

Stay With Me



By Reana Malori

Stay With Me

By Reana Malori

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Stay With Me © 2010 Reana Malori

Cover Photo © Lev Olkha - Fotolia.com

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced electronically or in print without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in reviews. This is a work of fiction. All references to real places, people, or events are coincidental, and if not coincidental, are used fictitiously. All trademarks, service marks, registered trademarks, and registered service marks are the property of their respective owners and are used herein for identification purposes only.

eBooks are NOT transferable. Re-selling, sharing or giving eBooks is a copyright infringement.

Dedication

Inspiration comes in so many forms. When you least expect it, something can trigger a memory...a song, a smell, a sound... and you're lost in the possibilities. For all those who still believe in happily ever after, I hope you enjoy this story.

Chapter One

I do not want to be here. Keisha Gaines was talking to herself again, but she could not believe she was in this situation. *How can he sit there with that woman and not realize that he's breaking my heart. Every touch, every smile in her direction is another dagger, another tear, and he simply does not care. Hell, I may as well be invisible to him. I wish I were somewhere else, anywhere else... just not here. With them.*

Keisha sat in the comfortable restaurant booth watching her best friend in the entire world smile and laugh at the new love of his life. Well, maybe she was only the new love of his life until the next one came along. The restaurant interior, which would have been something to admire at any other time, simply faded into the background while she sat at the table crying inside. She wasn't usually so melodramatic, hell—she had never been melodramatic or emotional—but leave it up to Greg Jordan to make her lose her damn mind.

Looking across the table at the couple causing her so much anguish, Keisha could not help but remember the first time she and Greg had met all those many years ago. They had both been serving in the Marines and were stationed at a base in North Carolina. When he'd walked through the doors of the S-1 shop to check-in to the duty station, Keisha had been the first person he had come across and she had fallen in love almost instantly. From the very first moment they had spoken to each other, it seemed as if they had instantly clicked. She had not experienced anything like it before or since. Although a year younger than her, his quick wit, Jersey-boy attitude, and sexy drop your panties accent quickly wormed their way into Keisha's heart.

From that day forward, they were like two peas in a pod. They spent almost all their time together and did most everything that two people could do without being an official couple. They simply hadn't taken things that far and at this stage it didn't look like they ever would. Although some people would assume they were lovers, Greg had never looked at her that way in all the years they had known each other. However, their friendship was still strong after all these years and had only gotten stronger the as time passed. If you saw one of them, then it was a pretty good chance you would find the other somewhere in the vicinity.

It wasn't that Keisha had not known or been aware of what her feelings were for Greg back then. She did. There had never been any doubt exactly how she felt about him. Their current status of being only friends was mainly based on the simple fact that she knew Greg did not feel the same way that she had. As a result, she had never tried to make the relationship more. Although Keisha could hold her own in any situation, putting her heart on the line with the potential to get hurt was not something she ever wanted to do. She had always dreamed of more with Greg, had always wanted more with him, but it had never seemed like an option.

Greg always had eyes for the type of women that were the complete opposite of her—not black, not a size twelve, and not a Marine. All the things that she would never change, never wanted to change, and would tell a man to step the fuck off if he ever tried to tell her she somehow needed to change. So, after two years of desiring a man who probably thought of her as just a sister, she had resolved herself to the fact that

there would never be anything more between them than just a great friendship.

So, at the end of her contract with the Marines about two years ago, she had received a job offer at a company in Alexandria, Virginia and jumped at the chance to leave North Carolina. She had served her time in the Corps with honor and had loved all of the experiences she had, the friends she made and the relationships she had built. But her time had been up and she had decided it was time to move on. Try new things. Meet new people.

Unfortunately, there was nothing to keep her in North Carolina and although she was crazy, no one had ever called her stupid. She was not going to stay and pine away for a man who didn't want her the same way. So, after much soul searching and angst, she accepted the new role, packed up her belongings and made her way up I-95.

After she moved, they continued to talk all the time by telephone and email. They were still friends and no matter what, she would still be there for him. Sometimes they would talk about mundane topics such as what they did at work each day, the weather, or weekend plans. Other times they talked about all the things that made life hard, such as family, friends, loneliness, and relationships. Well, he mainly talked about his relationships while she listened and served as a sounding board for all the things wrong with the latest woman he'd met and discarded within a relatively short time.

Nine months after her move away from North Carolina, she found herself on the road headed back down to North Carolina to a farewell luncheon for Greg. He had been on his way to Diego Garcia, a place she had never heard of until she had received the call from Greg late one

night a few weeks before her trip back down to North Carolina. He had accepted orders to this god-forsaken place and was leaving for an entire year. An entire fucking year!!! She could now admit that she had been extremely pissed that he had accepted the orders without talking about it with her first. Not that he had to run his life decisions by her, but she was his best friend dammit and these things needed to be discussed.

Although they had spoken almost every day, he had never even mentioned it was an option until he had already accepted the orders. Not that he could have refused to go, but that wasn't really the point. The one thing Keisha understood was that when the Marines told you to go somewhere, the correct response—the only response—was always “Yes, Sir.” So fine, while she understood that he really did not have an option, it sure as shit didn't mean she had to like it.

After his announcement, Keisha quickly realized that there would be no more daily telephone calls to talk about nothing in particular. Email would be their only communication for the next twelve months and then who knows where he would be stationed after that. The Marines might just send him to BFE (bum-fucked Egypt) and she had been concerned that she wouldn't see him again for a very long time. Even though he had promised that would not be the case, the worry and concern still lingered in her mind.

So, after making her way back to a place she never expected to see again, she had prepared herself to say goodbye to her friend. Surrounded by all of their friends with whom they had both served and had some great times, his going away luncheon had been pure hell. She had sat next to him the entire time and just soaked him in. Although she already knew the shape of his chin, the color of his eyes, and the

slope of his nose, she stared at him as if trying to burn the memory of his chiseled features into her mind. He was so damn fine it almost hurt to look at him, but Keisha would not turn away. Hell, she couldn't turn away. Blond hair cut in the standard Marine cut, ice-blue eyes, and beautiful tanned skin that did not require him to do any artificial tanning made him a catch for any woman brave enough to go after him. He stood at six feet two inches of pure male and his broad shoulders stretched his shirt to the brink of ripping. In a nutshell, he was gorgeous. He was the type of man that made women trip over themselves as they tried to catch a second glimpse as he walked down the street.

