, Rane Technology was a thing of the past and he wasn't going to get a second chance to go back and rectify his mistakes.

Now, wasn't the time to be thinking about Boston or his former life there. He lived here now and the sooner he got used to his new home. The easier his pain would get, but first things first. He still had a basket full of dirty clothes in his apartment and without Kendra's help he wouldn't be able to do them.

Grayson knocked on Kendra's door before he talked himself out of it again. He might have been worried for nothing. She might not even be home. She could still be at work or worse out on a date with her boyfriend.

For some odd reason, the latter didn't sit too well with him. But why should he be giving any thought to it, he hadn't known Kendra long enough to be jealous

of any male relationship she might had or have at the moment.

Just as the thought left Grayson's mind, the front door to Kendra's condo swung opened and his cock instantly got hard.

What did he do in a past life to get this lucky? Who did he send a thank you card to for this gift? Did Kendra always open the door looking this fucking good or was he one lucky bastard tonight?

The sleeveless ribbed t-shirt molded against her breasts like second skin and the tiny gray boy shorts showed off her toned shapely legs. Her hair was back in the familiar ponytail he had seen before, but the wire-rimmed glasses perched on her cute nose were something different but something he found extremely sexy.

"Hi, Grayson." Kendra smiled, showing off a dimple in her right cheek. "How can I help you?"

Oh, I know how you can help me. Flashes of the two of them naked on a bed appeared suddenly in Grayson's head before he shook it out.

Stop!

He wasn't here for hours of hot sex unless Kendra made the first move and then he would forget all about doing laundry and spend the night with her in a hot second. He wasn't the type of man to turn down a beautiful woman's request.

Grayson figured out pretty fast that his fantasy wasn't going to happen. At least not tonight, so he focused his wandering sexual thoughts away and

concentrated back on Kendra.

“I hate to bother you, but do you have change for a twenty? I need to do some laundry and I forgot to get change before I came home from work.”

Kendra’s smile grew even wider as she moved back and waved him inside. “I’m glad to know that I’m not the only one who forgets to do that. It seems like it would be something I would remember to do. Yet, like you for the longest time I forgot about it when I first moved in here; thankfully, I have gotten better.”

Grayson walked inside of Kendra’s condo and she closed the door behind him. She went around him, waved towards the couch and headed for the kitchen. “Please take a seat while I get your change.”

Inside of taking Kendra’s advice, Grayson took this time to check out her living space. It was so completely different from his in the way she had it decorated, but similar in some ways.

Two matching white couches were facing each other in the living room with three dark brown pillows positioned on them. One had two white daisies on them, the other pillow had more of a fifties circular design and then the last pillow only had one huge white flower instead of two. A tear drop shaped brown table was between them on top of a dark sienna rug that covered the floor.

Moving over to the other side of the room, he noticed the off white dining room table with winged back chairs. A vase of wild flowers was located directly in

the middle. A little further down was an open shelf with different colored glasses and dishes placed on them giving the space the color it truly was lacking.

He also noticed that Kendra's patio was exactly designed like his. The only difference between the two was but his was bare and hers was filled with adorable patio furniture along with a small grill.

Grayson couldn't help but smile. Kendra didn't look like the type of woman who would barbeque. He wondered what else she was keeping a secret.

"What are you smiling about?" Kendra asked coming back into the living room carrying a roll of coins and a box. "Here you go." She handed him the roll of quarters followed by a small yellow box of detergent.

"I only need the quarters. Let me give you the money." He started to reach into the front pocket of his slacks for the money, but Kendra hand reached out stopping his.

"Keep it. Consider them as a late welcome to Twin Oaks gift. I got the same two things when I moved in six years ago. Because you'll learn very soon that you can't ever have enough quarters or detergent for the washer and dryer."

Grayson was touched by Kendra's gesture towards him. He wasn't used to another person being so generous and not expecting anything in return. This really was a new experience for him.

"Thanks, this is very nice of you," he said, trying not to think how much he

wanted to kiss the bundle of sexiness in front of him. It was time for him to leave or he might act out what he was thinking and scare Kendra away from him.

“Would you like to stay and talk for a few minutes?” Kendra asked, surprising him.

God, he would love to take her up on her offer but he couldn't. He had to truly get these clothes done, read over some reports for tomorrow and finish up working on the list of things Preston and Stamford talked about today with him.

“I wish I could but I need to get my clothes done along with some work related stuff,” Grayson answered already kicking himself mentally for saying no to Kendra.

He instantly noticed how her smile slipped a little on Kendra's gorgeous face making him want to change his answer, but truthfully he knew that he couldn't.

“I understand about work maybe we can get together another time,” Kendra said, walking around him. “Let me escort you to the door. I don't want to keep you any longer than I have from doing your job. I know how it is to be overloaded with work.”

Grayson followed behind Kendra trying to think of something to lighten up the tension that had suddenly dropped into the room all of a sudden. Was he really out of his mind turning down the chance to spend time with a gorgeous,

intelligent woman?

No, he wasn't stupid at all. Work and the clothes could wait. He would think of a way to get everything done that he had to for work, so he was going to accept Kendra's invitation. Just as Grayson was about to inform Kendra about his change of mind, he noticed she already had the front door open.

Shit! He couldn't take it back now. Kendra was already for him to get out of her personal space. Well. He would go but he wasn't going to give up on getting another invitation out of her. Hell, he might even think of a way to get a dinner date with her.

However, now wasn't the time to try to stay and talk with Kendra about this misunderstanding. He would take a step back for tonight and regroup then think of a way to get to know her better.

"Kendra, thank you for the money and the extra detergent," Grayson said. "I hope we can find some free time to talk again." He stopped in the open doorway and looked down at her. Hoping he might get to see her beautiful smile again.

"Who knows?" She shrugged. "Maybe we'll meet again and next time I'll keep all of my clothing inside of my basket. Have a good night, Grayson."

Dismissed!

Kendra was done with him for the night so he wasn't going to press the issue anymore. He hadn't achieved things he wanted out of life by taking a back

seat to anyone or anything. Kendra was now in his radar and he wouldn't give up until he found a way to get her on at least one date with him.

"Goodnight Kendra. Sleep well." Grayson walked on out the door and heard it close softly behind him.

Grayson glanced back at Kendra's door and couldn't keep the unexpected grin off his face. Tonight turned out totally different than he thought it would. If he had any doubt of Kendra's lack of interest in him. He knew now he was wrong. Kendra sensed the attraction between them the same as him.

Yes...Kendra would be his welcome to his new life and job present to himself. She just didn't know it yet but would in the very near future.

Chapter Six

“Emma, how are you doing today?” Kendra asked watching as the little five year old African American girl walked around the room holding a doll against her chest.

It had taken a threat from her to Emma’s parents about going back to the judge that made Emma’s mother finally bring her today five minutes late for her appointment.

She didn’t know what in the world was wrong with Emma’s mother and father. Why didn’t they want their daughter to get the help she needed?

Emma wandered over to her office window and glanced down at the people below still without saying a word to her. Her sessions never seemed to move beyond this part but she wasn’t going to give up hope. She would get Emma to speak to her today.

“Emma, sweetheart,” Kendra said. “What is your doll’s name? Who gave her to you?” She hoped that this new approach worked since she was asking her something else beside what was wrong and why she was keeping it all bottled up inside.

“Baby,” a soft voice answered. “I got her from my Grandmama.”

Disbelieve and utter shock raced through Kendra’s body at the sound of the little girl’s voice in the room. She wouldn’t have believed it happen if she wasn’t in the room. Emma gave her a response! Kendra wanted to jump up and down from sheer happiness.

Okay, she would stay with this topic. Emma wanted to talk about her doll and her Grandmama for this session then they could to it. No problem. This little opening could be the first step in finding out the bigger thing she was hiding.

“How long have you had your baby? She’s very pretty.”

Emma’s doll was one of those real baby dolls she constantly saw advertised in commercials around Christmas time. She remembered buying one for one of her girlfriend’s daughter a while back.

“I don’t know. I think I’ve had baby a while. I guess. Grandmama gave her to me before she dead and went to heaven.” Spinning away from the window, Emma came over and stood next to her chair.

“Dr. Kendra?”

Emma was coming up to her without her asking. Today was going better than she could have thought. Emma actually approached her all on her own. She might be on the right road to get the precious little girl to tell her the secret she was hiding.

“Yes, sweetheart,” Kendra replied.

She wanted to touch Emma on the back of the hand, but she held back because she wasn’t sure how the little girl might react since she wasn’t sure about the abuse Emma had suffered.

“Can I really tell you anything like you told me last time my mommy brought me to see you?” she asked, optimistically

The sheer hopefulness in the child’s voice almost made Kendra cry. What happened at her house? Who was Emma so afraid of and was the person still around her?”

“Emma, you can tell me anything and I’ll believe you each and every time.”

Emma’s hazel eyes watched her with such an intensity Kendra fought down the urge to give the child a hug to assure her she was telling her the truth, but she did have an idea how to help Emma.

Reaching into the front pocket of her short red suit jacket, Kendra pulled out one of the business cards she usually kept handy for people who asked for consultation with her. “Here you go. You can call me anytime and talk to me. I promise you that I’ll always answer the phone.” Kendra held the card out and waited for Emma to take it from her.

Slowly, Emma’s tiny hand reached out and took the card. Kendra watched as she read it before shoving it into the front pocket of her jeans.

“Can, I call you even when it’s dark out?” she whispered, softly.

“Sweetie, yes, you can call me even when it’s dark outside. I will still be there to listen to you.”

After hearing Emma’s question Kendra was even more nervous about what was going on with her, but before she could ask anymore questions the timer on her desk went off signaling Emma’s session was over for the day.

Thirty minutes just wasn’t enough time to spend with Emma. Having enough time with a child was the most important ingredient into building their trust especially with a new person they weren’t familiar with.

“Dr. Kendra, the timer went off so does that mean it’s time for me to go back out there with my mommy?” Emma asked moving away from her.

Standing up, Kendra nodded her head. “Emma, you’re very smart. Our session is over, but you will be back on Friday to see me. What do you think about that?”

Emma shrugged her shoulder then made her way towards the closed office door. Kendra noticed how Emma drew back into her shell more and more each time she needed to go back home.

Walking over to the door, Kendra waited for Emma to move out of the way before she opened it. The second the two of them were back in the lobby. Emma mother, Michelle Jefferson, tossed the magazine she had been reading down in the

chair next to her and came over to them.

“How did the session go today?” Michelle asked, moving Emma closer to her. “Did my shy little girl finally open up?”

Kendra wasn’t going to get into Emma’s ongoing case in the middle of the very open and not so private lobby with Emma’s mother. She got the sense Emma’s mother really didn’t care about her daughter’s well-being at all.

“I can’t get into this with you right now. However, Emma is a wonderful little girl. I always enjoy my session with her. Well, I have to get ready for my next patient. I’ll see Emma tomorrow at the same time.”

“Oh, I meant to tell you. Emma’s dad and I are going on a trip. She won’t be able to make it,” Michelle told her as she grabbed Emma’s hand with a smug look on her face.

“My court order states Emma is supposed to attend sessions three times a week with me for six months,” Kendra said, trying to keep her temper in check. “I have only seen her three times. If she isn’t here on Friday at eight o’clock sharp then I’ll have no other choice but to report you to the judge.”

“I’m a person of my word. Please don’t make me prove it to you. Have a nice day Mrs. Jefferson.” Kendra gave Emma’s mother a long look.

She saw how icy and unresponsive her mother’s eyes were so she gave her attention over to Emma who craved and deserved it more than her mother.

“Emma, I had a great time with you today. I can’t wait until we get to talk again.”

Like usual, Emma didn’t answer her but dropped her eyes down to the floor holding the doll closer to her chest. It was one of the saddest sights she had ever seen in her life. The way Emma was so disconnected from everything around her pushed Kendra to fight even harder to help this little girl.

“Come on, Emma we need to go. I have to drop you off a school and get back to work.” Michelle turned around storming out of the office practically dragging a quiet and withdrawn Emma behind her.

Kendra was positive she would be able to reach Emma if her sessions were made longer than thirty minutes. She could tell that Emma wanted to open up, but either she didn’t know how to do it. Or she was being threatened by someone else to keep her mouth shut.

However, none of it was going to work. Emma’s silence was crying out to her for help and she was going to give it to her no matter what Emma’s parents thought.

Chapter Seven

Grayson finished entering the last of his ideas for the budget meeting and new marketing plan targeting the 18-24 year old demographics into the computer before sending it to the printer.

He thought adding a site to the Director Enterprise website where teenagers and young adult could get twenty-five of their favorite songs for a set price every month.

He believed it was a sound way to boost visitors to the new webpage Stamford introduced last year. After reviewing the page, he noticed several ways to step up the website. He was positive with his education that he would be able to bring it up to the next level.

Director Enterprises was making money off of it, but he really thought his idea was excellent. At Rane Technology he would have signed off on it, but here he had to write out a report detailing everything he wanted to do and the money it would bring into the company.

Being a passenger inside of a moving car was extremely hard for him especially when he was used to being the driver in every since aspect of his life

until now. But he wasn't going to complain about his lack of position because Stamford and Preston didn't have to offer him a job.

Yet, they did and if he hadn't swallowed his huge pride the sexy Kendra wouldn't be living across the hall from him now. Kendra was an added surprise he wasn't expecting, but was very happy she was there.

She turned his body on without even trying to make him hot and horny. He never thought of himself as the kind of man who would want to spend time making love instead of going to work. Now, after meeting Kendra all he did was think with his always hard cock instead of using his head.

Kendra was an intelligent, independent woman and she didn't come off like she would appreciate being manhandled by him or any other man for that matter.

Last night, he went over to her condo in hopes of getting to know her better and it back fired on him. How could he have been so stupid to turn down her offer to stay a little longer with her? If he was lucky enough to get offered that chance again, he wasn't going to make the same mistake twice.

Had losing his business also messed with his sense of reasoning what red-blooded male would tell Kendra doing laundry was more pressing than enjoying spending a few extra minutes with her?

While he laid alone in his big empty king sized bed, all he could think about last night was how temptingly rich Kendra's skin came across wearing that white

t-shirt. A couple of times he had to stop himself from reaching out to taste and see did she taste as sweet and delicious as she looked.

Grayson's body squirmed around in his seat as his cock leaped to life at the thought of what part of her luscious body he would sample first.

Would it be those full plump lips that screamed put your mouth here?

No! Kendra's mouth was beautiful, but he wasn't going to try that place first. He *knew* the right spot. This location would have Kendra dragging him off to her bedroom instead of his the first time the two of them made love.

Oh, he was going to get his hot neighbor out of her clothes before she knew it by nibbling and kissing the spot right below her ear. When was the last time he was *this* interested or drawn to a woman?

Honestly, he couldn't remember at all.

Before he left for work this morning the thought of asking Kendra out on a date crossed his mind, but he changed it at the last minute. Because he wasn't sure if Kendra was still harboring bad feelings from the previous night and the way things ended between them.

If she was still mad at him, it might be hard to get her to agree to have dinner with him but he wasn't a quitter.

Kendra might try to ignore him; however, getting tossed to the side by her wasn't a part of his plan. Reaching to the side of his desk, Grayson grabbed the

report he printed out for his bosses.

He would love to stay here and think about Kendra for the rest of the afternoon, but he couldn't. He only had ten minutes left to get to his meeting and then he would find a place for lunch.

A quiet place would give him the time and solitude he needed to think about his next move with Kendra. Getting up from his seat, Grayson made his way out of his office pushing the thought of Kendra out of his mind because he couldn't miss his first big meeting with Stamford or Preston. He wanted to impress them with his ideas. Selling it home would have to be a huge part of his presentation today.

Chapter Eight

“Grayson, I have to tell you that I’m very impressed with your ideas about how to draw the 18-24 age group demographics to Director Enterprises,” Stamford told him looking up from the sheet of paper in his hand.