Several times during the lunch he would turn to her and give a lopsided grin as he laughed about something. Or he would whisper in her ear to share a secret comment or joke about something that was said. During one of those secret, shared moments, Keisha had known—without a shadow of a doubt—that she would never love anyone else the way she loved him. No matter where the Marines sent him once he finished his time in Diego Garcia, she would make a point to be there for him. Her pride had made her leave for Virginia because her heart couldn't take being around him all the time and not being *with* him. But she would not—could not—lose the only man she had ever loved, not again. If the only way she could be in his life was as the best friend, then okay, she could live with that. Maybe.

During her weekend visit as he was preparing to leave for Diego Garcia, they had spent almost the entire time together just doing little things. They went to the movies, hung out at his apartment, and visited friends she hadn't seen in months. And although she had wanted to be selfish, she knew she could not monopolize all of his time. So, while he

went off to spend time with some of his other friends, she had visited with some friends with whom she had lost contact, just to reconnect and get some space.

Her first visit had been to Becky and Dennis, who had been friends with both Keisha and Greg and were also Marines. They were two very different people, but had become a couple as well once they realized how truly compatible they were. Becky had two kids from a previous marriage and about six months ago, they had purchased a home together and were planning their wedding. Since Dennis was an officer and Becky was enlisted, they were waiting until Becky finished her latest tour for the actual wedding day. No one who knew them would have ever thought they would have ever been attracted to one another or would become a couple. When they did, it was quite a shock, but not an unwelcome one. Becky was a mid-western girl who loved R&B music and had been previously married to a black man. Dennis was a hardcore rock-n-roller who partied hard and played even harder. He never seemed the type to settle down, but Becky changed all of that.

When Keisha sat in their living room and watched them interact with each other, she knew it was the real thing. They were so in love with each other. Becky had found her knight in shining armor and Keisha couldn't have been happier for her and the kids. They needed someone who was strong and loyal and who loved them to distraction. As she sat there on the couch looking at the two of them, Keisha realized that Dennis was all that and more. Seeing those two had given her hope. Hope that Greg would finally realize what had been right in front of him the entire time.

When the weekend was over and she had to leave and make that long trip back up to Virginia, Keisha had cried like a baby. Serious crying...blubbering actually...all over Greg's shirt. She was sure that he had no idea what the hell was going on, but she was so damn sad and hurt that he was leaving and she had never told him how she felt about him. Her arms wrapped tightly around his waist for what felt like mere seconds, but she knew they had stood there for almost thirty minutes. Her crying all over his shirt, never wanting to let him go. His arms wrapped tightly around her, holding her up while she cried herself out, silently praying for his safe return. Not one word of complaint had come out of his mouth the entire time, no attempt to remove her from his arms. He just stood there and accepted that this is what had to happen.

As she finished crying, she pulled her head back and wiped her tears away with her hands. She must have looked horrible, but she didn't care. Greg had seen her at her worst and he was still her friend, so she really didn't care how she looked right now. A crooked smile on her face, she wiped the wetness away and tried to make herself presentable. Even though she knew it was a lost cause at this point, she still tried to put up a brave front.

Greg had smiled at her with a look that she had not seen before. One eyebrow was raised in a questioning look and she believed he thought she had finally lost her mind with all her blubbering and crying.

"You okay now, Keisha?"

"Yes, I'm fine now. I just needed to get that out. I'm going to miss you Greg."

"I'm gonna miss you too. But we'll still be able to talk by email all the time and we'll be able to talk on the phone once in a while." He lifted

his index finger and tapped her on the tip of her nose. "I have to bug you on a regular basis. Besides, if I don't do it, who else will?"

"Well, you'd better email me all the time. If I don't hear from you at least once a week, I'm not going to be happy with you."

"Don't worry. Are you going to be okay to drive all the way back to Virginia?"

"Yes, I'll be fine. Your plane leaves tomorrow morning?"

"Yep, bright and early at six in the morning."

"Okay, I'd better hit the road."

"Call me when you get home. I want to make sure you get there safely."

He then pulled her close for another hug, kissed her on the forehead, and opened her car door. He reminded her one more time to be safe as he closed her door and waited for her to drive off.

After she arrived back home after the five hour drive, she had felt dead on her feet. Before she showered and fell into a deep sleep, she had called Greg. He picked up after two rings and the first words out of his mouth had been, "It's about time. I was starting to get worried."

Laughing, she couldn't help but be pleased that he had been waiting for her to call him. "Yeah, I had to stop and get gas and something to eat. I just walked in the door."

"Are you tired?"

"Yeah, I'm going to shower and fall into bed. Will you call me before you leave tomorrow?"

“No, I will not call you. It will be too early and you need your sleep. I want you to get into bed and don’t wake up until your eyes pop open. Got it?”

“Yeah, yeah. Okay, well, I’m going to bed then.”

“Okay, so—”

She quickly interrupted him. “Greg, please be safe over there. I’ll worry if you don’t and you don’t want me to worry about you all the time.”

“I’ll be careful. I promise.”

“I—I’ll miss you.” She could hear her voice cracking and was bound and determined not to cry again.

“I’ll miss you too. But I’ll be back in a year and we’ll make sure we see each other. Okay?”

“Okay. Um, Greg, ah—I love you.” There, she’d said it.

Without hesitation, he responded, “I love you too. You’re my best friend. ‘Night Keisha.”

He had no idea how those four words—*you’re my best friend*—had dashed all of her hopes for something more. “‘Night Greg.”

Life went on after that, with numerous calls and emails to sustain their friendship during the next year while he was away. Imagine her surprise when she received a call from Greg late one night around one in the morning and he told her that he was coming to Virginia. He would be stationed at Quantico, Virginia for the next two years to finish out this current contract term. It was the best news she had received in a year and her excitement grew as the time got closer. Life couldn’t be better

now that her best friend was coming to her. Well, that was what she had thought anyway.

Her thoughts now back at present day, she stared across the table at Greg and “The Homewrecker” and gritted her teeth. She didn’t bother learning the other woman’s name because Keisha was going to forget it as soon as she left the restaurant. Spiteful and petty? Yep, it sure was. Greg had went home for a week’s vacation and came back talking about “The Homewrecker”, again pushing Keisha to the side in favor of another woman.

Although it pained her to do so, she knew this was it. She could no longer do this to herself. Greg had to be the dumbest man in Virginia, maybe even the entire east coast, because here she was right in front of him and he still couldn’t see her. Well, you know what? Fuck him. She was going to move on with her life and find her a man who would appreciate the woman she was.

Grabbing her glass of Chianti, she gave an internal toast to herself and her new beginning. Greg would soon find out what it was like to no longer have Keisha at his beck-and-call. Yep, Keisha was looking out for numero uno from this day going forward and Greg was no longer invited to the party.

Chapter Two

He left another message for Keisha after her phone continued to ring with no answer. This was the fifth message he had left for her in a matter of days. They had never gone this long without talking, but maybe she was just busy. Although something told him there was more to the situation than just her being extra busy with work. When he *was* able to get in contact with her, she usually told him things were fine. That seemed to be her favorite word nowadays...Fine. When he asked her how she was doing—Fine. When he asked her how she was—Fine. He had never heard so many “Fine’s” in all his years and it was starting to bug him.

This situation with Keisha was so frustrating and there was nothing he could do about it. She wasn’t being outright rude or dismissive, but she simply wasn’t being *his* Keisha. He was getting anxious and so he decided to call her one more time. Stalkerish? Yes. But he didn’t care. He wanted to talk to his friend and he would keep calling her until she picked up the damn telephone! Picking up his cell phone, he dialed her office number one more time. He didn’t know why it was so important, but he needed to talk with her. They hadn’t seen each other or went out to dinner in almost two months. Hearing the phone ring on the other side, he was prepared to leave another message when she picked up.

“Keisha Gaines speaking.”

“Why the hell haven’t you been answering my calls Keisha?”

He heard her sigh on the other end of the line, but waited patiently for her to answer. Something was wrong and he would be damned if he got off this telephone without her telling him what was going on with her.

“Greg, I’ve been busy. I told you that. Things are just hectic at work right now.”

“No, Keisha, I don’t think that’s the whole story. I’ve called you four days straight and not once have you returned my calls. I was about to come to your office and wait outside the door for you to come out.”

“Greg, you had better not do that! Okay, okay. What did you need? What’s so urgent?”

“Dinner. I want to go to dinner. Tonight.”

“Sorry, I can’t. I have plans.”

“With who?”

“Some girls from work asked if I would come to happy hour. Since I haven’t been out with them in a while, I agreed.”

His jaw tightened almost to the point of pain. This was her typical answer every time he asked her to dinner, lunch, or anything in between. She had plans. In the past, her plans had always been with him and he was tired of being ignored.

“Keisha. I’m going to be at your house tomorrow and I expect you to be there.”

“Wait just a minute—”

“No, Keisha. No more waiting. You’ve been avoiding me and I aim to find out why. We’ve been friends too long...hell, you’re my best friend, and I don’t think I should beg for your time. When I arrive tomorrow, I

expect you to be ready to talk to me. And since it will be Saturday, no more excuses about being busy.”

“What if I already have plans? I can’t just sit at home all the time waiting for you to show up. I have a life you know.”

He could hear her starting to get pissed. Normally her voice was low and smooth, always professional. As she continued to speak, her tone became a little less smooth and a lot more clipped as she continued speaking to him.

“Change them.”

“No.”

“Change your plans Keisha. If you don’t think I’m serious about this, you have a rude awakening coming. I expect you to be at home and ready to talk with me about what the hell is going on lately.”

When she spoke again, he knew she was in full-blown angry mode. Good. It was about time she realized just how serious he was.

“You may be my best friend, but I don’t answer to you. I have plans tomorrow night and I’m not changing them. You can wait and talk to me on Sunday.” And with that final statement, she hung up the phone on him.

Seething inside, Greg knew his anger was irrational and he couldn’t understand why the thought of Keisha having plans made him so upset. He ran his hand down his face and took several deep breaths. He would just have to make sure he showed up before she went out. As he turned to look out of his office window, the picture of him and Keisha sitting on the ledge caught his eye.

It had been taken just over four months ago. He had taken her out for her birthday and the restaurant had taken a picture of them sitting at the table. As he picked up the frame, he remembered how much effort he had put into that night. She had mentioned to him in passing how she had never been serenaded, so he made plans with the restaurant owner to have a Spanish guitar player sing a few of her favorite songs to her as they were eating dessert. When she realized what he had done, the smile she bestowed upon him had lit up the entire place. The tears in her eyes caught him off-guard until he realized they were from joy and happiness.

They had always done things like that for the other and over the years, their bond of friendship had become stronger than steel. At one time he thought nothing would ever come between them. Lately, he wasn't so sure that was still the case. Something had happened to their relationship over the last few months. He knew he hadn't changed, so whatever it was that had changed, it must have something to do with Keisha.

He glanced at the clock and noticed that he had a meeting in five minutes with the Company Commander. Gathering the items for the meeting, he vowed to get to the bottom of the situation and he wouldn't leave Keisha's condo until they fixed things between them and were back to normal.

Chapter Three

Greg was still pissed and as he stomped his way up to Keisha's condo he tried his best to calm down. Not sure why he was so angry in the first place, he knew that Keisha was going to feel the brunt of his unhappiness. The one thing he never thought would happen had now come to be and he was not pleased at all. Keisha no longer wanted to be around him.

He wanted an answer as to why she had been avoiding him for the past few months. As he sat drinking his coffee this morning, he realized that it had been a gradual change that had occurred and he could clearly see what had been going on right under his nose.

It had started slowly, with her not always picking up when he called the house or her cell phone. If she did pick up, which wasn't often, she would use the excuse of "oh, I must not have heard the phone ring". That was always the reason she gave him whenever he asked her why she didn't pick up his calls. Then she started to cancel plans with him on a regular basis. That was when things really started to worry him because she had never done that before. Something was up and dammit he wanted answers. Right now.

He knocked on her door—loudly—making it very clear that he expected her to answer. He noticed that her car was out front when he arrived, so he knew she was at home. He tightened his jaw and gritted his teeth in frustration—she had damn well better be at home. If she had stayed out all night after happy hour and her car was here then that would mean...Well, he wasn't going to think about that. He had told her

he was coming by today when they spoke yesterday and when he tried calling her earlier, she didn't pick up the phone...Again!

With him in a foul mood like this, there was no way he wasn't letting off some steam, so this conversation needed to happen now. Today. Right this fucking minute! She wasn't answering the door quickly enough for him, so he pounded again, even harder this time, and yelled out, "Keisha, open this damn door!"

Footsteps pounded on the floor inside and he knew she was running to get to the door and answer it before he made an even bigger scene. She must have heard the urgency in his voice because she never rushed for much of anything. As she swung the door open, he pushed his way inside, not bothering to wait until she invited him inside.

"What the hell is going on Keisha? Why do I get the feeling you're avoiding me? We haven't seen each other in weeks and when I call you do something you're always busy. I want answers!"