“I know that Preston would agree with me. I apologize again from him missing this meeting but his wife wasn’t feeling too well this morning, so he decided to stay home and take care of their son.”

“I understand completely family should always come first over business,” Grayson agreed leaning back in his chair.

Stamford laid the printout down on his desk then folded his hands on the top of it. “A few years back, I wouldn’t have thought having a family with a gorgeous wife and baby on the way would be more important than the last stock update. I used to work from sunrise to sunset.”

“Nothing seemed more important to me than having a top of the line business and a load of money in the bank. Until I saw Syeshia in the elevator the first day I started working here at Director Enterprises. After meeting her, my main focus became making her fall in love with me and putting a ring on her

finger.”

Grayson listened to Stamford talking about his wife with such adoring love and he secretly wondered would he ever feel that intense emotional connection with a woman that he would want to give up everything he had to be with her.

Working was his *life* and at this moment his only passion was finding a way to get his own business back or at least moving up to a better position than the one he currently had here with Preston and Stamford.

After the way his mother left him and his father when he was only five years old because she got tired of being a parent. He wasn't interested in finding the perfect family anymore. All he wanted now was to get back on top like before.

“I'm glad you and Preston are happily married, but I don't think I'm the marrying type. I have yet to found a woman understanding enough to accept the long hours I put towards my career. So, I think I'll be single for the rest for my life and I don't have a problem with that. Hell, I'm already forty. So, I gave up on the family thing years ago.”

Chuckling, Stamford picked up the report and laid it to the side of his desk. “Oh, you don't know what the future holds. Now, how about we grab some lunch and we can discuss your ideas better. I'm not the best thinker on an empty stomach. Well, that is what Syeshia tells me.”

Grayson planned to eat alone today but having lunch with one of his bosses

sounded better. People wouldn't believe how much individuals could get done over a good meal. This would be the first step into moving up into a higher position in the company.

"Sounds good," he agreed. "Do you know where you want to go and have lunch?"

"There's a fantastic hamburger place around the corner. I have been there only once, but had planned on going back again, so why not today?" Stamford said as he picked up his cell phone off his desk.

"A double cheeseburger does sound pretty good since I skipped breakfast."

Grayson left out the reason he wasn't able to get anything for breakfast. He had overslept and it was all Kendra's fault. He had a hot dream about her in his bed doing things with him that had his cock hard all the way to the shower and a semi-erection still lingered after he got out of the shower.

Once he had Kendra out of his system and was back on the top like he knew he should be then he could go out and get the whole family thing his bosses were so proud of. Now, the only thing he desired with that much passion was having his own business again. Because he was a natural born leader and being a follower wasn't in his genetic makeup at all.

"I'll throw in a plate of onion rings and I think we'll have a pretty good lunch ahead of us," Stamford stood up slipping his cell phone into his pocket before

heading for the office door. “We better leave and head to Big Boy’s Burgers or we won’t get a seat. It fills up pretty quickly.”

“I’m all about getting a decent seat myself. I hope they are good.” Grayson grinned standing up following Stamford out of the door. He hoped Big Boy’s Burger lived up to the hype because eating lunch was at the top of his list at the moment.

“Big Boy’s Burgers aren’t good. They’re out of this world,” Stamford quickly corrected before they left.

Chapter Nine

“Thanks again for inviting me out to lunch,” Grayson said as the waitress placed the plate of double cheeseburgers and onion rings in front of him.

“I remember how it was to be the new guy at work. It was hard for me to make friends. The only two people I was around were Preston and Syeshia until the other employees felt they could trust me.” Stamford took a bite of his burger and then laid it back on his plate.

Grayson hadn’t thought about the other employees bonding with him since most of his time had been spent getting familiar with the ins and outs of how the company worked.

“Most of the employees haven’t said much to me. I think everyone is busy doing their jobs,” Grayson answered then reached for his fattening double cheeseburger.

“Sometimes it might seem like that but take the time to get to know the staff. Because they will be your right hand once they feel comfortable with you. I know this has to be a huge change for you too.”

Swallowing the bite of food in his mouth, Grayson wiped the side of his

mouth off with a napkin. “What has to be a huge change for me?” he asked, wondering what Stamford was referring to.

“Grayson, you had to sell your once successful business to Director Enterprises. I’m not stupid I know it had to be an agonizing decision for you. I don’t know if I could have done the same thing as quickly as you.”

This isn’t the conversation Grayson thought he would be having over lunch with Stamford, but he couldn’t keep avoiding this topic with his bosses.

“Selling my business was tremendously difficult for me. I tried for months to save my computer design business, but in the end I had to realize it was time to throw in the towel and sell it,” Grayson admitted.

“A lot of companies wanted Rane Technology, but I’m glad I sold it to Director Enterprises. Preston and you gave me the best deal I could use for my former employees. I wasn’t overly concerned about me as I was about them.”

Stamford took another bite of his cheeseburger and swallowed before he answered again. . “I understand completely where you’re coming from when I bought half of Preston’s business. One of Preston first demands to me when he sold me half of his business was I would keep his entire staff and I kept my word. I didn’t fire anyone. Honestly, I wasn’t planning on letting anyone go.”

“When I first arrived at Director Enterprises most of the employees avoided me as much as they could because I was a new suit in the building and they

weren't quite sure what I wanted from them.

"Also, it didn't help that I kept my true identity a secret for weeks and it almost cost me Syeshia when she found out who I really was and why I was working at Director Enterprises."

"What? Why?" Grayson couldn't believe as happy as Stamford and Syeshia were that they had any kind of problems in their relationship.

A faraway look came into Stamford's eyes. "Take a word of advice from me. Don't ever lie to the woman you care about. You might not think it isn't anything big, but she sure will and it might cost you the love of your life."

Love of his life?

He wasn't thinking about getting with any woman that deeply while he was trying to find a way to get back on top. Really, he had never believed there was any woman out there he ever would consider the 'love of his life.' All of that nonsense and storybook romance was for men a lot weaker than him. Which is why he was so surprised how much Preston and Stamford seemed so taken by being married and having babies.

They used to be power workers like him and now they came across like they would rather stay at home and watch Sesame Street instead of watching the stock trade numbers. It just didn't make any sense to him, but he wasn't about to say a word about it. Since it wasn't his life which meant, it really wasn't any of his

concern either.

“I’m not worried about any of that,” Grayson laughed. “My only concern at the moment is finding my place at Director Enterprises.”

The sound of the bell ringing above the door drew Grayson’s attention away from his conversation with Stamford and everything stopped around him as he noticed the person at the counter giving her order.

Sitting up straighter in his chair, Grayson watched in growing anger at how the other men turned around in their seats to stare at Kendra in her tight black skirt and matching short sleeve top. The fabric of the skirt hugged her ass in all of the right places and he was taking notice just like every other man in the building.

Kendra looked amazing and she truly didn’t have a clue at the breathtaking picture she was making inside the small restaurant. After seeing her here today, he was kicking himself again even more for not talking to her this morning before he left for work.

“I can tell from the way you’re staring at her either you know her or you want to know her. So, which is it?” Stamford asked him.

“She’s my neighbor,” Grayson answered watching as Kendra paid for her food and then left the restaurant to his immediate disappointment.

“What’s her name?” Stamford inquired facing him again. “Have you asked her out on a date yet?”

Grayson looked at his boss wondering what all of the sudden interest came from towards Kendra. Stamford already was married to a stunning woman and had a baby on the way.

“Her name is Kendra Winstead and no I haven’t asked her out on a date yet. I have been too busy with work to even think about getting involved with anyone.”

“Are you crazy?” Stamford asked shaking his head. “You shouldn’t wait too long or someone is going to snatch her up before you shake off your cold feet. Kendra is an attractive woman.”

He still couldn’t shake the strange feeling that it was an awful odd conversation to be having with his boss that he barely knew. He wasn’t used to an employer being so forthright with his employee.

Yes...back in Boston him and Trina has a close relationship, but that came after them working together for years not after only a month of employment.

“I don’t know about asking Kendra out on a date. I’m not positive she doesn’t have a boyfriend,” Grayson finally admitted.

Damn! What if Kendra wasn’t single? Had he been fantasizing about a woman he couldn’t have.

“You aren’t going to know either unless you ask her and find out. Go for it.”

“Why are you so interested in my personal life? I thought we came here to

discuss work?” Grayson asked.

Leaning back in the chair, Stamford watched him with a keenly observant eye. “Grayson, I’m glad you’re working at Director Enterprises. You’re going to be a great addition; however, you have to understand that everyone at Director Enterprises considers each other as part of a family. That is what makes us work so well together.”

“Yes, we talk about work ninety percent of the time, but the other ten percent we discuss other things. You’re entire life can’t be centered on work. It isn’t healthy and when you do it too much life will pass you by. Take it from me. I know what I’m talking about.”

Grayson wanted to press the issue further, but he could tell Stamford was done giving him a glimpse into his past. He saw now that he couldn’t become a work alcoholic here like he loved doing at his old job.

So, he would have to think of a new approach to gaining the respect he wanted to achieve at Director Enterprises. Which meant all of the energy he was going to use towards building up his career could be focused on getting closer to Kendra instead, if she was single and was interested in him.

“Thanks for the advice,” Grayson said. “You’re right. I should be putting some of my attention on something else besides work.”

“Are you thinking about taking my unwanted advice now? Stamford teased,

standing up.

“I’m going to ask Kendra out on a date the minute I get home and I’ll see where it goes from there,” Grayson answered wondering where he would take Kendra if she agreed to his dinner invitation.

Chapter Ten

Standing in the open doorway of the laundry room, Grayson watched as Kendra sorted out her laundry on a table a couple of feet away from the washing machines. He still wasn't fond of how it seemed like Kendra had been avoiding him on purpose since their last conversation.

Pursuing Kendra had become very important to him since moving to Marvel, Illinois he wasn't going to give up on at least getting her to agree on having one date with him..

Since his lunch conversation with Stamford, Grayson had tried to catch Kendra at home but luck really hadn't been on his side until tonight. Usually, he was an extremely private and sometime secretive person. He made sure strangers didn't know anything about him. He didn't want known.

But after meeting Kendra and being around her for the short meetings that they experienced with each other, Grayson decided at that moment to put his barrier down an inch or two and see would Kendra be open to an apology from him.

"I thought I would never see you down here again," Grayson said, walking

further into the laundry room. He watched as Kendra spun around to face him.

Her dark brown eyes widened in surprise as she looked at him then she resumed dividing her clothes into separate piles.

“Why would you think that? The washer and dryers are located in the basement so you were bound to run into me again.. I can’t have clean clothes without using them.”

If Kendra’s attitude got any more cold, he might have to go back upstairs to his condo and grab a sweater from the chill. However, he wasn’t a quitter when it came to what he wanted.

Once he decided to do something. Nothing got in his way of achieving his goal which always meant he finished what he started, even if the outcome isn’t what he thought it would be or wanted.

“Would saying I’m sorry fix it so I’ll be able to ask you out on a date like I have been dying to do since I first saw you down here?”

Grayson placed his laundry basket down on the table by Kendra. “I really would like a chance to get to know you better. Do you think we can move past just being neighborly?”

He liked the smile hovering at the corner of Kendra’s mouth that she was trying to hide from him. Yes! That smile meant she wasn’t dating someone and there wasn’t an important man in her life.

He doubted Kendra knew when it came to him. It was an all-or-nothing quality about his personality. His interest in getting to know her better was genuine because he wouldn't be investing his time if it wasn't.

When he didn't want to be involved with a woman he *never* seeks out her company for any reason.

"Care to tell me why you have this sudden need to go out on a date with me?" Kendra questioned, catching him off guard as she tossed a turquoise top down on the table.

Moving closer to her until he was almost in her personal space, Grayson liked how Kendra's eyes darted to his mouth before looking into his eyes.

Oh, his earlier assumption was right! Kendra was attracted to him as much as he was to her.

"You're like this mystery I want to solve. Most women I come across are boring and unappealing. The way you carry yourself is fascinating to me. Which makes me want to find out what else is going on with you, so will you accept my dinner invitation for tonight?"

"I can't give you an answer yet. I need to think about it some more," Kendra told him taking a step back from him.

"How about I give you some help?" Grayson suggested closing the gap Kendra put between them a few second before.

Chapter Eleven

Wait a minute!

Kendra wasn't sure if she should stay and find out the real reason with Grayson's sudden change towards her. Or if the better plan would be to snatch all of her dirty clothes up and make a run for it back upstairs to her apartment.

Grayson owned a seductive sexuality she wasn't used to dealing with in previous guys she had gone out with in the past. Because being heart-stopping sexy and downright handsome, Grayson possessed a sharp mind that could match her own. She could see it in his eyes every time he looked at her.

He probably sized her up in the three seconds flat their first meeting dawned on her. She had never been good at hiding her attraction from a man she was interested in. Grayson's whole demeanor exuded a natural self-assurance that made a person take notice and respect what they saw in him.

His magnetism scared her a tiny bit because life or a date with Grayson would be so intense and with everything else going on at work, she wouldn't be able to handle anything else.

"Grayson, I—"

“Do you know how perfect your mouth is?” he asked, running his index finger across her bottom lip. “Your lips have been the star in many of my late night dreams.”

She took a deep breath, trying to calm her pounding heart and racing hormones. Shit! Why was Grayson doing this to her? He blew her off two days ago. He couldn't come back now and ask for a do over.

Things just didn't work that way.

“Thanks for the compliment, but I think I should go,” she whispered, moving Grayson's finger off her mouth.

Kendra expected Grayson to try to talk her into staying, but he didn't do that. Instead, he lowered his head and captured her lips with his.

The kiss wasn't tender or slow, but deep and demanding. The tip of his tongue traced the top seam of her mouth before slipping inside to stroke the side of her mouth. His hand wrapped around the back of her neck tugging her against his hard chest.

A soft moan escaped from her mouth, it had been forever since a man had kissed her like this...like she was the only woman who he wanted to be.

A low heat started in the pit of her stomach slowly working its way through her body until she felt like she was on fire. Her back ached because she was fighting off the need to wrap her arms around Grayson's shoulders and rub her

swollen nipples against the fabric of his shirt.

She craved more than this kiss. Needed so much more she could practically *taste* it.

Grayson broke their kiss, trailing his tongue down the side of her neck and then back up to nibble at her ear.

A gasp escaped from Kendra's throat. "What are you doing?"

Looking down into her eyes, the corner of Grayson's mouth lifted up into a slight smile. "I'm trying to change your mind about having dinner with me. How am I doing?"

"If I admit I might change my no to a yes. What do you have in store for me on our date?"

Grayson didn't have to say a word, but the look in his eyes told Kendra everything she needed to know. He had plans for her. God, she wished she knew what they were.

Chapter Twelve

“How long have you been living here and you still haven’t unpacked everything?” Kendra asked, eyeing the boxes in the corner of the room as she took a sip from the glass of wine Grayson handed her.

After she agreed to have a date with him tonight, they both gathered up their laundry and made plans to meet at Grayson’s condo in an hour.

Now, dinner was over and Kendra was trying to find out more about Grayson while he finished cleaning up the kitchen. She had offered her help, but he turned her down telling her it would only take him a few minutes to get everything inside of the dishwasher.

“I have been living here a little over a month now,” Grayson told her as she headed back toward the kitchen.

Taking a seat at the island she watched Grayson as he placed the last of their plates inside of the dishwasher. Grayson’s kitchen was a lot more contemporary than hers with its stainless steel appliances and polished-granite countertops.

Her condo didn’t have the two long wall of cabinets, work surfaces or an

angled island that could be used for cooking or entertaining. Over next to his stacked ovens was a tall pullout cabinet with sliding shelves that was used for pantry goods.

“Don’t you think it’s about time you cleaned out those boxes?” Kendra suggested, placing her wine glass down on the countertop. “I can give you some help if you want it.”