"Greg! What the...! No you did not just bum-rush your way into my home and start demanding answers. What the hell is wrong with you? This couldn't wait for another time? I told you yesterday that I have plans. I'm busy tonight."

"With who? You never used to cancel on me and now all of a sudden you have something else so much more important to do. When did this happen?"

"Does it matter? Why aren't you busy with your newest fling? Why are you over here acting like a damn caveman? You know what, screw this. You're acting like a madman. I'm going to get dressed."

As she turned and walked away from him, he started to follow her and continue the argument because there was no way he was done. When he noticed what she was wearing, he stopped in his tracks and was frozen in place. Keisha looked different and his breath hitched, his heart lurched. Oh damn. He had never responded to her like this before and there had been times when Keisha had worn much less in his presence. They had visited the beach several times and he had seen her in a bathing suit before. But somehow that seemed different from what he was seeing tonight. What she was wearing now made her look almost sexy. Wait, almost? No, it made her look damn sexy. This was a huge problem for him. He should not be having these feelings about his best friend or noticing how sexy she looked in her underwear.

She was wearing a pair of silk panties and a matching camisole that outlined her rounded ass and trim waist. Thank God he had been too pissed off to pay attention to the front and the outline of her breasts. He probably would have broken out in a cold sweat. He watched her ass jiggle just a bit as she walked down the hallway to her bedroom and he realized that he wanted to follow her for a totally different reason.

Suddenly, his hands itched to grab her and squeeze the round globes, just to know how it would feel. His mouth became instantly dry and he was in desperate need of some water to quench his thirst. He stumbled back and sat down on her couch. Oh fuck! There was no way he could be attracted to Keisha. He had worked so hard to simply be her friend. In all of his twenty-nine years, he had never had a friend like her. Keisha was the one person he could tell all of his secrets to without worrying about her judging him. Even when he acted like a chauvinistic

asshole, which was quite often, she never turned away from him—until today. Something was changing and he did not like it.

Wait a minute, did she say that she had plans? Oh, hell no! Not tonight she doesn't. He needed to talk with her about why she was avoiding him. He stood up and took off his jacket, placing it on the coat rack near the door. Greg was settling in for a long night and Keisha had better be ready because she wasn't going anywhere tonight, not without him by her side.

Just who the hell did he think he was? Demanding to know what she was doing and where she was going. She didn't owe him a damn thing and he could kiss her natural black ass. Stupid, dumb ass man who couldn't see a good thing standing in front of him if he was clocked on the head with it.

Plus, she was excited about her night out with Ellis. He was a nice guy and HE had paid attention to her. They worked together at the same company and Ellis had been trying for months to get her to go out with him. Now the one night she agreed to his request for a date, here comes Greg acting as if he had papers on her. Damn! Why did he have to do this shit tonight?

She had already slipped on her black skirt and was buttoning her silk blouse when her bedroom door slammed open. Greg stood at the opening like a Viking marauder laying waste to a country. Fine...if he wanted to do this tonight, she was game. She had not planned to have it out with him like this, but since he wasn't going to let it go, she would tell him what was on her mind. He may not like what she had to say, but that was too damn bad.

“Greg, go away. I have a date tonight and I don’t have time to talk with you. I told you I was busy.”

“Keisha, we’ve never had a fight in all the years we have been friends.” She watched him take a deep breath as if trying to calm down. “We’re about to have one right now if you keep trying to avoid me and not talk about what’s going on with you. I came here to talk with you and you’re telling me...again...that you have plans. If you think I’m going to leave here tonight without settling this between us, then you have another think coming.”

She had enough! She had waited years, four years to be exact, for him to notice that she was around. Now that she had decided to move on and live a life that wasn’t focused solely around him, he wanted to stake a claim. “Greg, you’re an asshole. I can’t believe you are doing this shit to me. I just have a date! That’s all. We can talk tomorrow.”

“No. You’re not going out to tonight. You’re going to spend time with your best friend and we’re going to talk.” She then watched him stalk over to her bed and sit down. He leaned back and his shirt stretched over his chest as he placed his hands behind his head. She couldn’t help but admire how perfect he looked. As if he belonged there. He had been in here before, but only for a short period of time and never had he looked like this. Although the woman in her was giddy that she had finally gotten a response from him, she still wasn’t happy that he was doing this tonight. Ellis would arrive at any moment and she did not want a scene.

Just at that moment, the doorbell rang and she knew things were about to get ugly. She glanced towards Greg and his face was a mask of anger and frustration. She turned toward the living room and began

walking quickly towards the front of her condo. Maybe if she arrived to the door first, she could avoid the confrontation she knew would take place. As she reached for her purse and jacket, she heard Greg behind her mumbling under his breath.

“...Must be out her damn mind if she thinks she’s leaving this house tonight.”

She opened the door and saw Ellis standing there with a smile on his face. He was a handsome man, not as handsome as Greg, but still very good looking. She really would like to get to know him better, but knew that it would not be happening tonight.

With Greg here demanding that she not go out tonight, she knew she would be staying put. Although she hated to admit that she was giving in to him, she knew she would. She loved him too much and they had to settle things between them. Realizing that Ellis was waiting for her to say something, she knew it wasn’t fair to put him in the middle of their fight. As she opened her mouth to speak, Greg walked up behind her and removed her hand from the door.

“Keisha has other plans tonight.”

“Who are you? Her plans are with me tonight.”

“Not anymore.” And with that, Greg slammed the door in Ellis’ face. Keisha was in shock. Never before had he acted like this and she wasn’t sure how she felt about it.

“Greg, why did you do that?” She couldn’t yell anymore. Her resolve had weakened and she knew the night would be spent sitting on the couch hanging out. Honestly, she couldn’t even be mad at him because she could admit that she *had* been avoiding him these past two

months. Ever since that damn dinner with his Bimbo of the moment, she had tried to move on with her life without Greg as a starring member.

He turned to face her and leaned back against the door with his arms folded across his chest. “Because we don’t talk anymore. I told you I wanted you to stay home tonight Keisha. Did you think I was joking? Did you think I would allow my best friend to brush me off and ignore me when I’m standing right in front of her?”

Motherfucker! Was he serious? Yeah, her anger came roaring back. “Why not? You’ve been doing that shit to me for years! I was always right in front of you Greg and did you notice me? No. You didn’t! I was always the best friend, the buddy. You have ignored what was right in front of *you* for almost four years. Even with all those women who meant nothing to you, I was never the one you chose. So, now that you’re feeling on the outside and no longer have my undivided attention, you come in here acting all caveman and shit.” She kicked off her shoes and went stomping back towards her room to change. “You must have lost your damn mind—again!”