Closing the dishwasher, Grayson turned it on then joined her at the island. Leaning forward, he moved the glass out of the way then ran the tip of his finger across the top of her hand.

“I invited you over to my place for dinner to find out more about you. Not to talk about my lack of decorating skills.”

With deliberately causal movements, Kendra broke eye contact with Grayson by glancing away and then looked back at him. “What do you want to know about me?”

“Do you have a boyfriend?” Grayson asked, coming around the island to stand next to her chair.

“I thought you might ask me something different than do I have a boyfriend. Do you think I would’ve accepted your dinner invitation if I was seeing someone?”

He moved closer until he left her no room at all. Grayson gave her a predatory smile that sent her pulse racing. “I hope not because I’m very attracted

to you and I'm hopeful I can find a way to become that guy."

Kendra found it impossible not to return Grayson's disarming smile.

"Shouldn't we find out more about each other first before we jump that far ahead?"

A look of faint amusement passed over Grayson's face before he moved back from her. "I guess I can find out more about my beautiful dinner date," he sighed and then ruined it by winking at her.

Taking her by the hand, he pulled her off the bar stool over to a dark gray couch in the living room. Grayson waited while she took a seat and then sat down next to her.

"Since you don't want to do it my way, I'll let you start with the questions," Grayson told her as he relaxed next her and his body heat warmed her body.

Kendra tried to clear her mind to think of something good to ask Grayson; however, being this close to him was wrecking havoc on her mind not to mention her body. She had to fight down the overwhelming need to scoot closer to him.

He was disturbing her in every way. Grayson was the first man in a very, very long time that radiated a vitality that drew her like a magnet.

"What is your best quality and what is your worst?"

A spark of some indefinable emotion appeared in his bedroom eyes before it disappeared just as quickly.

"That's a different question," Grayson said. "Most women ask me what I do

for a living.”

“I’m not most women,” Kendra tossed back waiting for Grayson’s answer.

Resting his arm along the back of the couch, Grayson got more comfortable next to her and then slid a little closer until their thighs were touching.

“I pride myself on my ability to identify what doesn’t work in a situation and finding the best way to fix it without too many problems coming up. I have been told that my worst qualities are being addicted to work and trying to control certain situations in my life. I don’t think I’m as bad as I used to be when I was younger.”

“Did you get a sense of security from being in control of so many things?” Kendra got that trait from Grayson the second she met him.

“You sound like a psychologist.”

“You’re right. I’m a psychologist,” Kendra admitted, looking at Grayson.

“You have to be kidding me. I can’t believe it. There is no way someone as pretty as you are is a psychologist.”

“No, I’m serious. I have a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology, a master’s degree in experimental psychology and then a PH.D in clinical psychology.”

Kendra was a little apprehensive about telling Grayson all about her life so soon. Most men found it intimidating dating a woman who was psychologist. One man actually told her it was a lethal combination when an attractive woman was

intelligent.

“What exactly is experimental psychology? I’m not familiar with it.”

Kicking off her shoes, Kendra and pulled her legs up on the couch. “Most people aren’t familiar with it or they do have the wrong idea about what it means, so let me try to explain it you as best as I can. Since, it’s my love sometimes I can ramble a bit about my job.”

“Experimental psychology used to consist of research. It can be conducted on published articles or classes taught on perception. =Thinking, memory, developmental psychology or sensations. Now it has moved more towards to motivation, emotions mixed with social psychology. Honestly, it’s just discovering the process of behavior and cognition.”

“Clinical psychology is promoting well being and personal development but it’s subjective to certain people.”

“Wow...that’s fantasizing. You have a lot more going with your career then I do at mine,” Grayson said.

“Grayson, I don’t believe that is true,” Kendra denied, wanting to get the subject off her and back on the man in front of her.

“How about you tell me about your job since I have bored you too death with mine?”

“There isn’t really much to tell about my job anymore since my business

went under because of the recession,” Grayson sighed. “Director Enterprises bought me out over a year ago and as a part of the package they offered me a position with the company.”

“Now, instead of having my own business which dealt with specific spyware and download of music, I work for someone now. I’m back to being an employee instead of my own boss like you are.”

The bitterness in Grayson’s voice didn’t go over Kendra’s head. She heard how upset he was about losing his business. “I don’t know that much about Director Enterprises, but I heard it is a very successful company. Do you think you might grow to like working there? I know sudden change can be hard on people.”

Grayson shrugged his shoulder. “Honestly, I can’t say that I will. I miss being my own boss and it has been hard for me to accept my new job. One good thing has come from me moving here from Boston, though.”

“What is the good thing?” Kendra asked, softly.

Wrapping his hand around her arm, Grayson pulled her to him. “I got to meet a beautiful woman that I’m hoping had as good of a time as I did on our first date tonight.”

A strange faintly eager look flashed in his eyes making Kendra aware of how much she truly liked getting to know more about Grayson. Only time would tell how things would work between the two of them.

“Grayson, I don’t know the last time I had such a good time on a date. I work so many hours going out a real date hasn’t happened in a while,” she confessed.

“How about I fix that problem right now? Would you like to go out on another date with me tomorrow night, Kendra?”

“I would love to.” Joy bubbled up in her at the thought of spending more time with Grayson.

“Good, how about we end our first date on something both of us can remember when we are alone tonight in our beds?”

“What do you have in mind?” She could only imagine what it was, but she hoped it was the same thing she was thinking about.

Grayson leaned forward and brushed his lips across hers. *Softly. Barely connecting.* It was completely different from their first kiss they shared downstairs hours before.

Kendra moaned in the back of her throat, but Grayson moved away instead of deepening the kiss. She whimpered her shock and disappointment.

“Baby, I love your moans and I would love to explore this further, but I won’t,” Grayson said. He got up from the couch then pulled her up after him.

“Let me walk you to your door.”

“Are you sure?” she questioned frustrated. Kendra didn’t want to go home.

She would rather stay here and continue making out on the couch with Grayson.

“Yes, I’m sure because if I don’t take you home right now. I’d be running late for work tomorrow since I would have to stay home to make you breakfast in bed,” his voice was low and purposefully seductive.

Kendra hid her smile as Grayson opened the door to his condo. Wow. She hoped she would be able to sleep tonight and not be up all night thinking about Grayson and the sexy image he just unconsciously placed in her mind.

Chapter Thirteen

“What has put that look on your face this morning?” Mary Jane questioned, placing her mug of steaming green tea on her desk. “I can’t recall the last time I got to work before you, so are you going to tell me what is going on with you?”

Closing Peter Kent’s file, Kendra placed her hands on the top of it. Did she want to brag about her date with Grayson?

It was only one date and she wasn’t sure if there was going to be a second date or not. Sure, Grayson had already asked her out on a second date, but with their busy schedules. She wasn’t sure if it would happen this week, next week or in the near distance future.

“Kendra, I know you aren’t keeping juicy details away from me. Haven’t I always told you about my dates whether they were good or bad? Come on. I know that you’re keeping something to yourself. Get it off your chest and let me know about it.”

“I had a date last night,” Kendra blurted out because she couldn’t hold it in any longer. She had to tell someone about Grayson and Mary Jane was her best friend.

Mary Jane rushed over to the office door, closed it then hurried back taking a seat in front of her desk.

“You haven’t been on a date in over two years. Tell me about this guy,” she said. “Do I know him?”

“Do you remember the man I told you about that moved into my building?”

Mary Jane’s dark green eyes lit up. “Are you talking about tall, dark and handsome with the sexy voice? I have been meaning to ask you about him and how things were going. What was his name again?”

“Grayson Rane.”

“Oh, what a delicious name,” Mary Jane exclaimed. “How do you get to go out with a man whose name sounds like a Hollywood movie star and I date a guy named Romeo who still lives with his mother?”

Kendra didn’t want to agree with Mary Jane, but she couldn’t deny it. “You’re right. You have dated a lot of wild guys which I find surprising since you’re so gorgeous. I mean you could be Jenny McCarthy’s twin.”

“My looks aren’t the topic of conversation right now. I want to hear about this date. What did the two of you do?”

Flashes of her date last night went through Kendra’s head and she couldn’t stop the warm feeling from taking over.

“Grayson cooked me dinner which I loved by the way. That was the first

time a man has ever cooked for me and then we sat on his couch and talking for what seemed like hours. Last night truly was the best date I've had in a very long time," Kendra gushed.

Mary Jane made a *tsking* sound with her tongue on the roof of her mouth. "I think you have a crush on your neighbor. Did you get to kiss him on this wonderful date of yours? Please tell me you did more than talk about work."

"Why shouldn't I talk about me job if Grayson asked me about it?"

"I know you love being a psychologist and yes you have helped a lot of people, but you need time for yourself. Grayson might just be the man who can take you away from working all of these long hours."

Kendra loved Mary Jane like she was her sister, but sometimes her friend got a little too bossy; however, if she didn't tell her about the kiss then Mary Jane wouldn't let it go until she got an answer.

"Yes...we kissed," Kendra finally answered.

Brushing her blonde hair over her shoulder, Mary Jane scooted forward in her seat. "Okay. How would you rate it?"

"Rate it? You want me to rate my kiss with Grayson?" Shaking her head, Kendra grabbed Peter's file, then got up from her chair. "I'm not going to do that at all. I think I have told you enough already."

Heading over to her filing cabinet, she opened it and returned Peter's files to

the correct spot. She closed it then turned back around to look at Mary Jane. “It’s almost time for Peter to show up. Why don’t you head back to your desk? I can’t have him walking in without knocking again.”

“Peter believes he can do that anything he wants and he can’t. We had a very long talk about his behavior the other day, but I still don’t know if what I’m telling him is getting through.”

Mary Jane stood up. “Well, his family does have more money than Oprah, Paris Hilton and Donald Trump combined,” she pointed out heading for the door. “He feels that he can do anything he wants. I mean last week he tried to bribe me so he could have a longer session with you.”

“What! Why didn’t you tell me about this before now? We have talked over and over about him showing off his wealth,” Kendra sighed with exasperation. “Now, I see I still have a lot of work ahead of me.”

She was trying her best to get Peter to see he didn’t always have to spend excess amounts of money to make people like him. Nevertheless, he kept doing it anyway and she doubted it was giving him the results he was constantly searching for.

“Peter is some piece of work. Yeah, he’s gorgeous, but his cocky attitude makes him so damn ugly,” Mary Jane complained heading for the door. “I’ll let go so you can get ready for him. I’ll buzz you when he’s gets here.”

“Thanks, Mary Jane,” Kendra told her assistant as she opened the door and then walked out closing it behind her.

Kendra left the filing cabinet and returned to her desk hoping that Peter would be open to listening to what she had to tell him instead of being his typical self-absorbed and arrogant self. She honestly wasn’t sure if she could make Peter understand he had more going on for him than the figures in his bank account.

Chapter Fourteen

“Preston, I have a question for you...Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t know you were with someone. I can come back later.”

Grayson stopped in his tracks inside the office doorway as Preston move away from the attractive African American woman holding a baby with a head full of curly black hair. The baby was so cute. He could have been in a Gerber commercial.

“Not a problem, Grayson. Come on in,” Preston said, waving him inside of the office. “I would like for you to meet my wife Layla and our little boy Preston, Jr. Layla; this is my newest employee Grayson Rane.”

Walking forward, Grayson extended his hand. “Nice to meet you, Layla,” he said. “Your little boy is adorable.”

“Thank you,” Layla smiled, shaking his hand with her free on. Turning away from him, she looked back at Preston. “After I take Preston to get his shots, I’m going to stop by Syeshia’s if he isn’t crying. I want to check in on her.”

“Just call and let me know what you decide to do for sure. You know that I worry about you and the baby when the weather starts to get colder,” Preston

said.

Grayson watched as Preston kissed his wife then moved away as Layla placed the baby back into the stroller and then left the office. He was a bit envious of the beautiful picture the three of them made together.

“You really have a beautiful family.”

“Yes. I do,” Preston agreed pride in his voice. “I’m a very lucky man. Have a seat and tell me what you have a question about.”

Preston rested his hip on the edge of his desk as he took a seat in a chair a few feet in front of him.

“I have been looking over some of the old reports that were on my desk. You wanted me to check and I noticed a few of the software design programs were pretty good, but they didn’t get the proper attention they needed.”

“The last guy you had working this position didn’t have the level of training I do working with website design and html codes. I know I can redo at least four of your failing website and have them making you the money you intended them to do.”

Preston stood up sliding his hands into the pockets of his tailored slacks. He started walking around inside of his well-decorated office. “Truthfully, I’m not sure if I can give you the green light to go ahead with this idea of yours.”

“In the past four years, I had six guys try to save those shopping sites and

not one of them had the ability to do it and I have lost a lot of money in the process. Why should I think you're any different? I hired you to dismantle those websites not try to save a lost cause."

Grayson couldn't disagree with his boss more. Preston was making a huge mistake in his opinion. Those sites could be drawing in huge amounts of money, but they needed to be shut down and reorganized. He loved doing website and creating something out of nothing.

When he spotted any kind of unrealized potential, underused resources or untapped promise, he felt an almost irresistible urge to see them grow into something bigger and better than they were before.

After noticing the files and checking the websites, he knew he had to ask Preston about taking control over them. Sometimes, he thought of himself as a transformer and the act of improving something like those failing websites will be a high form of creative expression for him.

"I'll do it for free and if they are successful for two months then you can start paying me," Grayson suggested.

Preston turned slowly away from the window. "You're willingly to do all of that work for free?" he asked with a significant lifting of his brows. "Along with working on the others already assigned for you to do during your regular work hours? You're positive that you will be able to handle the extra work load? I don't

want you spending extra hours at the office.”

“Yes,” Grayson answered already thinking of a way to fix the first website he looked it before coming in here.

“Okay, I’ll agree to your terms. I wish you luck with it. I’m waiting to see if you can be successful where the other guys I hired weren’t.”

“I’m very confident I can do everything I promised.”

Grayson missed having an impact in the work force in a significant way and this could be it. A large part of his identity was shaped by how fast his career moved forward. Now, he had the chance he wanted at Director Enterprises and he wasn’t about to ruin it.

Chapter Fifteen

“Hey beautiful,” a male voice called out behind her.

Spinning away from her door, Kendra found Grayson lounging in his doorway wearing a pair of well-worn jeans and a black sweater looking extremely hot.

She should have been home two hours ago, but she got caught up at work with a new patient and getting her case files ready for Emma’s next visit. Time had slipped past her and before she realized what happened. It was already after six o’clock.

“Hi, Grayson,” Kendra answered, walking over to him. “Were you watching for me to come home?”

“If I said yes would it freak you out?”

The idea that Grayson was waiting for her actually thrilled her a little...well, it *thrilled* her a lot!

“No, I wouldn’t be alarmed at all. But I apologize for being late because weren’t we going to have a second date tonight?” she asked, knowing it might be too late to go anywhere now.

“We can still go out on our date,” Grayson informed her moving away from the door. “How quickly do you think you can change out of those work clothes into clothes more comfortable? I want to take you somewhere.”

Oh, a surprise! Kendra felt a warm glow flow through her. She LOVED surprises. She wondered what Grayson wanted to take her.

“Where are we going?” she asked, excited.

“Can’t tell you or it will ruin my plans. Now, go and get changed, but I need one thing from you before you go.” He ambled over to her cupping her face in his large, strong hands.

“What do you need?” Kendra asked, staring up into Grayson’s beautiful eyes.

“I need a kiss to tie me over until you come back.” He leaned over her, capturing her lips with his. “Don’t have me waiting too long,” Grayson murmured once he released her lips.

Kendra pressed her fingers to her lips taking a step back. Grayson only gave her a small kiss and she was ready to rip his clothes off.

“I won’t,” she promised before hurrying back across the hall and going inside of her apartment.

Chapter Sixteen

Grayson stood back enjoying the view of Kendra ass up in the air as she bent over the pool table with the pool stick in her hand. The short black skirt hugged her body in all of the right places and he wasn't complaining at all.

At first, he wasn't sure about taking her to a pool hall for their second date, but Kendra didn't seem to have a problem with it at all. In fact, she had been kicking his ass at pool for over an hour making him wonder how in the hell she had gotten so accomplished at the game.

"Do you care to tell me how you got this proficient at playing pool?" He asked, watching as Kendra shot another ball into the side pocket.

Standing up, Kendra smirked at him. "Mr. Rane, are you upset you're getting beat by a woman? I thought better of you."

Grayson grabbed his pool stick from against the wall then moved over to her. "Sweetheart, I don't have a problem getting beat by a beautiful woman at all. In fact, I find it very hot the way you lean over the table. All I want to know is how you got this excellent."

"I did more in college than attend classes all day. A group of us would go to a

pool hall about a block from campus every Friday to eat nachos and play pool. I had so much fun back then.”

Stepping in front of her, Grayson pressed his body against Kendra pressing her butt into the side of the pool table. “I bet all of those guys at the bar offered to buy you drinks, didn’t they?”

Kendra shook her head. ‘No, Tori got a lot of drinks bought for her because she was twenty-one and could drink. Since, I was only twenty I could only enjoy the nachos and pool.”

“I find that very hard to believe your friend Tori was the only one to draw attention when the two of you went out. Are you sure you aren’t holding out on me?”

“No, I’m not holding out on you. Tori did get all of the attention. I used to be so jealous of her back in college, but I got over it.”

“Well, I have never laid eyes on Tori, but I can say those guys were crazy back then not to notice you. You’re gorgeous. Maybe you intimidated them with your good-looks and killer pool skills.”

Grayson’s body leaped to life when Kendra stood up on her tiptoe and pressed her lips against his ear. “I love hearing all of your compliments, but they aren’t going to keep me from kicking your handsome butt.”

Turning his head, Grayson gave Kendra a quick kiss on the mouth. “How

about we make a small bet?”

Kendra stepped back from him staring up at him. “What kind of bet do you want to make? Is it something good? Because you know that you’re going to lose,” she taunted. “I’m so good at pool. I can’t remember the last time I lost a game.”

“Baby, there’s a first time for everything and I would love to be the man who breaks your winning streak,” Grayson told her.

Kendra placed her hand in the middle of his chest and pushed him away. “How about you stop talking and show me what you got?”

Grabbing Kendra by the arm, Grayson tugged her back against him loving how her breathe caught in the back of her throat. “Darling, I would love to show you what I go and I’m not talking about my pool skills either.”

Slowly, Kendra licked her lips as her eyes left his and dropped down to his mouth before reconnecting with a hot look of desire there.

“Promises...promises,” she whispered. “I would love to see what you have to offer,” Kendra flirted back, “but I want to kick your butt at pool first.”

“Haven’t you ever heard of ‘be careful of what you ask for?’” Grayson turned away from Kendra and centered his attention on the pool table. He had to win this game because he already knew what he wanted his prize to be.

“I’m not scared of you,” Kendra taunted, poking him in the middle of back with her finger.

“I’ll remember you said that when I’m thinking about what I want to do after I win the bet,” he tossed back.

“Hey, I never agreed to a bet with you.” Walking around the pool table, Kendra glared at him from the other end as Ciara’s *Goodies* played around them in the crowded bar.

“True, but you didn’t say no either. Now, move back so I can show you my skills, Ms. Winstead.”

Grayson waited until Kendra moved out of the way. Oh, he was going to like this. He had to show Kendra how a true pool player worked the game of pool.

Chapter Seventeen

“You cheated,” Kendra complained, reaching for a nacho on the plate in front of them. “I know you did. I can’t prove it, but I know you didn’t win that easily.”

“Sweetheart, I only played a game of pool,” Grayson said, before he picked up a nacho dripping with cheese, peppers, and onions then shoved it into his mouth.

“Tell me how you did it?” She was a damn good pool player and she seldom lost when she played, so how did Grayson come up from behind and beat her.

Instead of answering her, Grayson grabbed another chip and shoved it into his mouth followed by a sip of beer. “How about we talk about what I want you to do since I won our bet?”

Grayson knew that she never agreed to a bet with him over a game of pool, but she wanted to see what his bet wish was. There was no telling what he wanted from her. It was kind of a turn on waiting to hear what he was going to say.

“Okay, I’ll bite,” Kendra said. “What do you want me to do?”

“I want you to give us a chance at becoming a couple. I know how we both

work crazy hours, but I think something good could happen between us. How about it? Do you think you could be interested in dating me instead of having a dinner here or there as neighbors?”

Kendra was too startled by Grayson’s suggestion to offer any kind of comment for a few seconds because she was amazed at the sudden thrill it gave her.

“Well, are you going to give me an answer? Would you like for us to spend more time together? I know how I feel but I would like to hear what you think.”

Dropping the nacho back down on the plate, Kendra wondered what was going on. Did she hear correctly? Grayson wanted them to try to date exclusively? They hadn’t known each other that long to take such a huge leap forward.

“You want us to only date each other? Are you sure that we are at that step yet? This is only our second date. I thought we were still in the getting to know you stage.”

Reaching out, Grayson’s hand played with the half empty glass of beer in front of him. “We are still in the getting to know you stage, but I thought it might be better if you agreed not to see other people. I know that I’m not interested in dating anyone else. How about you? I know this connection between us came fast, but it’s something good.”

She stared wordlessly across the table at Grayson, her heart pounding. She

bit down hard on her lower lip while she debated over Grayson's offer. A part of her wanted to tell him no and continue to get lost in her work like before, but she wasn't going to do it. She was taking a leap forward and she would see where things went with Grayson.

"I like your idea. I would love to see where things could go between us." Kendra wasn't going to allow past bad relationships to ruin what might be developing between her and Grayson.

She had always been drawn to men who offered her some kind of individuality and who behaved in an unexpected manner. Guys who usually fit into a box of what's typically conventional bored the hell out of her.

Part of Grayson might be a work alcoholic, but she felt he might be able to break away from that with the right amount of coaching on her part. He could start doing something creative, different or shocking he might brush off the past.

Grayson wasn't the typical overworked business man who didn't know how to have fun and she wanted him to sit up and take notice of that. The deeper side of her was attracted to the Grayson who brought her here to this pool hall.

She loved pool, but never really got the chance to play anymore because of her current work schedule. Grayson gave this back to her tonight because he showed her another side of him. Expressed something new which drew her to him even more...the more she thought about it the more she liked the idea of going

further with Grayson.

“Yes, I like the idea of us dating. I think it’s something I want to do,” Kendra said, finally giving Grayson an answer to his question.

“Sweetheart, I’m glad. How about we head back home? I want to finish up this conversation at my condo. What do you think?”

“I only want to know what took you so long to ask.” Kendra waited while Grayson stood up and then pulled her up from the seat.

“Sorry about that. I swear I’ll make it up to you once we get back to my place,” he promised in a low voice by the side of her ear.

Chapter Eighteen

“Do you want to come in for something to drink?” Grayson asked her as he stuck his key into his condo door and unlocked it.

Staring at his wide back, Kendra thought about telling Grayson no for a split second then changed her mind. She would love to have a drink with him. Why not? What would it hurt?

“Sure, I would love to,” she agreed as Grayson opened the door and waved her on inside.

As her body brushed against Grayson’s body as she eased past him to go inside of the condo, a tingling of excitement raced through her so fast that she had to swallow down a sudden moan.

Calm down, girl, she scolded herself as Grayson closed and locked the door behind them. This wasn’t the time to be thinking about stripping Grayson completely naked when all he wanted to do was have a drink.

“Kendra, look at me,” the rich timbre of Grayson’s voice made her slowly turn around.

For a moment he studied her intently as the air cracked with sexual tension

and then his eyes darkened dangerously a second before he yanked her to his body. Spinning her around, he pressed her back against the door and then kissed her.

She parted her lips in surprise giving Grayson the chance he needed to slip his tongue inside, thrusting deep. His long fingers wrapped around her hips, tugging her even close to him as he continued to explore her mouth with the tip of his very talented tongue.

Kendra tried to form words in her head, but all she could think about was how *good* Grayson was making her feel. She wanted more, but didn't know exactly how to ask for it. However, Grayson must have read her thoughts because he lifted her legs up wrapping them around his waist grinding his thick cock against her drenched panties.

Her entire body ached for him. Maybe Grayson was the man she had been waiting for all of these years.

Grayson broke their kiss breathing hard he stared down into her eyes. She swallowed several times before she was finally able to speak.

"I thought you wanted us to have a drink?" she blurted out, scarcely aware of how her voice sounded.

"I lied," Grayson answered with a huskiness that lingered in his deep voice.

"You don't want us to have a drink?"

"Maybe later. All I want to do now with you is this." The rest of the

conversation left the room when Grayson's hand eased between their bodies and her ruin panties came off with a quick tug of his fingers.

Lowering his head, he nibbled at the part of her skin that connected her neck to her shoulder. He continued to ground his cock against her with fast movements making her soak the front of his jeans. He wasn't being gentle and she was *loving* it.

"Grayson?"

Lifting his head, Grayson's bedroom brown eyes caught hers. "Not now, baby. Let me love you." Seconds later, she heard a belt coming undone, followed by the rasp of a zipper and then he lifted her higher and was deep inside of her.

Stroking into her with such a maddening need that all she could do was wrap her legs around his waist and get lost in the lust Grayson was creating inside of her body.

A moan escaped from his throat causing her to wrap her fingers through his thick hair and she pulled his mouth down to hers for a soldering kiss that could melt metal.

His mouth didn't become softer as he kissed her, so she succumbed to the forcefulness of his lips. Her thoughts spun as Grayson pulled her tighter against him as his thrusts got wilder and wilder as her orgasm approached. It was like he could sense she was almost there and he wanted to shove her over the edge.

Not a minute later her orgasm ripped through her sending her entire body into another world. Kendra held on to Grayson as he tore his mouth away from her, riding his own orgasm as it ripped through him.

After it was over, Grayson detangled her body from his placing her back on her feet and catching her when she stumbled away.

“Are you okay?” he asked, a hint of worry in his usual confident voice. “Are you upset by what just happened? I want to be but I’m not.”

Was he out of his mind? That was the best sex she ever experienced in her life. In fact, she wanted it again and again.

“No, I’m not upset at all,” Kendra answered, watching Grayson as he fixed his clothes. “I liked it a lot.”

“Did you like it enough to take it someplace more comfortable where I can strip you out of all of your clothes?”

Kendra nodded and then Grayson picked her up carrying her through the living room and in the direction she hoped was his bedroom. She couldn’t guess that she was in for the night of her life and she couldn’t wait.

Chapter Nineteen

“Have I told you thank you for agreeing to spend the weekend with me?”

Grayson asked as his fingers brushed against her stomach.

“Yes, you expressed your happiness quite well,” Kendra laughed as Grayson tickled her side.

“If you need me to show you again just let me know and I’ll be very pleased to do it.”

Turning her body around, Kendra faced Grayson on the bed snuggling closer to his body. “I thought couples in the getting to know you state spend the weekends at each other’s places.”

“They do, but I thought you might turn me away,” Grayson admitted.

“Why?” Kendra asked, wondering what was going on with Grayson.

“We made love pretty quickly and I was worried my forcefulness might have scared you off and I didn’t want that to happen...not when I’m trying to get to know you better.”

Kendra placed her hand in the middle of Grayson’s chest playing with the light dusting of hair there. “One thing you should know about me is I never do

something. I don't want to do. No matter, how you might want me to change my answer. Once I have given it, that's it."

"Kendra, you're a very surprising woman," Grayson complimented.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just when I think I might be figuring something out about you. You give me a different view into your personality which makes me go down a total different road."

After the way they had made love in the living room against the door, Kendra was shocked when Grayson brought her into his bedroom and slowly stripped her naked. Making love to her like she was the most precious gift in the world to him. Now, they were snuggling in his bed on a Saturday morning just talking getting to know each other even better.

"Grayson, you would be amazed at how long it took me to get to this place in my life. Back in my twenties, I was such a free-spirit and I fought hard to find ways to distinguish myself from everyone else around me."

"God, one thing I didn't want was to have an ordinary life. I searched out a wide assortment of things to make my mark on. I constantly thought something greater would come from my zany personality. I mean I don't know how my mother dealt with some of the off the wall stuff I did back then and not lose her mind."

“That’s what it is.” Grayson grabbed her wandering hand. He brought it to his mouth placing a kiss in the palm.

“What?” she questioned with a sudden frown.

“When I first met you in the basement I couldn’t figure out why I literally stopped in my tracks when I saw you. Now I know why,” Grayson confessed.

Letting go of her hand, he slipped his fingers through her hair.

“The air seemed to sizzle around us. The more I tried to look away from you. I couldn’t. You had this strength about you...like a hidden passion rooted inside of you like I was supposed to find.”

“My mother told me once I would...”

Grayson suddenly stopped talking to her and got out of the bed. He walked over to his discarded jeans he tossed there last night. She watched as Grayson yanked them on then made a beeline for the bedroom door.

Scared by the sudden change in Grayson, Kendra sat up in the bed pulling the sheet over her breasts,

“Grayson, what’s wrong? Talk to me.”

“Nothing is wrong. I just need a few minutes to myself,” he told her before opening the bedroom door and rushing out.

No! Grayson wasn’t going to rush out on her like this. She would find out what was going on. Getting out of the bed, Kendra grabbed one of Grayson’s dress

shirts off the back of a chair. She buttoned it up then hurried after him out the door.

Walking into the living room, Kendra spotted Grayson sitting on the couch with his head resting against the back of the couch and his eyes closed. She slowly made her way into the room sitting down on the living room table between his spread legs.

“Grayson, what happened? Why did you leave the bedroom?” Kendra asked, placing her hand on his hard thighs.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” he answered without looking at her.

“It might help if you got it out in the open. I don’t mind listening to you.”

“NO!” Grayson snapped.

“Grayson—”

“Damn it” Grayson growled, raising his head glaring at her. “I told you to leave it alone. I asked you to spend the night as my girlfriend and nothing more. I don’t need your psychologist crap tossed in my direction. Can’t you listen?”

Kendra was silenced by Grayson’s dark, angry expression. She wasn’t trying to be a psychologist with him. She only wanted to know what had upset him so much in the bedroom that he had to leave.

Well, if her presence bothered him so damn badly then she would leave his sorry ass here to get lost in his own pain and stubbornness. She got up from the

table and made her way back towards the bedroom.

“Kendra, where are you going?” Grayson asked her, but she sure as hell didn’t answer him.

Inside the bedroom, Kendra took off his shirt tossing it on the rumbled bed. Going over to the other side of the bed, she picked up her clothes from last night and got redressed. Grayson wanted some space from her. Hell, she wasn’t about to stay here if he didn’t want her around.

Kendra took one last look around the room making sure she didn’t leave anything then she left the room. Grayson jumped up off the couch as soon as he saw her.

“Kendra, wait! Don’t leave.” He tried to grab her arm, but she pushed him away without saying a word.

Noticing her purse over near the door where she dropped it last night, she snatched it up, unlocked the door and went out slamming it behind her.

Standing outside her door, Kendra searched through her purse for her key. The quicker she got inside of her condo and away from Grayson and his attitude the better off she would be for the rest of the day. She needed a break from each other.

Grayson’s condo door opened and closed softly behind her. “Baby, don’t leave. I’m sorry for losing my temper in there like I did. I still want us to spend the

day together. Come on over here and I can cook breakfast for you like I had planned.”

Finally finding her key at the very bottom of her purse, Kendra pulled it out and unlocked her door then walked inside. She wasn’t interested in doing anything with Grayson at the moment, but getting away from him.