Keisha quickly changed into some cutoff shorts and a tank top and pulled her hair up in a scrunchie. She padded back into the living room and found Greg standing in the same spot she had left him. He looked utterly confused and she could not really blame him. Her tirade had unleashed more information than she really wanted him to know. No wonder he was confused.

“Keisha—”

“Pizza or Chinese? I’m in the mood for pizza myself, but I can deal with Chinese if you want it.”

“Keisha—look at me! What did you mean by that?”

“Look Greg, just forget it. By the way, I’m ordering pizza since you can’t seem to decide. I was angry and said things that should not have been said. It was the heat of the moment and now I’m no longer pissed at you. I’m not happy that you ruined my date, but I’m no longer angry.” She picked up the phone and called the local pizza delivery place to make their order. She took Greg’s credit card from his wallet and gave them the number. Since he made her cancel her dinner with Ellis, he could damn well pay for the pizza. Order finished, she hung up the phone and placed his credit card back in the wallet.

Greg glared at her and began to speak slowly and softly. She could tell that he was trying to hold on to his temper. “If you had cancelled before I came over, it wouldn’t have been an issue. I’ve never intentionally cancelled on you Keisha. Why would you do that me?”

“You just don’t get it Greg and you probably never will.” She poured a glass of red wine and stomped into the living room. Her feet were pulled up to the side of her on the couch and she turned on the television to the local sports station. “Come on, sit down. You wanted to talk, let’s talk. Grab something to drink first. I’m not serving you.”

Greg grabbed a beer out of the fridge since she always kept his favorite kind available. Although, based on how things had been these last few months, she didn’t understand why she kept buying it for him. She watched him toe off his shoes and place them against the wall. He walked to the couch and sat down next to her as they settled in. Keisha didn’t know how things would end tonight, but she was certain that

things would never be the same. If Greg really pressed her on what was going on, she didn't think she could hold back from telling him. Once that happened, she was afraid that she would forever lose her best friend and she wasn't sure if she could survive not having Greg in her life.

Chapter Four

As she walked by him to the couch, he couldn't help but catch her intoxicating scent and he stopped himself from reaching out to touch her. Greg couldn't help inhaling her special scent liberally laced with her favorite perfume. It pissed him off all over again that she had planned to go out tonight, wearing the perfume he'd bought for her. Over the years, he had purchased several bottles of the stuff, but had never really paid attention to how it smelled on her. Well, he was paying attention tonight.

He knew she was pissed at him for ruining her date, but something in him had snapped when she told him she was leaving him to go out with another man. In all the years they had been friends, he had never really seen her with another man other than him. If she needed to go out somewhere and needed someone by her side, she always called him. That's just how things were. While he knew men found her sexy and asked her out on a regular basis, she had always put them second to Greg. Tonight was the first time in all these years where he had not been first on her mind and he had not known how to react. In fact, all he could do was stop it from happening the only way he knew how.

There had been no way in hell he was going to let her walk out of the door with that guy. Not while he was standing here demanding that they talk. At the time, he didn't know why he was so upset, but once he'd closed the door in the face of her so-called date, he had recognized what was going on. He was jealous. Immensely, deeply, and irrevocably jealous.

He was smart enough to realize that he was being a bit of a hypocrite. He had introduced Keisha to every single one of his girlfriends over the years and had never thought anything about it. She was his best friend, so why shouldn't she meet them all. After her comments tonight about her being right in front of him all these years, he now wondered if she had felt hurt and betrayed—like he did right now—each and every time he had flaunted his latest girlfriend in front of her.

Damn, had he really been that blind over the years? Could Keisha have been the one for him all along and he had waited too long to do something about it? He continued facing the television, but couldn't help the words that came out of his mouth. "I don't want you to avoid me anymore, Keisha. I don't like it."

He watched her place the glass of wine on the table. He felt the deep sigh that traveled throughout her body as she settled back against the couch. He turned to her to look at her just as she closed her eyes and blocked him out.

"Greg, I never wanted to avoid you, but I can't do this anymore."

"Do what?"

"I can no longer be here for you at the drop of a dime and always be at your beck and call. I have to live my life the best way I know how. Recently, I've come to realize that you may not be a part of that life anymore. Not the way I need you to be." She gave a low laugh that seemed full of resignation and sadness. "Isn't that something? Up until now when I looked at my life ten, fifteen, even twenty years down the road, you were always with me. Right by my side." He watched her open her eyes, but she still avoided looking at him. "But not anymore. I have to build my own life, on my own. I know that now."

He grabbed her chin and forced her to look at him. “Don’t avoid me Keisha. Talk to me. What does that mean? You have to tell me because I don’t understand what you’re saying.”

Beautiful brown eyes stared up at him and suddenly he knew. It was there in her eyes and he was finally seeing what he had ignored for so long. Keisha was in love with him. Oh God! His best friend was in love with him and he didn’t know what to do.

The shock he felt must have shown on his face because he saw her eyes change and harden, then felt her pull back from him. “Greg, I’m going to bed. I’ve changed my mind and really don’t want to talk anymore tonight. Your room is made up, so you can crash here if you want. If you’re still here tomorrow morning, maybe we can talk then.”

He was struck dumb and couldn’t form a coherent sentence to save his life. Keisha got up from the couch and walked away from him. He couldn’t decide what surprised him more—the fact that his best friend was in love with him or how good it felt for him to know. He listened as she took a shower and prepared for bed, the sounds fading into the background as he continued to sit in the living room in a state of disbelief. It was only nine o’clock when she had left him and went to her room and Keisha never went to bed that early. So he knew that she was trying to avoid him. Again.

When the pizza arrived, he signed the receipt and simply put it in the fridge for tomorrow. His appetite was gone and he knew the food would taste like sawdust. Greg sat for another hour in the living room, waiting for her to come back out talk to him, wondering what he would do now.

When the clock struck ten, he got up from the couch and walked towards the spare room. Keisha always kept a place for him to stay since Quantico, his duty station, was about an hour away from her place. She claimed that she did not want him to drive on the roads after a late night. So no matter what day it was, he knew she always had a place for him to lay his head. He pulled out his clothes for the night and went to take a shower. Maybe he could wash away the doubts and conflicting thoughts swirling in his head about Keisha and what he had realized when looking into her eyes tonight. He didn't know what the next move would be, but he knew that a choice had to be made.