“Are you going to say anything to me?” Grayson asked as she turned around to look at him.

“You wanted to be alone and now you are. Go home, Grayson,” Kendra said then closed the door in Grayson’s shocked face.

Chapter Twenty

Kendra sat back watching as Mary Jane spread butter over the top of her fluffy, hot pancakes and then reached for the container of maple syrup on the table pouring it all over the top.

“Thanks for inviting me to breakfast. I had to get out of my apartment,” she said as Mary Jane placed the container back on the restaurant table.

“I could tell you were upset from the way you answered the phone.” Cutting into the pancakes, Mary Jane grabbed some with her fork shoving them into her mouth.

“You’re right. I did need someone to talk to,” she admitted glancing down into her coffee cup before she took a sip. “Something happened last night.”

“Tell me. You know how much I hate to guess.” Mary Jane placed another forkful of buttermilk pancakes into her mouth.

Kendra decided to wait until Mary Jane finished chewing before she answered her. She didn’t need her best friend choking on her.

“I slept with Grayson.”

Mary Jane’s blue eyes grew wide in her face and her fork hit the table. “You

slept with your neighbor?” she shouted causing every head in the crowded restaurant to swing in their direction.

“Can you please lower your voice and not draw attention to us?” Kendra hissed, wanting to shake Mary Jane for embarrassing her.

“Sorry, boss,” Mary Jane apologized then took a sip of her orange juice. “You didn’t tell me things had gotten that serious between the two of you so fast.”

“They weren’t. It just kind of happened when we came back to his place after playing pool,” Kendra admitted.

“Pool is a very sexy game for a couple to play with all of the touching and bumping into each other. I can see why it happened. So, did Grayson toss you from his bed this morning and that’s why you’re upset. Men can be real bastards the next morning after sex.”

She gave Mary Jane a small shake of her head. “No, actually it was just the opposite. Grayson invited me to stay with him and everything was going practically perfect until Grayson said something about his mother and it pissed him off.”

“He left the bedroom and I followed him. He told me to get away from him and I gave him what he wanted...space.”

“You mean he didn’t try to stop you?” Mary Jane said as she slid her plate out of the way. “What an asshole!”

“You got that part wrong. Grayson did try to stop me, but I wasn’t in the mood to hear it so I just kept on walking.”

“Do you know what could have upset him like that? The way you have talked about him. Grayson didn’t come across like the type to lose his temper for no apparent reason.”

Right at the moment, Kendra didn’t care about what Grayson was feeling. There was no reason for him to lose control like he had with her. He should have talked to her not thrown a fit. She had too much going on in her life to deal with Grayson not wanting to open up to her.

“Are you planning to talk to him when you go back home?” Reaching into her purse, Mary Jane tossed a tip on the table for their meal.

“I’m not heading back home since it’s still so early in the day. I need to do some stuff at work. You know that the judge granted me the extra thirty minutes with Emma. So, now I have an hour starting on Monday. I’m going in for a couple of hours so I can get everything ready for her. Plus, I’m moving Peter’s appointment back to Mondays and Thursdays only. He isn’t bad enough anymore that he needs to see me three times a week like Emma.”

“Peter isn’t going to like getting his days cuts down,” Mary Jane said. “I think he really looks forward to his visits with you.”

“I know that’s the problem. He’s getting too attached to me. If cutting down

his days doesn't work, I'm going to refer him to another doctor. Peter does has real commitment issues and unless he starts listening to me. I won't be able to help him get over them and be able to move on with his life."

"I agree about Peter; however, I still think he's not going to be very agreeable with this change. I could be wrong, but I don't that I am. Do you need me to come to the office with you?"

Kendra got up from the table. She liked that Mary Jane wanted to come with her, but she would rather be alone to think and her office was just the place today.

"Thanks for the offer, but I want this time alone. Go on home and enjoy the rest of the day. Don't you usually go to the park on Saturday and catch up on your reading?" She knew that her assistant was an avid reader and sometimes could read three books in a week.

"Yes, I do, but I can come with you instead. I can even bring my book with me and read at my desk. I just don't like the idea of you being at the office all alone on a Saturday," she said, getting up from the table.

"Mary Jane, you're very sweet, but you shouldn't change your Saturday plans for me. Now, let's hit the road. I have a stack of patient's files waiting for me on my desk. I might actually get caught up on my notes today."

Kendra turned and headed for the door. Mary Jane didn't understand that

she would rather be at work instead of going back to her condo and dealing with Grayson. She had men in her past who constantly tossed her career in her face and she thought Grayson would be different, but she was wrong.

Thank God, things hadn't gotten any deeper between them or she would have been more disappointed than she already was.

Chapter Twenty One

Why in the hell did he push Kendra away like he had this morning? After the amazing night they shared and afterwards she agreed to spend the weekend at his place. He had to go and lose his temper after bringing up something his mother had told him when he was a kid.

God, he hated anytime he thought about the parent who abandoned him at five years old because she couldn't handle being married or a parent anymore.

For the longest time, he thought she would come back but when he turned thirteen he finally realized it wasn't going to happen and that's when he started to rebel against his father.

Growing up part Native American because of his mother and part white because of his father had been hard on him when his moved them back to his small hometown, but he found a way to get through it.

A lot of time he would get comments at school from the other kids, but he never let it get him down. Things started getting better for him when he tried out for sports in high school and eventually become the captain of the football team. Girls and guys seemed to respect him more and it was there he realized what

having power could do for him.

It taught him the more power he possessed the less likely he was to get hurt or humiliated. He didn't have to be liked by others, but they sure in the hell better respect him and what he had become.

Before moving here, he usually relied on his sharp intellect when making any kind of decisions or evaluating situations, but after having Kendra around he was using his feeling and instincts more.

One thing was for sure. He wasn't going to lose Kendra over the stupid argument that he took the total blame for. His words this morning had to sting Kendra when he yelled at her for no fault of her own.

She might be avoiding him right now, but he could wait for her to come back home. He wasn't sure if an apology would be enough, but he would figure out the right thing to say or do to get her back with him.

Ever since Kendra left his condo, Grayson knew it was his fault but it took him a second to really admit it to himself by rising above the situation to evaluate it with objectivity. Kendra was important to him and he had to get over this crash and burn idea in his head.

Yes, it was hard for him to be dating a woman who made more money than him. Yet, if he continued to obsess over it in his mind he wouldn't be able to think straight. Building a relationship; with Kendra is what he wanted the more time he

spent around her.

Every beautiful part of Kendra aroused him. She ignited his emotions stimulated his mind with her intelligence and had his thoughts running wild about how unbelievably satisfying it will be once he conquered her sassy personality unless his short temper made her storm out again on him.

She was the first woman that made him hungry to discover more about what made her tick. Kendra gave him the impression her uniqueness would enrich his life if he allowed it... which meant he had to let go of his need for power.

Financial and social power was a very intoxicating for him since he learned at a young age what it could do for a man. Most people didn't experience the true sensations of having power brought into your life. It was a very energizing high, but the feeling wasn't so enjoyable that he was willingly to lose what he was building with Kendra for it.

Getting up from the chair, Grayson grabbed the gift and flowers off the table he went out and bought earlier. He wasn't going to lose Kendra. She stirred his desire and enticed him. Kendra wasn't making it easy to win her over.

Honestly, her leaving him this morning made him lust after her even more. Kendra was in his sights and he wasn't about to let her go until she became a permanent part of his life.

Going out of the front door, Grayson made his way over to Kendra's condo.

She had been gone most of the day, so she had to be back home by now. If Kendra wasn't then who in the hell had she run to when he shoved her away?

All he knew was it better not be another man. He never learned to share well as a child or teenager and he sure in the hell wasn't about to start now being an adult.

Chapter Twenty Two

Standing outside her condo door, Kendra glanced down at the white box wrapped with a huge red bow and the bouquet of flowers left there. She already knew who left them, but why would Grayson go through all of this trouble?

He showed her earlier that he wouldn't be able to open up to her because he had a problem with her job. How could they ever build anything with that in the way? It would be best of the both of them if they left things alone and moved on from each other.

"I thought you would never get home. I guess you stayed away so long because of me?"

Spinning around, Kendra looked at Grayson relaxed in the doorway in his usual position with his shoulder against the door jam, shirtless, with a pair of well-washed jeans riding low on his hips, barefoot with a dish towel tossed over his left shoulder.

"You're wrong. I didn't stay away because of you," Kendra lied. "I had some errands to run and other personal stuff to take care of."

"You didn't have either one of those things when you decided to spend the

weekend with me. They only happened after the way I treated you which made you leave,” Grayson stated.

Kendra mentally kicked herself for getting caught up in a lie. Grayson was right and he knew it too. “Fine, you’re right. I was staying away because of you. But now, I’m home so how about you go back into your condo and I’ll go into mine,” she suggested.

“I think that’s a horrible idea.” Pushing his shoulder away from the door, Grayson sauntered over to her. Placing his hand above her head, he leaned into her blocking her body between his and the door behind her.

“I’m sorry about what happened this morning. I shouldn’t have lost my temper like I did. The argument was totally my fault. Do you think you can forgive me?”

“No.” the answer was swift and fast. After what happened earlier she realized there was no time for romance with Grayson in her busy schedule.

“Please, Kendra,” Grayson whispered as his lips brushed against her neck. “I’m truly sorry about my behavior. I shouldn’t have lost my temper.”

He raised his head gazing into her eyes. “Don’t you want to look at the present I got for you? I think you’ll like it.”

Grayson did act like he was truly sorry for the fight they had hours ago and wanted to make up for the words he tossed at her. She wasn’t surprised to see

Grayson waiting for her. What shocked her most was how he apologized for his mistake.

“Grayson, if you have a problem with my career I worked so hard to achieve then we aren’t ever going to have a relationship with each other.”

Her last boyfriend voiced his opinion about how her work was always more important than him and she was the one who caused him to find pleasure and love in another woman’s arms...which was a right out lie. David wanted to cheat on her and he did it. None of it was her fault like he was pushing her to believe.

“Kendra, I can handle your career. I’ll make a big effort not to let it come between us. I should have never tossed it in your face and I’m very sorry. How about you grab your gift and flowers then come back over to my place. I truly hated that you left.”

Any other man she would have told to get lost but Grayson’s masterful persuasion changed her mind. So, her vow about not becoming involved with him just got shattered.

“I’m not making any promises that I’m going to stay, but I’ll come over for a little while.”

“Sweetheart, I’ll take what I can get.” His lips brushed against her as he spoke. Raising his mouth from hers, he gazed into her eyes then stepped away.

“Let’s go beautiful. I’ll grab your present and flowers.”

Easing away from Grayson, she scooted inside of his condo and he followed, closing the door behind then locking it. “Do you want something to eat or drink?” Grayson asked.

“No, I’ve already eaten and I’m not thirsty.” Kendra took a seat on Grayson’s couch wondering what was in the box he was holding.

“Why don’t you open your gift while I put your flowers in some water and then I can tell you why I got so upset this morning?” Grayson handed her the medium white box before leaving her and going inside the kitchen.

Holding the box, Kendra turned it around a couple of times before the excitement of getting a present got the better of her. She tore into the gift and pulled out a man’s dress shirt similar to the one like Grayson’s she had worn this morning.

“I loved how my girlfriend looked wearing my shirt before I became an asshole and you took it off. I was hoping I might get lucky enough and you would put it on again.” Grayson said as he came back into the room placing the flowers down on a table in front of them.

Folding up the shirt, Kendra placed it back into the box and then laid it next to the flowers. “I think before that happens again we need to get everything out in the open.”

“You’re right. I can’t agree with you more.” Grayson picked a t-shirt up off

the side of the couch and pulled it over his head before joining her.

“First, I want you to know that I wasn’t mad at you because you’re the best surprise that has come into my life,” Grayson said. “I got upset with the fact I brought my mother into our conversation.”

“You aren’t close to your mother?” Kendra wouldn’t admit it to anyone that her own mother drove her up the wall sometimes, but she loved her dearly and would do anything for her.

“My mother walked out on me and my father when I was only five years old. I kept thinking she was going to come back, but after awhile it hit me that she wasn’t. I don’t have a lot of memories of her, but the clear one that I do. She was telling me about how to know the woman was meant for me when I met her.”

“Since my mother was Native American she believed the visions she had would come true. Every day she told me I would meet my other half and surprisingly it was how we met each other and it only hit me this morning. After I had gotten older, for years I thought her visions were foolish until it came crashing back to me today while I was in bed with you.”

Reaching out, Kendra placed her hand on top of Grayson’s. She couldn’t help but think about the disappointment and confusion the five year old little boy felt back then wondering why his mother left him. Grayson’s mom left him at an age that a little boy needed his mother’s attention the most.

Turning her hand over, Grayson wrapped his fingers around hers. “Grayson, I’m so sorry that happened to you. I can understand better now why you were so upset.”

“I guess since we’re coming clear about our past. I should open up more about mine.” Kendra thought it might be time to tell someone else about David. Mary Jane was the only person who knew the real reason she broke up with David.

She knew she couldn’t have confided in her mother about David cheating on her. Or her mother would have been on the first plane down here ready to defend her because her loving mother was big on nobody better mess with her baby girl.

“What are you talking about?” Grayson asked her.

“I dated this guy for about four years while I was getting my career off the ground and running. I was working long hours trying to get clients and my name out there as a psychologist. Well, since I had to do all of that I was spending less time with him. In his mind, he decided that gave him the right to cheat on me.”

“Kendra, your ex was a bastard and didn’t deserve you. I’m not needy for your time. I understand what it is to work long hours to have a successful business. I’m not jealous of you in that way.”

She was hearing the words, but Grayson didn’t understand he wasn’t acting like he wasn’t bothered by it.

“Grayson, you’re saying all of the right words but do you mean them? I have too much going on not to be in relationship with a man who is going to turn out like my ex. If you think you have any kind of insecurity about what I do or the money I make then we need to end things before they go any further between us.”

“Baby, I’m not interested in any other woman but you. I would be crazy to look at someone else when I have the woman I want to right in front of me. Do you believe me?”

New and unexpected warmth surged through her. As Grayson studied her, she felt the truthfulness in his words. “Yes, I believe you,” she answered. “So, what are you going to do to make sure you never chase me off again?”

Grayson stared at her and then burst out laughing. Kendra liked how that small sound eased the tension between them making everything back to normal.

“How about I think more before I shove my foot into my mouth?” Grayson asked as he pulled her to him.

“That’s a very good start,” Kendra said and then kissed Grayson on his sensual mouth.

Returning her kiss for a few minutes, Grayson finally moved away from her, looking deep into her eyes and she could see the seriousness in his expression. “I’m serious, Kendra. I’m not like that jerk who hurt you. I won’t break your heart by cheating on you. It’s not in me.”

Deep down, Kendra knew Grayson wasn't immature and needy as David and that was the only thing that mattered to her.

Chapter Twenty Three

Grayson finished up the last code for the updated website he was working on for Director Enterprises. The first two he finished last week were now up and running with over a thousand more hits than the old website ever got in a six month period. It looked like his plans were working.

Hopefully, this last website would do exactly the same thing and show Preston and Stamford he was completely capable of handling a bigger responsibility than he had at the moment.

Work was getting better for him and if things turned out the way he planned, his work life would be a perfect as his personal life was with Kendra. Everything between them was getting better and better with each passing day.

Kendra had forgiving him for snapping at her that day in his condo which had been the biggest mistake of his life. He made sure now that he was very open and honest with her about everything.

Just last night after finishing their dinner they went for a walk in the park holding hands like they didn't have a care in the world. All he thought about was how much pleasure Kendra had brought into his life.

Trina was right when she told him something unexpected would happen when he came here. He treasured that he felt safe enough to let his guard down around Kendra and was able to be himself.

The words he told Kendra weren't lies. No matter how overwhelmed he got with work. He would always find a way to make sure she came first. He cared about her and if anything went awry again. He'd deal with it, so Kendra wouldn't wander off and find another man to take his place. She was showing him what the true meaning of quality time was and how to infuse it into their relationship.

The most important thing he hoped Kendra knew that when she was having a hard time after work was she could tell him about her problems. She kept everything so locked up inside, but she had him now to talk with.

"Here, I thought you would be working so hard and I find you staring off into space," A female voice teased drawing his eyes away from the laptop on his desk.

"Kendra, what are you doing here?" Grayson asked completely shocked as he got up from his seat. Walking over to her, he kissed her on the mouth and then stepped back.

Kendra moved away from him to take a look around his office. "I had some extra time before my next client showed up, so I decided to come and check on my handsome boyfriend. The security guy down at the front desk almost didn't allow

me to come up, but I charmed him and here I am.”

“Baby, I’m so glad to see you. I’ll have a talk with the security guys so you won’t run into that problem the next time you come to visit me.” Grayson eyed the white wraparound dress that was showing off all of Kendra’s assets to perfection that he loved so much.

“You look very sexy in that dress. I didn’t know you had left wearing this.”

“Of course, you didn’t because you left my place early and headed back to yours. I love this dress. My mother gave it to me last year for Christmas,” Kendra replied, running her hands over the fabric covering her stunning figure.

“I would like it better if you had saved it for me instead of showing it off at work,” Grayson admitted as he grabbed Kendra’s hand then he took her over to his desk. Taking a seat behind it, he tugged Kendra down onto his lap.

“I shouldn’t be sitting on your lap while you’re at work. It isn’t very professional.” Kendra tried to get up but Grayson wrapped his arm around her waist holding her in place.

“Don’t worry about it. We are here by ourselves. Now tell me how work has been going for you today.” He wanted to share Kendra that he cared about what was going on in her life.

Running her hand down the front of his pressed shirt, Kendra scooted closer to him surrounding them in the scent of her sexy perfume. “I can’t tell you

everything because of patient and client confidentiality, but the patient I have coming in at one worries me.”

“I know you’ll be able to find a way to reach them. Don’t let it worry you. You’re very good at your job.”

“Thanks, I hope you’re right,” Kendra sighed. “Enough about me how is your day going have you done anything fun or exciting that you want to share with me?”

His work day was turning out better than he thought, all of the improvements for Director Enterprises he brought up in his report last week with his boss were starting to be implemented into a computer programs.

He was already seeing the difference with the reports he printed out this morning. With any luck, all of this would work towards his advantage, but he wasn’t ready to talk about it with Kendra yet. He wanted to keep it a secret until everything worked out for him.

“How about we stop talking about our jobs and do something a lot more fun in my opinion since our time is limited?” Grayson asked Kendra in a voice that held a rasp of excitement.

“Are you thinking about the same fun thing as me?” He was rewarded with a grin that looked dazzling against Kendra’s mocha skin.

“I hope so.”

Chapter Twenty Four

Lowering his head, Grayson claimed Kendra's mouth with his. He moved his mouth over hers, devouring the softness and sweetness he found there. The touch of Kendra's full lips was a delicious sensation making him wish they were anywhere but his office.

She returned his kiss with such a reckless abandon that he tugged her to his chest, pressing her breasts against him. He groaned harshly and pulled her lower lip into his mouth, nibbled at it then slowly released it.

"Do we need to come back?" a masculine voice cut in breaking them apart like they just got doused by cold water.

Shocked by the sound of the unexpected voice, Grayson's head swung in the direction of his office door and he was stunned to find Preston along with Stamford standing there with huge grins on their faces.

"Oh God, I'm so embarrassed," Kendra cried as she scrambled off his lap and fixed her clothes.

Standing up in a less panic mode than Kendra, Grayson tried not to laugh at the uncomfortable look on his usually relaxed and composed girlfriend's beautiful

face. He grabbed Kendra by the arm, so she wouldn't leave the room in a rush before he had the chance to introduce her to his bosses.

Truthfully, there was no reason for them to be uncomfortable because they got caught kissing. It was something couples in love did all of the time.

Grayson's heart stopped in the center of his chest as the words from his thoughts settled in. He *loved* the idea that he had found the same kind of love Stamford and Preston shared with their wives. He couldn't wait to introduce her to his bosses.

"Stamford and Preston, I want you to meet my girlfriend, Doctor Kendra Winstead," Grayson said, making the introductions. "Kendra, these are my bosses Stamford King and Preston Scott."

Kendra moved his hand off her arm and shook Stamford's and then Preston's hand. "Nice to meet you, Mr. King and Mr. Scott, but I have to get going. I have a one o'clock appointment I can't be late for."

"It was nice to meet you too, Kendra," Stamford and Preston said, looking at Kendra and then at him with a knowing look in their eyes.

Kendra stepped away from him and moved in the direction of the door. "Grayson, I'm going to leave now, so you can get back to work. I'll see you back at the condo." She gave him one last look and then went out the door.

"Kendra, wait a minute," Grayson yelled hurrying out the door so he could

catch her. He couldn't let Kendra go without another kiss to keep him going through the day.

Stopping in her tracks, Kendra spun around waiting for him to catch up with her. Grayson couldn't stop the love he felt for Kendra from pumping through his veins. The feeling was so intoxicating that he never wanted it to go away.

"Grayson, I have to get back to work or I will be late for my next patient."

"Don't worry. You'll get back to work on time," he promised stepping in front of her. "I only wanted to tell you two things."

"What are they?" Kendra asked him as she moved closer.

"I want to tell you not to be embarrassed that Preston and Stamford caught us in my office making out. They're probably very happy I'm not spending all of my time at work slaving away over the computer anymore."

"I know I shouldn't be embarrassed, but I was," Kendra admitted. "That isn't the first impression I wanted to make at your work place. So, what's the second thing?"

"I love you." The words rang out in the hallway. Grayson watched as Kendra's eyes blinked a couple of times as she processed what he just told her.

"You love me?" Kendra whispered, softly.

"Yes, baby. I love you. The feeling I felt when I introduced you as my girlfriend was indescribable, then it hit me that it came from being in love with

you.”

“Grayson, I love you too,” Kendra confessed, hugging him. “I have never fallen this quickly for a man before.”

“I’m glad that I’m your first and last.” Grayson wrapped his arms around his woman loving how good Kendra felt against him. “Because, I’m not about to let you go for anything in the world. You’re mine and I’m going to keep you forever.”

Easing back from him, Kendra looked up into his face. “Grayson, I hate to tell you, but you have to let me go.”

“Why?” Grayson demanded as he leaned back from Kendra. Where did she think she was going without him? “What are you talking about?”

“I need to get back to work and I can’t unless you let me leave,” Kendra teased.

Grayson kissed Kendra on the mouth then moved back. “Have a great day at work. I’ll meet up with you after we get home.”

“Oh, that sound like a promise to me,” Kendra teased taking a step back from him.

“Do you want me to show you how serious I am?” Grayson asked desire in his voice.

“I would love to, but you have to catch me first.” Kendra spun around and hurried towards the exit sign when he took a little step towards her.

Standing in the hallway, Grayson stared after Kendra admiring how good she looked in her dress and thrilled Kendra was his woman.

Chapter Twenty Five

“Mama, I haven’t been avoiding you. You know I work different hours,” Kendra said, tossing her purse and house keys on the table.

She heard the phone ringing when she was in the hallway and hurried up to unlock the door thinking it was Grayson calling her, but it ended up being her mother instead.

“Kendra, when are you are going to stop spending all of your time at work and go out and meet a man?” her mother complained. “Sweetheart, I have this guy from church who has been asking about you. You should let me give Stanley your phone number.”

Kendra kicked off her shoes then moved in the direction of the kitchen. “Mama, are you talking about toupee Stanley? I don’t want him calling me besides I’m dating someone.”

There was a slight pause on the other end of the phone then her mother said. “Kendra, are you telling me the truth? I know Stanley isn’t the best looking man, but he has a good job and really likes you. You might even be able to talk him into stop wearing the toupee.”

Opening up the refrigerator, Kendra pulled out the casserole she prepared yesterday and laid it on the counter. “Mama, I’m not lying to you. I’m dating someone and his name is Grayson. Besides, if I wasn’t dating Grayson I wouldn’t be interested in dating Stanley. He reminds me of a black Carrot Top with that God awful toupee he wears.”

“Sweetheart, it isn’t nice to make fun of Stanley’s hair issues.”

Kendra turned on the oven and slid the broccoli and cheese casserole inside. “You know I’m telling you the truth,” she insisted, closing the oven door.

“Enough about Stanley are you bringing this Grayson with you to my party tomorrow? I want to meet this new man in your life because my daughter only deserves the best.”

“Grayson is amazing. We are so perfect for each other. I like having him in my life.” Kendra set the timer for the food then left the kitchen.

“Sweetie, I can’t wait until I meet this young man. Remember the party starts at eight. Please try to be on time. No more showing up fifteen minutes before the party if over. I know what you’re doing.”

Darn it!

She hoped her mother wouldn’t ever catch on to her plan. She wasn’t interested in her mother’s friends giving her advice about how to find a good man and move back home near her mother. Her neighbor’s meddling is one of the

reasons she moved over to the next town.

“Mama, I don’t have any idea what you’re talking about, but I’ll be at your party tomorrow.”

“With Grayson?”

“I’ll ask him, but I’m not making any promises,” Kendra said, secretly wondering if Grayson was ready for her mother and her friends.

“Okay, sweetheart,” her mother said. “I have to go. I’m working on a new recipe. I’ll see you tomorrow at the party.”

“See you then and I love you, mama.”

“I love you too, baby.” The phone went dead in her ear and Kendra tossed it down.

God Bless her mother. She loved her to death, but she was forever the matchmaker mixed with an overprotective parent.

Taking the hairpins out of her hair, she ran her fingers through it and then tossed the pins down on the table. She wasn’t sure what Grayson would tell her about attending her mother’s party with her. He might turn her down and she understood how meeting your girlfriend’s mother for the first time could be a little intimidating for him.

However, all she knew was Grayson blew her away today confessing his love for her outside his office. The sense of fulfillment she felt after hearing those

words was astonishing. Her heart swelled with a feeling she had thought long since dead.

If someone had told her weeks ago she would have found the love of her life while doing laundry in the basement. She would have called them crazy. Her attraction to Grayson came because he was different and very distinctive. She admired how he wanted to be his own person.

Grayson owned a way of keeping things exciting between them which helped her stay interested in seeing how far their relationship could go. She didn't have a doubt whatever it was Grayson would keep her fascinated.

Tomorrow would show her how well Grayson would fit into her family after he attended her mother's party. As much as she would love to overanalyze her mother's party tomorrow, she didn't have any more time to do it. She still had to get undressed and finish working on dinner.

Hopefully, Grayson wouldn't decide to work late and make it home in time so they both could eat dinner together. She wondered would he bring it up again about the two of them moving in together instead of paying rent on two condos. He didn't think it made any sense since she spent more time at his place now instead of hers.

She liked that Grayson wanted her to move in with him, but she liked having the freedom of coming back to her place anytime she wanted. No, she

wasn't ready to move in with Grayson yet. Yes, she loved him but she still loved being her own woman.

Kendra's attention was pulled away from her thoughts when two knocks sounded on her condo door and she hurried over to answer it. Swinging the door open, Kendra circled her arms around Grayson's neck and planted a kiss on his mouth.

"Hey, baby," she whispered as Grayson picked her up and carried her back into the condo kicking the door closed with the heel of his shoes.

"Hey back, gorgeous. What smells so good?" Grayson kissed her on the mouth before putting her down.

"Supper, it's in the oven," Kendra answered.

Grayson took off his suit jacket and tie tossing it in a near by chair. "What else have you been doing since you got home?" He came back over and stood in front of her.

"I talked to my mother. She wants me to bring you to her pre-Christmas party tomorrow. Do you want to go with me?"

"Are you going to show me off and brag about how I love everything about you?"

Grayson's fingers worked at untying the sash at her side. Getting her dress undone, he slipped it off her shoulder allowing it to fall to the carpet behind her.

“Grayson, what are you doing? The food will be ready soon.”

“All I thought about while I was at work was coming back home and making love to my beautiful girlfriend. I’m hungry, but not for food,” Grayson said, looking at her. “Stay right here.”

Grayson left her standing in the living room then went into the kitchen and came back a few minutes later. “Food is off. Now, let’s get to something a lot more delicious than a plate whatever is inside of your oven.” Swinging her up into his arms, Grayson carried her back to the bedroom.

Chapter Twenty Six

Lying her down on the bed, Grayson's eyes raked slowly over her body. "God, you're so breathtaking. I can't believe you're mine." Long fingers finished removing the rest of her clothing until she was completely naked.

Excitement swamped through Kendra as Grayson lowered his head taking her nipples into his warm, hot mouth. As he made love to her breasts, she eased her hands between them working at the buttons on his shirt. She slipped it half way off his shoulders.

"I can't get it off the rest of way," Kendra complained, pulling at the shirt.

"It's okay. Let me help you." Grayson got off the bed, and slowly shredded all of his clothes until he was naked in front of her.

All thoughts of eating supper left her mind as her lustful need for Grayson took over. Her body hummed for the moment his hard, long, thick cock would be inside making love to her in the way she loved so much.

With a light in his dark brown eyes, Grayson laid back down on top of her pulling her swollen nipples back into the wet cavern of his mouth.

"Damn, you smell so good," Grayson groaned as he let go of her breast

pressing his nose against the side of her neck.

“Grayson, I’m wearing the same perfume I always do,” Kendra laughed as his finger skimmed down her sides.

“I guess it smells different now because it’s on the woman I love.”

“God, you know the way into a woman’s heart, don’t you?” she teased.

“The only woman’s heart I want is yours,” he said, lifting his head to gaze to her.

His eyes told her everything she wanted to know. He watched her like she was the object of his desire. She gasped when Grayson lowered his head and licked her skin right about her navel.

Her body hummed and blood raced through her head as Grayson spread her legs into a wide V lapping at the cream pouring from her body.

A loud moan escaped from her throat as Grayson’s mouth moved to the side of her leg and he inserted on thick finger inside of her. Squirming on the bed, Kendra tried to get Grayson’s finger deeper inside of her wetness.

“Baby, do you like that?” he whispered against her skin then gave the side of her leg a long lick.

Kendra tried to form an answer but Grayson took that moment to remove his finger replacing it with his tongue. Her body jerked up, she grabbed Grayson’s head holding him in place as her orgasm raked throughout her body nearly making

her black out because it was so powerful.

As she came back down her earth-shattering high, Kendra found Grayson on top of her with his hard cock pressed against her stomach and a lustful look in his hypnotic eyes.

Chapter Twenty Seven

Grayson slowly eased his erection inside of Kendra loving how her body willingly accepted him. This wasn't the first time that they had made love, but it felt different more...*hot!*

He could feel the heat of Kendra wrapped around him as he slowly rocked into her and mewling sounds came from deep inside of her soft body.

"Damn you feel so good," he groaned as he rocked into her.

"God...I can't handle," Kendra whimpered as she wrapped her legs around his hips. Her manicure nails scratched at his back as she urged him on. He continued to pump into her as he pulled her wrists on either side of her head holding them there.

"Yes, you can. Give it to me. Let it go, Kendra. Stop holding it in. Give it all to me."

Grayson reclaimed Kendra's full lips slipping his tongue inside of her mouth. Taking the tip of his tongue, he explored the recesses of her mouth loving the sweet taste he found lurking there pushing him to continue what he was doing.

Tearing his mouth away, Grayson tried to keep the pleasure going as long as

he could. He wasn't ready for it to end. Sweat poured down his face dripping onto Kendra's chest mingling with the dampness already there.