He stepped into the shower and stood under the strong spray of the showerhead. The water pulsing on his neck and shoulders felt so good. His muscles began to loosen and he felt some of the stress and tension leave his body. As his body relaxed, one of his hands moved to the base of his growing cock and he began stroking himself, the water allowing his hand to move quicker, sliding over his length in rapid strokes. He closed his eyes and almost immediately his mind conjured up a picture of Keisha standing in front of him wearing that silk underwear she had on tonight. Breath coming in short bursts, he could clearly see her nipples pebbling as they rubbed against the material, her lips full and covered with gloss, and her long legs wrapped around his body, pulling him closer as she begged him to make love to her.

As he continued stroking his cock, his fantasies became even clearer. Him and Keisha kissing, their tongues intertwined and tasting the unique flavor of each other. His fingers plunging deeply inside her body as he pinned her up against the wall. The fantasy was so realistic, he could almost feel the walls of her pussy milking his fingers as if

pleading for something more, forcing him to give in to the feeling. Her moans of pleasure increased his need for her and his hunger for her body spiraled out of control.

He knew he was going to come soon and it was all because of her and the feelings she invoked. The tingling sensation began in his toes and crept up his body, causing a rippling sensation to run along his skin. His hips began a jerking motion and his breath rushed out of his lungs as he felt his orgasm charge through his body like electricity. With a muffled cry, his seed exploded out of the head of his erect penis and he couldn't help but whisper the name of the woman who he now realized had always been a part of him. "Keisha."

Shower finished, Greg slipped on some shorts and crept towards Keisha's door. He wanted to talk with her. Needed to understand and make sure that he had not misread the look in her eyes tonight. While he still wasn't sure what he would do with that knowledge, he simply knew that he needed to hear her voice and discuss what happened tonight. The one thing he didn't want was the yelling and angry words. They had never had a real fight and he ached inside to realize that their first one had been caused by him.

Part of his nature was that he did not like it when things did not go the way he wanted. Tonight was one of those times. Seeing her dressed up and ready to shine for someone other than him had caused him to act irrationally, which resulted in him placing demands on her that he'd never done before. She had every right to curse him out.

One thing he had noticed during their argument was that she was damn sexy when her eyes were all ablaze with anger. If he had known that, maybe he would have made her pissed off at him before tonight.

He knocked softly and waited for her response. When none was forthcoming, he opened the door a crack and poked his head inside. At first he thought she was ignoring him again, but quickly realized that wasn't the case. She was out like a light. The television was still on, playing some sappy movie with women crying all over the place. He laughed under his breath as he wondered how in the hell she watched those things. The blanket had been kicked off, so her legs were barely covered and her camisole top had ridden up just under her breasts. Her stomach was bare and as she breathed deeply, he noticed the rise and fall of her full-size breasts. The rational part of his brain told him to leave the room and talk with her tomorrow. His other, smaller brain, was quickly reacting to the visual of Keisha sprawled out on the bed like an ancient offering and his shorts began to tent as his cock hardened.

Doing his best to ignore his body's reaction, he turned off the television and walked to the bed where Keisha lay. He reached for the covers, pulled them up over her body and tucked the ends under her chin, hiding her body from his gaze.

He ran his long fingers over his hair and cursed softly. "Damn..." He had never reacted to her like this before today. Something must be wrong with him. It wasn't that he did not find her attractive, because he did. In fact, he found her to be quite beautiful. In the past, whenever they had met somewhere in public and she walked through the crowd toward his direction, he could see the hungry eyes of the other men watching her. Although Keisha had never turned her gaze away from him, he always felt nervous that somehow, some way, her attention would be drawn elsewhere. The pride and relief he would feel when she made it to him had always been there. He had simply thought it was

because she was his friend and he was possessive of anything or anyone he felt belonged to him.

He leaned his head down and kissed her forehead and whispered softly, "Goodnight love." He straightened up and walked toward the door. As he reached for the knob, he heard her speak.

"Greg, please...stay with me."

Five simple words she had spoken, but he somehow knew they would change his life forever. At first he didn't think he heard her correctly, even though his brain was telling him that he did. Turning back to the bed to look at her, his second thought was that Keisha was still sleeping and didn't realize what she had said.

His voice was strained with nerves, but he still managed to whisper softly, "Keisha, what did you say?" If she was sleeping, he didn't want to make an even bigger ass of himself.

He heard rustling in the bed and watched her sit up. "Stay with me. Just for tonight. Tomorrow, we can go back to our regular lives as just friends."

Greg slowly walked toward her and stood by the bed. He looked at the beautiful woman sitting on the bed, really looked at her, and knew that he would always want her. Maybe he had always wanted her. Those other women had been substitutes for the one woman he needed. This was probably why it had never worked out with any of them. He knew that tonight with Keisha would never be enough for him.

He didn't think he would ever let her go after tonight and if she thought he would, she apparently did not know him very well. He lifted the covers from her body and knelt down on the bed, running one

hand up her smooth leg as he continued looking in her eyes. He saw the love she felt for him reflected back and he felt humbled. He felt as if he could conquer the world, but most importantly, he felt as if he were finally where he belonged.

All the wasted years. All the time he had spent chasing what he thought was the perfect woman, when she had been right in front of him this entire time. Keisha had every right to call him an asshole, because he was. But he was about to change that. Tonight, he would claim the woman who had always been there for him no matter where he was. She had been by his side, supporting him no matter what, loving him unconditionally.

He lifted her foot and moved it to the side, spreading her legs wide enough so that he could lie down. As he lowered his body down to gently lie in between her legs, he knew nothing else had ever felt so good. It pleased him that she had some meat on her bones and he enjoyed the softness of her body. He could lie with her or on top of her, and not be afraid that her bones would cut into him.

“Keisha, are you sure?”

“Yes. I want you.”

“Then you’ll have me.”

He leaned down to kiss her and the first brush of her mouth against his was like heaven. They had kissed before, but it had always been friendly pecks between friends. This was something more and he felt the sensation flow through his entire body. Yes! This is what he had been missing. This is what he needed. As he deepened the kiss and their tongues met, his cock grew to immense proportions as her tongue

dueled with his. He was propped on his elbows and his hands cradled her face as he continued to ravage her mouth. He knew he had to claim her, make her his, because as of this moment, she belonged to him.

Chapter Five

All she needed was tonight. After this, she would let him go. She had no other choice. Her heart was breaking at every turn and she was no longer willing to put herself second. She wanted a life of her own. She wanted marriage, babies, and a husband who loved her more than anything else in this world. It was time for her to put away childish dreams and Greg was one of them.