Seeing Kendra's body all covered with sweat while her body met him stroke for stroke made him even hotter. He already thought Kendra was a sensual woman, but her sensuality was only getting more enhanced in his mind by the way her body worked so well with his.

"Grayson... *please.*"

"Please, what baby?" Grayson asked as he unwrapped Kendra's legs from around his waist holding them down to the bed so he could go deeper and harder.

Kendra's head thrashed back and forth on the pillow as her orgasm started to come. Her eyes closed as she screamed her release as it raced throughout her body.

Seconds after Kendra came Grayson hollered his release as it shot through his entire body so hard that he almost passed out from the intensity of it. As Grayson slowly came back down from his high he let go of Kendra's thighs.

Rolling over to his side, he tugged Kendra against his body and she came willingly into his arms. If he ever doubted, his love for the woman next to him tonight sealed the deal in his heart and mind.

Chapter Twenty Eight

“Are you ready to meet my mother?” Kendra asked as she stood outside on her mother’s front porch and fixed Grayson’s tie. “I have to warn you that she’s very blunt. She doesn’t mince her words for anyone...not even me.”

Grabbing her by the waist, Grayson yanked her to his body planting a kiss on her mouth. “Baby, I’m here to be with you not get the support of your mother. Now, how about we go inside and you can show me off to your family and friends,” Grayson suggested.

“Remember, I warned you.” Kendra patted Grayson on the chest and then rang the doorbell.

“I’m not scared,” Grayson whispered grabbing her hand before the front door opened with her mother standing on the other side.

“Kendra, you actually got her early,” her mother said, hugging her then stepped back and gave her attention to Grayson. “So, you’re the man who my daughter was talking about when I called her on the phone yesterday. You’re a lot older than I thought you’d be. The last guy she dated named David was such an immature asshole. I hated him with a passion, but I never told Kendra.”

“Mama!” Kendra hissed taken back her mother had been so blunt with Grayson.

“Honey, you know I’m right. I was so glad with the two of you broke up Now, Grayson are you going to make me hate you or like you?”



Grayson knew he was a grown man, but the way Kendra mother’s sharp hazel eyes locked with his made him want to take a step back. Kendra was right her mother didn’t have a problem telling him what she thought. However, he could see where Kendra got her good looks from. Kendra wore her hair long, but her mother’s hair was a lot shorter with little layers to it. Honestly, they could almost pass for twins. It was amazing how young Kendra’s mother looked.

“Yes, I’m Grayson Rane,” he finally answered. “It’s very nice to meet you Ms. Winstead,” he said, extending his hand. “I hope you will end up liking me more than Kendra’s ex-boyfriend.”

“Grayson, nice to meet you too. We’ll have to wait and see if you can impress me more than David had. Now, why don’t the two of you come inside? There are so many people waiting to meet you and my beautiful daughter.”

Turning around, Kendra’s mother went back into the house leaving them to follow her but Grayson was a little nervous about who might be waiting for them in there after the experience he just went through.

“I told you that you better be ready for my mother. I can promise you that her friends are the same way and some of them can be even worse. They don’t pull any punches,” Kendra told me letting go of his hand and walking inside.

Grayson took a deep breath hoping he passed any test that he might be put through at the party, but none of it mattered because Kendra knew he loved her. It had been a while since he had got introduced to a girlfriend’s family. All he hoped was he didn’t stick his foot into his mouth too much.

Following Kendra into the house, he closed the door behind him and caught up with her. He linked their fingers together as they walked into the crowded dining room. “I didn’t know there would be this many people here,” he said, staring at a room full of about seventy-five plus guests.

“This is small compared to the other pre-Christmas parties my mother had thrown in the past. I guess some of her other friends weren’t able to make it,” Kendra said as she waved at someone across the room. “Just don’t be nervous. I swear these people can smell fear ten yards away.”

“I’m not scared of anything,” Grayson whispered in Kendra’s ear as he wrapped his arm around her waist.

“Oh God, here he comes.”

“Who are you talking about?” Grayson asked.

“Look straight in front of you the man in the dark gray suit with the gray

and white striped tie. He's name is Stanley Newton and my mother has been trying to fix me up with him for the past two years. Lord, I was hoping I would be able to avoid him longer than this."

"Is he wearing a toupee?"

"Yes and he thinks people believes it is his real hair," Kendra answered.

"Okay, he's almost here. Please just smile and let him talk. He has a way of rubbing everyone the wrong way."

Grayson tugged Kendra closer to his side a second before Stanley stopped in front of them with a drink in his hand. He wouldn't say anything unless Stanley overstepped his boundaries with his comments to Kendra and then he would but to end the conversation very quickly.

"Hello, Kendra," Stanley said without bothering to even look in his direction. "You look very stunning in that little black dress. Would you like to dance?"

"If you didn't know, Kendra is here with me," Grayson cut in before Kendra could say a word.

Stanley's head turned in his direction and then he took a sip of his drink. "I didn't ask if she was here with you, buddy. Do you have a problem with your hearing? I asked Kendra if she wanted to dance. There is a huge difference you know," he snickered.

Grayson let go of Kendra's waist and took a step towards the shorter and fatter man. "How about you back away from us and go bother someone else?"

"Oh, you're a lot tougher than the last loser Kendra dated. David was too busy flirting with the other woman at the last party Kendra's mother had to even stay with her. So, where did she find you?"

"Stanley, why don't you go? Grayson and I were doing fine without you coming over here," Kendra said then touched him on the arm when he took another step towards the irritating man in front of him.

Grayson prayed that Stanley took Kendra's advice before he decided to move him away in his own way and he was better sure that Ms. Winstead wouldn't be too pleased with the way he did it.

"All, I said was that you weren't a big asshole as Kendra's last boyfriend," Stanley tossed back at him.

"You should have listen to Kendra when she told you to leave."

"Grayson, don't let Stanley get to you. Let's go and dance." Kendra grabbed him by the hand and pulled him in the direction of the dance floor at the other side of the room.

Grayson took one last look at Stanley before he got lost in the crowd on the dance floor with Kendra. "I can't believe that guy had enough nerve to hit on you right in front of me. I still should go back over there and make sure he understands

that you're mine."

"I think everyone in the room heard the two of you arguing," Kendra said as she wrapped her arms around his neck. "Don't let Stanley get to you. He's a lonely old man and always will be with the attitude he has."

"Baby, I only wanted to tell that jerk to stay away from you. He needs to know when to step back." Grayson pressed Kendra against his chest and moved his body to the music. He didn't think when he came to the party. He would almost get into a fight with a man over his girlfriend.

"How about we push Stanley to the back of our minds and just enjoy this moment. Don't you realize this is our first dance?"

Looking down at Kendra's, he cupped the side of her face with his hand.

"Baby, you're right. How about we do something to even make this more special?"

"Like what," she flirted back standing up on tiptoes as he lowered his head.

"This."

His lips brushed against Kendra's as he spoke before he captured them with his. Her lips were soft and moist which made him only want to deepen the kiss even more. Sliding his hands down her waist, Grayson held her against him as his cock grew harder and he rubbed it against her stomach.

A wave of passion flowed between them because the feeling was more than sexual desire...it was love.

A light tap on Grayson's shoulder raised his head away from Kendra's intoxicating mouth. Glancing over his shoulder, he found Kendra's mother standing there with her arms folded and a very disapproving look on her face.

"Mr. Rane, will you please keep a respectable distance between you and my daughter?" she scolded. "Don't make me come back over here and separate the two of you again."

"Yes, ma'am," Grayson grinned before Mrs. Winstead walked away blending into the crowd.

"Oh, you're in trouble," Kendra laughed, tapping him on the shoulder. "I told you she didn't play games."

"Fine, I'll keep my hands off of you but we can continue this later when we are alone, because I'm not finished with you yet."

"Grayson, you know that we will be spending the night at my mother's right? So, we wouldn't be able to make love until we get back home on Sunday night."

What! He didn't know thing about this! Surely, Kendra didn't think he could last three days without her sleeping next to him in the bed. No...he would make sure that he ended up in Kendra's bed tonight one way or another.

"If you say so, Kendra," Grayson said, twirling his girlfriend around on the dance floor.

“Grayson, what are you planning?” Kendra questioned.

“Nothing... All I want to do is enjoy our dance and that’s it.” He tugged Kendra closer to him when the band started playing a slower song.



Lying in bed alone later that night, Kendra listened to the wind blowing outside wondering what room her mother placed Grayson in away from her. She was pleased that Grayson handled the party so well. He only got into one argument and that had been with Stanley, but thankful Stanley hadn’t stayed at the party much longer after the confrontation.

Placing her hand on the empty spot next to her, she ran her hands across the sheet wishing that Grayson was there with her. She hated that he wasn’t, but there was no way her mother would approve of Grayson sharing a bed with her while she was here for the weekend.

Closing her eyes, Kendra turned over on her side and tried to get some sleep because she wasn’t going to be able to do anything else tonight. She was finally about to drift off to sleep when she heard the bedroom door open. Thinking it was her mother she laid still because she wasn’t in the mood to have a lecture about Grayson.

“Kendra, are you awake?” Grayson’s voice whispered in the dark.

Shocked at hearing his voice, Kendra sat up in the bed looking over at the

door. “Grayson, what are you doing in here?” she asked as he came towards her and sat down on the edge of the bed. “How did you know what room I was in? My mother is good at placing visitors at the other end of the house.”

“I followed behind the two of you to make sure I knew what room you were in,” Grayson said as he climbed into the bed next to her. “Didn’t I make promise to continue tonight where we left off on the dance floor?”

“Grayson, are you crazy? We can’t have sex in my mother’s house.”

“Good because I don’t want to have sexy with my girlfriend. I want to make love to her,” Grayson corrected as he started removing her nightgown and pulled it over her head. His lips seared a path down her neck, her shoulders as they made a straight line for her nipples.

Kendra slid her fingers through Grayson’s hair and bit down on her bottom lip to keep from groaning out loud because the last thing either one of them needed was her mother bursting in on them.

Chapter Twenty Nine

“Kendra, where have you been?” Mary Jane asked running to her past two police officers. “I have been trying to get a hold of you since this morning. I know you’re usually at the office early on Monday mornings.”

“I spent the weekends at my mother and then got into town late Sunday night with Grayson. I stayed at his home and my cell phone was turned off. Mary Jane, what is going on? Why are all of these cops here?”

Grabbing her by the arm, Mary Jane tugged her to the other side of the room. “Emma’s parents got into a fight late Sunday night and Emma’s mother shot her dad.”

“OH MY GOD,” Kendra screamed and then lowered her voice when a police officer glanced in her direction. “How’s Emma? Is that why my office is filled with all of these people? God, what are Michelle and Emma?”

Kendra couldn’t believe all of this was going on. Poor Emma had already been through so much as it was. Just as the little girl was beginning to open up to her this had to happen. Today was going to be the first day she started seeing Emma for an hour.

Mary Jane glanced back over her shoulder at the cops then grabbed her by the arm tugging her into the hallway.

“Kendra, Emma was the one who called the police after Michelle shot herself in the head. She told them what happened. They came here after they found her in the closet with a death grip on your business card. I asked where she was at but they wouldn’t tell me anything when they realized I wasn’t you, but I did overhear two of the officers talking about Emma. I don’t know if you want to hear this or not.”

“Mary Jane, tell me,” Kendra stressed.

“The closet they found Emma is must have been a regular place for her because it was covered it different kind of fast food wrappers and juice bottles. I think they even believe Michelle could have kept her in there for weeks at time. They still don’t know why Michelle killed her husband or herself.”

Falling against the wall, Kendra closed her eyes as she tried to process everything that Mary Jane just told her. How in the hell did she allow this to happen to Emma? She promised Emma that she would be there for her and she hadn’t kept her word.

God, she prayed that Emma was okay. She wouldn’t be able to forgive herself if something happened to the little girl.

“Dr. Winstead?”

Turning around, Kendra started at the two cops standing behind her. She was scared about what they might be waiting to tell her. She was almost too nervous to even tell them who she was because she didn't want to hear anything bad about Emma.

"Yes, I'm Dr. Winstead. How can I help you officers?"

"Do you mind coming down to the station with us? We need to talk to you about one of your patients," A tall blond officer told her. "It will only take on an hour or two. We were also hoping that you might be able to talk to Emma. She hasn't said much since being taken to the station from foster care."

"Emma, is okay?" Kendra asked as a weight was lifted off her shoulders.

"Who's coming to take care of her? Can I take her home with me from the station?"

"I believe Emma's aunt is on the way here to take her. Her flight should be landing in a couple of hours that's why we wanted you to talk to her. Maybe you can finally find out if her mother was the one who put her in the hospital the first time. We thought it was the father at first, but now we think we're wrong."

"Of course, I'll be happy to go with you and see Emma." Kendra glanced away from the officer over to Mary Jane. "Will you stay and make sure everything gets taking care of and call and tell Mr. Kent, I will reschedule his upcoming appointments? I don't want to building left unlocked."

Mary Jane touched her on the shoulder. "Don't worry about a thing. I'll

make sure everything is taken care of just go down to the station and see about helping Emma before her aunt gets here.”

“Thank you,” Kendra said then faced the officers again. “I’m ready.”



“You wanted to see me?” Grayson asked as he walked into the conference room shutting the door behind him.

“Yes, please have a seat Grayson,” Preston said as Stamford slid a file across the table in his direction.

Sitting down, Grayson’s gaze swung back and forth between Preston and Stamford. He didn’t have a clue why he was even here. He was about to leave for his date with Kendra when Preston buzzed him and called him down here to the conference room.

“Stamford and I have been going over how well your work performance has been since you started here and how well you updated all of those failing websites in such a short period of time. We were both very impressed by your business skills.”

Grayson knew that he had been doing a *damn* good job, but he wasn’t sure if anyone else had noticed or not. Maybe he was up for the new promotion he heard the rumors about before leaving on his trip with Kendra.

He wasn’t going to get too eager because he didn’t know why they called

him in here. So, he tried to calm down until he found out what this meeting was about.

“I totally agree with Preston,” Stamford cut in. “Your dedication to the job is beyond anything we could have ever thought it would turn out to be. That’s why we’re terminating your contract with Director Enterprises.”

Grayson sat up straighter in his seat. *What in the fuck was going on?*

Grayson felt like the rug had been yanked from underneath him. How could Preston and Stamford praise him so much in one breath and then fire him in the next?

“You’re firing me?” he asked as calmly as he could. Now, wasn’t the time to be losing his temper.

“Yes and no,” Preston answered, confusing him even more. “I’m firing you as our employee because I want to offer you the job as CEO of Director Enterprises that I’m opening up in Boston.”

“I can see now that closing your company was a huge mistake and with a little work. I think Rane Technology can work successfully as a part of Director Enterprises. Do you care about having your business’ name second on the door instead of first?”

Grayson was so stunned he didn’t know how to even answer the question. One minute, he thought he was getting fired. Now, he found out he was getting

Rane Technology back which meant he would be headed back to Boston. How was he supposed to process all of this information in one night?

What was he supposed to say to all of this? Did they want an answer right this second?

“I’m shocked,” he answered, honestly.

“We thought you would be,” Stamford confessed. “The file in front of you has everything we’ve told you written out along with your new contract. If you want the job, we need it back by the end of the week because you need to be back in Boston by Tuesday of the next week.”

Tuesday! He could be back home by next week. He didn’t know what to do. God, Kendra would love Boston. He would get a chance to show her around for the Christmas holiday.

He had to talk to her about this. Kendra would know how to help him make the right decision about everything. Could he really go back to the life he loved? He wouldn’t have to think he was less of a man anymore because his woman made more money than him.

“Thank you for the opportunity. I’ll look over this paperwork and give you my answer by Friday.” Grayson got up from his seat and left the room as fast as he could.

Chapter Thirty

Kendra wandering around the room while she waited for Grayson back home from work. She needed someone to talk to after everything that happened today at work and then the police station. She couldn't believe that Michelle had been the one locking poor Emma inside of the closet.

The second Emma saw her she had raced up to her and wrapped her tiny arms around her legs. After taking her into another room away from the prying eyes, Emma finally opened up and told her about how her mother was the one hitting her and her father all of the time.

God, it had been so painful to listen to but she was glad Emma finally got everything out in the open. She shouldn't have been left in that house with an abusive parent.

Thank God, Emma had another relative to go and live with instead of being returned to foster care. Emma's aunt promised to let Emma call her once she got settled in back in California and she hoped it would happen.

Before meeting Grayson, she wouldn't had anyone to talk to about this and instead of coming home. She would have spent the Christmas holiday working late

on cases at her office. But now her sixteen hour days were over and no longer a part of her life anymore, because Grayson's love brought that incredible change to her life.

She loved him so much. She didn't know what having fun and living was until him. The old Kendra was now gone and she loved the new Kendra who had replaced her.

The light knocking on the door moved Kendra away from the box of Christmas ornaments she was searching through as she hurried over to the front door. She didn't have to bother looking out the peep hole because she knew who it was.

Opening the door, Kendra grinned at her handsome boyfriend. "You're early," she grinned. "What happened at your meeting with Preston and Stamford? I thought I wouldn't be able to talk to you about what happened at work until later on tonight. So, I started getting Christmas decorations out for the tree."

Grayson jerked her to him planting a quick kiss on her mouth before moving away and entering her condo. "Baby, you won't believe what happened at work. I got fired."

"What? Why?" Kendra asked, closing the door. "I thought Preston and Stamford loved having you there. Why did they fire you? Are you okay?"

"I'm better than okay," Grayson told her. "Do you know what this is?" He

waved a thick folder in front of her face.

Kendra shook her head. For someone who has just lost his job so close to Christmas, Grayson was awful thrilled about it.

“No, I don’t. What is it?”

“Preston offered me my old business back. He wanted to make me an equal partner with Director Enterprises. He realized what a mistake it was to close Rane Technology. He’s offering everything I have been wanting and if I take it. I’ll have to be back in Boston next week to start it back up.”

Kendra literally felt like someone had walked up and punched her in the stomach. Grayson got offered his old job back. This was the dream he had been talking about since the first day they had started dating each other. Everything that occurred today at work with her faded into the background.

There was no way that he wasn’t going to take the offer, but she had to ask just to make sure. Maybe he would rather stay here with her. Even before the thought left her mind she already knew the answer.

“Are you going to take the offer?”

Grayson frowned at her like she had asked him to run naked through the hallway. “Why shouldn’t I take it? I came here to get your opinion about how soon should I send the signed contract back to Preston. I can’t believe this has happened to me. I mean I don’t need anything else as a Christmas present. I loved

my job and now I have it back.”

Kendra closed her eyes holding back tears as the reality hit her hard. Grayson didn’t love her. Yeah, he might care about her a little, but he loved his career and the money he made from it. She would never be able to compete with the dollar signs in his eyes.

“What about us?” she asked, opening her eyes to look at Grayson.

He gave her another perplexed look like he didn’t understand the words she was asking him.

“Why are you asking about us? What does our relationship have to do with me and my job in Boston?”

God! Grayson couldn’t be that dense. Surely, he understood that things were over between them now. He wouldn’t have any time for a long distance relationship. All of his time and energy would be centered on getting his business back on the top which meant she wouldn’t fit into the picture at all.

“Grayson, once you accept this offer and go back home our relationship won’t survive that much of a separation. So, we need to break up now instead of later.”

His brows drew together in an angry frown as Grayson took a step toward her. He reached out to touch her, but she brushed his hand away. “Please don’t touch me. This is hard enough as it is on me, but I have to make the right decision.”

“You’re actually dumping me because I have a chance of getting my old job back,” he accused, angrily. “I thought my girlfriend would be thrilled for me and supportive.”

“Sweetheart, I couldn’t be happier for you and that’s why I think we need to end things now instead of later. You honestly have to know that once you get back to Boston.”

“You won’t have time to take calls from me. You’ll be too swamped with building your business back up along with promoting the partnership with Director Enterprises.”

Didn’t Grayson see how much doing this was killing her? She was only breaking up with him because she loved him so much.

“Stop lying,” Grayson snapped. “I know the real reason you’re breaking things off between us. You’re jealous and upset that I’m going to be more successful than you. You liked being the one in the relationship with the money. You got off dating someone you considered beneath you.”

“Since the shoe is going to be on the other foot the great Dr. Kendra Winstead can’t handle it. I see now why you can’t find a man who wants to stay with you. You have been the problem all along not him.”

Her body stiffened in shock at the hurtful words Grayson spat, she couldn’t believe they just came out of his mouth. She bit down on hard on her lower lip to

keep from crying until she got her emotions under control. When she was positive she could speak without her voice breaking Kendra answered Grayson.

“Get out! I don’t want you to ever come back here again. I told you about those things because I thought you would understand and now I see my mistake in trusting you. Go back to Boston.”

He stared at her, complete surprise on his face.

“Kendra, baby let me—” Grayson made a move towards her but she spun around and headed for her patio doors.

“I’m not going to tell you again, Grayson. Congrats again on your job and have a safe trip.” Opening the patio door, Kendra went out closing it slowly behind her as the tears she had been barely holding in poured down her face.

Chapter Thirty One

Grayson clenched and unclenched his hands on the steering wheel as he stared up at Kendra's condo from inside his rental car as the snow came down around him hitting the car and the ground.

How could he ever think that getting his company and job back in Boston could mean more than having Kendra in his life? After his fight with Kendra, like an idiot he had signed the contract Preston offered him and had a messenger deliver it to his boss the same night at his home.

God, he hadn't even tried to talk to Kendra again before he packed up his little belonging and moved back to Boston. He had realized his mistake as soon as he got there, but he thought the pain would pass.

Only, it grew worse with each passing day and by the third day he couldn't take it anymore. He missed the sound of Kendra's voice so badly he thought he was hearing it everywhere he went in town.

Grayson lost count of how many messages he had left at Kendra's home and office only not to have her not return any of his calls. When that avenue didn't work, he started sending Kendra emails begging her to at least take one of his calls,

but he was positive she deleted them without ever opening them.

How in the hell could he apologize for acting like a jerk...no asshole if Kendra wouldn't even acknowledge that he was alive?

Maybe she not answering you because she has a new man in her life, his mind taunted.

Unchecked jealousy raced through his entire body as the last words he tossed at Kendra came back to haunt him. Surely, she didn't take what he said in the heat of anger to heart. The guys who walked away from her in the past were insecure boys who didn't know how to appreciate a beautiful and intelligent woman like Kendra.

Grayson hated to admit that unfortunately, he also fell into the same category as them, but now he was back to claim the woman he loved and admit to his stupid mistake at leaving her in the first place.

A vow had already been made to himself that he wasn't going to leave until Kendra admitted she still loved him and wanted them to be together for the rest of their lives.

Every night when he closed his eyes back in Boston he saw the hurt and pain on her face his cruel words had caused. But he knew Kendra because she was his heart and he wasn't about to give up on getting her back.

The kind of soul-searching love he felt for Kendra made him resign from his job in Boston and ask for his old job back here. It might have taken him a while to

realize that money and power wasn't everything in the world, but he knew it now and that was all that mattered.

This was his home not a place that should have stayed in his past like it belonged.

Money, power and all the success in the world wasn't going to fill his heart with love or make it skip a beat the way Kendra's smile did...no, it only added superficial things to his life not the things that mattered.

With a sigh, he opened the door and climbed out of the car praying his greed for things from his past hadn't cost him the future he craved more than any amount of money could give to him.

Chapter Thirty Two

Christmas Eve

Kendra checked her reflection in the mirror one last time. She liked how the dark green strapless dress looked against her skin. She even had her hair cut and styled for the Christmas Eve party her office was having tonight.

Mary Jane was thrilled that she agreed to show up tonight especially after everything that happened with Emma. She was just going to blow the party off this year like she had done in the past.

For a second or two, the idea had crossed her mind about going back home and spending it with her mother until she realized her mother decided to go out of town with friends.

However, this year she decided to switch things up and attend the party. She had to do something to get her mind off Grayson and the way things ended between them.

How could he think that she didn't want him to be successful or find a job he loved more than anything in the world? That's why she broke off things with

him. He would have never been content here with her if he had chosen their relationship instead of the job he wanted more.

A few days after Grayson had relocated back to Boston, he called her and even left her a couple of message but she never responded to any of them because she didn't see any point in trying to build something when they were so many miles apart.

After the phone calls didn't work, he started sending her emails but she deleted them and changed her email address. She couldn't let Grayson back into her heart not when it was so hard to forget how good they had been together.

When Grayson first left she was hurt to the point she missed a week at work. Now, she was mad as hell because she gave Grayson something she had never given any other man before— her heart.

Well, she had learned her lesson the hard way and she wasn't able to open up her heart so freely again to anyone else. She wasn't going to turn into a bitter woman. She was only going to be more cautious about who she allowed into her life from now on.

Kendra forced Grayson out of her mind. It was still too painful to think about. Going over to the bed, she picked up a gold purse off the mattress then headed out of her bedroom towards the front door.

She was already running late for the party, so she had to get out of here in

the next five minutes. Rushing across the thick carpet in the living room, Kendra opened the front door stumbling in her tracks when her eyes locked with Grayson's.

Chapter Thirty Three

Taking a deep unsteady breath, she stepped back into her condo. No! Grayson couldn't be here. Not when she was trying to move past the heartbreak he caused her by picking his job over them. Yes, she might have told him to leave, but that didn't mean he had to do it.

"What are you doing here?"

Grayson came inside her condo, looking down at her intensely before closing the door behind him. "You look beautiful. Are you going out on a date for Christmas Eve?" Grayson asked as his eyes ran the length of her body before looking back in her eyes.

"Grayson, answer my question. Why are you here? What do you want?" Kendra prayed Grayson couldn't see how fast her pulse was beating at seeing him.

"I love you, Kendra. I want you in my life forever. I was crazy for leaving you. Will you marry me?" Grayson smiled at her, but it slowly slipped from his handsome face when she shook her head.

"Are you serious? How can I marry a man who thinks I'm trying to ruin his life by holding him back from his career?" Kendra demanded.

Spinning around, Kendra walked further into the living room tossing her purse down on the couch. “So, are you back in town to do something more than clear up your conscience with me?”

Crossing his arms over his chest, Grayson arched an eyebrow at her. “You actually think I came all the way back here from Boston just to apologize to you? You can’t honestly believe what you’re saying.”

“Yes, I believe it,” Kendra sniffed as tears filled her eyes. She stormed up to Grayson until they were toe to toe. Tilting her head back, she glared up at Grayson with all the hate she could muster up hoping he couldn’t see any of the love she still felt in her heart.

“You still love me.”

“No, I don’t. If I still was in love with you. Why was I on my way out the door?”



Grayson thought it would be hard to get Kendra to hear him out, but he never thought when he showed up that she would be heading out the door for a Christmas Eve date.

Who in the hell thought he was going to take Kendra from him?

“I don’t care who you were planning to spend time with tonight. I’m back and I’m not dumb enough to leave you again. I was an asshole for storming out the

way I did.”

“Grayson, I don’t care.”

“Baby, I do love you. I thought being back in Boston with my old job is what I wanted, but it wasn’t. I knew I had made a mistake as soon as I got back home but my pride kept me there instead of coming back to you sooner.”

The more Kendra was silent the more nervous Grayson became had he really messed things up with the woman he loved. For once in his life something...no someone was more important to him than making money.

Surely, Kendra still loved him. Hell, he didn’t need a hundred percent of it. He would gladly take seventy-five percent and work his ass off to regain the other twenty-five percent back. Just as long there wasn’t another man in her life making her unwilling to give him another chance.

“Grayson, do you really expect to show up out of the blue and I’ll take you back just like nothing happened?”

“Kendra, please listen to me,” he said, yanking his woman to him. He forgot how she loved to debate everything too death before giving in. There was only one way to make her understand that he was back to stay and prove his love for her.

Lowering his mouth, he kissed her showering Kendra with all the love he had in him. He wasn’t about to spend Christmas alone. Not when he was so close to unwrapping the present he wanted most in the world.

At first, Kendra struggled against him like he thought she would and then she wrapped her arms around his neck and returned the kiss. After what seemed like an hour of pure please, Grayson untangled himself from Kendra's warm embrace.

"Sweetheart, I love you so much. I didn't mean any of the things I said to you. I got caught up in the past and didn't realize what I needed was standing right in front of me."

"God, baby! Please tell me you believe me. I need to know. Do you believe I came back here for you and nothing else?" Grayson asked.

"I believe you," Kendra finally answered, "but we still have so much to talk about we just can't say we love each other and then agree to get married." She walked away from him over to the patio doors.

"Why the hell not?" Grayson demanded. "I won't lose you. I know I was wrong and I want to make it up to you."

"Are you sure you want to marry me?" she asked spinning back around to face him. "If I remember correctly you told me that I didn't have the ability to keep a man. So, why are you volunteering to be my husband? Aren't you scared that I'll run you off too?"

Grayson heard the lingering hurt in Kendra's voice but more than hearing it, he felt the hurt he caused with his words. Kendra wouldn't think about his

marriage proposal until he found a way to make her understand how sorry he truly was.

“Kendra...I want to marry you,” Grayson said, slowly closing the distance between them. “I can’t lose you. I know I walked away from you when you pushed me away, but you’re mine. I’m in love with you.”

“You’re the first woman that I felt I had such a powerful chemistry with because you matched my intensity, physically, emotionally, sexually and spiritually. I couldn’t imagine spending another day without you in my life and at my side. When it comes to our relationship, I’m the pots and pans, but you’re the Iron Chef. I’m only better because you’re in my life.”

Going across the room, Grayson wrapped Kendra back up in his arms. “You can trust me. I’ll never hurt you again. If I hurt you, it would be like hurting a part of myself. Can’t we move past this so I can prove to you I want to be with you forever more than anything else in the world?”

Titling her head back, Kendra rich brown eyes held his and the love he saw shinning in their depths had his face splitting into a wide grin. He wanted to get excited, but he waited because he wanted to see what else Kendra was going to tell him.

“Grayson, you don’t have to do anything else. You have already proved it to me by coming back here. I know you wouldn’t have ever done that unless you

loved me.”

“So, is that a yes?” Grayson asked as his heart sped up with hope.

“What am I supposed to be saying yes to?” Kendra teased.

“You’re saying yes you want to agree to the love I want to shower you with for the rest of our lives. You’re saying yes to becoming my wife and making me most happiest man in the word. Lastly, you’re agreeing to becoming the mother of our beautiful children by accepting my proposal.”

“Mr. Rane, you’re right. I’m saying yes to all of those things and probably more I don’t even know about yet.”

A smile of happiness spread across Grayson’s face as he stared down into his future wife’s eyes because he finally realized that all the wealth and influence in the world wouldn’t ever give him the compete joy and love he felt at this exact moment in Kendra’s arms.

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/>
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Awards

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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 or visit her website @ www.freewebs.com/irwriter/. She also has a discussion group fans can join and talk about her current releases. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MarieRochelle2/>. Or you can visit her website and join her regular yahoo group.

Red Rose Publishing:

Beneath the Surface- Available in ebook and print

Pamper Me- Available in ebook and print

Be With you – Available in ebook and print

Cover Model – Available in ebook and print

With all my Heart – Available in ebook and print

Love Play – Coming Soon

Tycoon Club Series

Dangerous Bet: Troy's Revenge: Available in ebook and print

Boss Man: Now Available-coming soon to print

Cole's Surrender

Business or Pleasure

Something Pumping

Special Delivery: Book 2: Heat Me Up-coming soon to print

Accept My Love: Sasha: The Williams Sister Series-Book 2-coming soon