She would take what she wanted—what she needed—from Greg tonight and then she would walk away. No matter how much he pushed and prodded, she would not come back to him. She would have her memories of this night when he was hers and no one else's. They would have to sustain her.

When he'd kissed her forehead and said goodnight, she had woken up at the sound of his voice. At first she thought it was a dream to have him here in her room, but as he opened the door, she had seen his erection trying to burst from his shorts and knew it was now or never. So, she gathered her courage and called out to him. All the while praying that he would not reject her or turn away.

Finally, he would be hers. When their lips met, she gave all that she had to him in that one kiss. All the passion and love she felt for him poured out of her. She wrapped her hands around his broad back and pulled him closer, as if trying to mesh their bodies into one. "Oh Greg, yes. Please."

"Oh baby, you feel so good to me. I never dreamed, never imagined it would feel this good."

She felt his hand moving toward her waist and delve into her underwear. As he felt her smooth skin on her mound, his hand stilled and he lifted his head.

“Oh God, baby. You’re completely bare. Oh, yes, I’m definitely going to enjoy this.” He lifted his body off of hers and grabbed her underwear, slowly sliding them down her legs and off of her body. His hands made lazy circles on her legs and thighs, slowly making their way back up to her center, which was pulsing in anticipation, waiting for what he would do next. To her disappointment, he bypassed the one area she so desperately wanted him to touch as he continued to touch and tease other areas of her body.

His hands traveled up to her camisole and lifted it from the bottom as he tugged and pulled, lifting it over her breasts. “Lift up so that we can take this off.” Once it was over her head, the top quickly followed her underwear and was thrown on the floor without another thought.

Once she was fully naked in front of him, he just stared down at her without moving. He did it for so long, she wasn’t sure if there was something wrong. To her knowledge, he had never been with a black woman before and maybe he didn’t like what he saw. She knew her nipples were darker than her regular skin tone. Her hips were a bit too wide and her body didn’t reflect the “rosy blush” so common among non-black women. The longer he continued to stare at her, the more she regretted her boldness and moved her hands to cover her breasts.

“No! Don’t cover yourself. Don’t ever cover this beautiful body when we’re together like this.” He took a deep breath and his eyes seemed to glow with an emotion she was too afraid to try and name. “Oh Keisha, you are amazing.” He then dipped his head and began licking

her breasts, his tongue moving from the underside all the way to her nipple. He lay his body down again, connecting them skin to skin as he continued to lave her nipples and suck them into his mouth. His teeth giving the tiniest bites to her nipple, causing ripples of desire to shoot directly from her breasts down to her hot channel. She had never felt feelings this intense before and the fact that they were being caused by Greg almost made her weep.

He then began trailing kisses down her body, his lips not leaving any spot untouched. Keisha felt as if her skin was burning, so she started to wiggle her hips to try and make him go faster. She needed him to do more and he wasn't moving fast enough. Although she wanted to savor every moment of his lovemaking, and did not want to rush him, her body ached for him to sink inside her. Her plans for the night included more than just one round with him and she planned to get more than her fill. She wanted as many memories of this night as she could get.

"Greg, please...don't stop."

"I won't baby. I won't."

Then he placed his mouth on her slit and licked her from top to the bottom. Her entire body arched into his mouth. Oh God, it felt so good. His hands grasped under her ass and his lips and tongue went to work bringing her more pleasure than she had ever experienced before. This man didn't just eat her pussy, he feasted on her as if he was sitting down for a five-course meal. He nibbled and licked, bit and sucked, and every time he moaned, the vibrations raced through her body.

"Oh My Damn!! He loved on her so good, she would never forget this night. She felt him move one hand from cupping her ass and then

felt pressure as he pushed one of his fingers inside her body, filling her as he continued to lick and suck her clit into his mouth.

“Oh Greg! Yes! Don’t stop!” She pulled at his hair, not sure if she was trying to pull him up and force him closer to her heated sex. The things this man was doing to her body were driving her insane. Her body started to turn in on itself and she could feel her orgasm coming up on her, crashing through her body like a freight train. She couldn’t stop her body from jerking and humping closer to his mouth, wanting more... needing more.

He was again using two hands to hold her hips while she bucked uncontrollably under the onslaught of his mouth. Her orgasm soared through her body and crashed on her like nothing she’d ever felt before. “Greg! Yes, I’m coming!!!” His mouth and tongue continue to lick and suck as her body convulsed and her juices flowed into his mouth. Even as her body calmed, he continue to lap at her as her body recovered from her explosive orgasm. Slowly he kissed his way back up her body, kissing her belly and breasts as he made his way up to her lips.

“Kiss me Keisha. Taste yourself on my lips.” Without hesitation, she latched on to his mouth and kissed him, her tongue stroking his. She rubbed her hands up and down his firm, toned body, feeling every inch of him that she could reach. As their kiss progressed, she felt his erection pulsing on her thigh and knew she was in for more fun. If what she felt on her leg was an accurate depiction of what he had to offer, then Greg was packing some major heat in his pants. She briefly wondered when he’d taken off his shorts, but quickly realized it really did not matter. All that mattered was getting him to make love to her. She broke the kiss and whispered her impassioned plea.

“Make love to me Greg.”

“As you wish.”

He resumed kissing her and she felt him align his cock to her heated passage. When the head of his cock rubbed against her sensitive clit just before he entered her body, she shivered. Regretfully, he didn't surge into her as she had initially hoped he would. No, what he did was so much better. He slowly pushed into her, stretching her inner walls inch by inch. He was so thick. Thicker than anyone she had been with before—which weren't many—and based on his slow progress, he was pretty damn long as well. Her body continued to open for him as he slowly consumed her, turning her into a quivering mass of flesh just for him.

Keisha couldn't blink, think, or hardly breathe. All she knew was that Greg was about to give her the ride of her life and she would accept everything he had. She would do nothing to stop this because it felt so good to her. Spreading her legs even wider, she enjoyed the feeling of his flesh meeting hers.

“Is this what you want Keisha?” His deep voice whispered huskily in her ear. Unfortunately, Keisha was in such bliss that she had lost all ability to verbally respond and could only nod her head up and down as she stared into his eyes. Those beautiful eyes that caused her to melt from day one. She had never been particularly wild in bed, but Greg's passion for her was her undoing. She grabbed his taut ass and lifted her hips, forcing his cock even further into her body.

As they both gasped at the sensation, Greg picked up the message she was trying to give and began thrusting inside her body. She had never been so full and her body had never responded to anyone this way.

He continued to stroke inside her body, his movements tight and measured as he brought her to the brink of orgasm again.

He lifted one of her legs over the bend in his arm and his thrusts became deeper. She could swear he was tapping her cervix he was going in so deeply. The combined feelings of pleasure and pain were almost overwhelming. She could feel her body continue to respond, becoming even slicker as he continued to drive into her, giving her all that he had.

“Oh, baby, this is amazing. You are amazing. Give me everything Keisha. Don’t hold back.”

“I won’t. Oh God, I won’t.” She felt another orgasm coming and she grabbed him closer to her as she bucked her hips to try and get closer to him. “Yes, Greg. I’m almost there. Don’t stop. Please, don’t stop!”

“Come on baby. Come for me. Let me feel you pulse around me. Milk my cock, baby.”

Keisha’s body exploded around him, her vaginal walls squeezing his shaft, encouraging him to come with her. His hips began driving deeper inside her body. His arms grabbed both of her legs and hefted them over his arms as he pounded into her body. Every thrust branded her as his. It made her realize that no one would ever love her as well as Greg was doing at this moment. When he came, he pushed himself into her body as far as he could get and she felt the warmth shoot into her as he filled her body with his life-giving seed.

Slowly waking up, Keisha realized her body was extremely sore. As she stretched her tense and tight muscles, the previous night’s activities

came roaring to the forefront. OH SHIT! Greg!! Her body bolted upright into a sitting position and the sheet fell down to her waist. Her breasts were bare and she felt as if she had been thoroughly loved all night. Which she had. Suddenly, she panicked. What now? How would they interact with each other now that she had pleaded with him to make love to her? She remembered some of the things she had begged him to do to her and she dropped her head in her hands. Now that the sexual haze had passed and she could look back on her actions in the light of the day, she was extremely embarrassed. The fact that he wasn't lying in bed with her only reinforced what she was afraid of. He must not have been as pleased with her as she'd been with him.

Keisha sat up in bed and leaned back against the headboard. She pulled her knees up and wrapped her arms around tight, as if trying to provide herself with a bit of comfort. She was not going to feel sorry about what happened. She had wanted Greg as much as he had wanted her and she would never regret the evening they spent together. Anyway, it was only for one night. He had never made any promises beyond that and she didn't really expect any. They would remain friends—although she didn't think they could ever go back to the way they were—but she would still be his friend no matter what. If he needed her, she would be there, but she *would* move on with her life.

The fact that he hadn't even bothered to stay with her all night was a testament to how he really felt. Head heavy, she rested her forehead on her knees, trying not to cry.

"Whatever you're thinking, stop." Her head popped up and she could only stare. Greg was standing at the door wearing a pair of shorts and a t-shirt, his arms crossed over his chest. When she just continued

to stare at him, mouth agape, he spoke again. “Keisha...I said whatever you’re thinking, stop.”

“How do you know I’m thinking anything?”

“Because I know that look on your face.” He walked to the bed and lay down next to her. “You’re questioning what happened last night and I won’t let you.”

“I’m not questioning anything.” She lied, not ready to admit that he was right. “I’m just still very tired. Someone kept me up all night and my body is sore and tense.” She raised one hand to her neck and began kneading the muscles. She could be cool about this. Sure...right...of course she could. If only he would leave then she could spend time analyzing—and reliving—what happened last night.

“Right, well, let’s get you in the bath then. Stay here while I get things ready.” He hopped off the bed and padded into her bathroom.

“What? Wait a minute. I don’t take baths.” Although this was a true statement, she knew that a bath would feel very nice this morning. The one thing she loved most about her home was the large bathroom. Her bathtub could easily fit three grown adults and had spa jets that could massage sore muscles and make them feel like jelly after a hard day at work.

Apparently, he was not listening to her protests because the faucets in the tub were turned on. She also noticed that he had several bath towels sitting on the edge of the sink. As he prepared the water, she sat on the bed dazed. Why was he still here? She thought he would have left by now. If nothing else, she didn’t expect him to be here preparing her a bath. What the hell was going on with him? She had

told him she didn't expect anything from him and she truly meant it. All she wanted was the one night and oh goodness, what a night.

As she watched him walk back into the room, she looked up at him with eyes that she was sure reflected a bit of her shock and surprise at his actions.

"Let's go sleepy head." He pulled the sheet back and stopped. Her naked body was bared to his gaze and his nostrils flared as he continued to look at her. His voice sounded strange to her ears as he whispered, "Damn Keisha." As she went to cover her body from his gaze, he looked up at her. "What did I tell you last night? Never hide yourself from me. I meant what I said."

Her hands stilled and fell to the sides as he bent over and picked her up from the bed and carried her to the bathroom. "Greg, put me down. You're going to hurt yourself. I'm not small."

"No, you're not small. But I'm still not putting you down. Plus, I like you just the way you are." He had a smile on his face that she couldn't decipher as he stopped by the bathtub. Her feet were placed on the carpet so that she could stand and he moved behind her and pulled her hair up into a scrunchie. Oh my...is this what it was like to have Greg as her man? If so, she could really get into this. His hands rubbed against her arms and then moved to her hips, his fingers getting her aroused simply by his touch. "Hold on, let me get in first so that you can lay back on me."

Heaven. Yes, she must have died last night and gone straight to heaven. That's the only thing that could explain being here with Greg

like this. In all her wildest dreams, she never expected that this would have happened. Her back rested on his strong broad chest and they had lain in the tub for more than thirty minutes simply relaxing and enjoying each other's company. His lean, muscular legs were bent at the knee and her forearms rested on his thighs. Strong hands gently rubbed her shoulders and arms, his lips making brief contact with her ear and neck as she let herself relax and enjoy this time with him.

After a while, she broke the silence and asked the one question she knew she should leave alone. "Greg?"

"Hmm?"

"Why are you still here?" As soon as the words were out of her mouth, she knew it had been the wrong thing to say. His body stiffened behind her and his hands stopped moving along her body.

"What did you just ask me?"

"It's just that last night...well, I told you I didn't expect anything more from you than the one night. I never thought you would still be here this morning, especially not like this."

His voice was harder and she could almost hear his teeth grinding, as if trying to stay calm and hold onto his temper. "Keisha, do you want me to leave?"

"That's not what I meant Greg. Please don't misunderstand. I love having you here, I just don't understand why. You don't think of me this way and even though I practically threw myself at you last night, I know that once you leave it's over. Why prolong it?"

With quick motions, he lifted her off of him and turned her body so that she was straddling his thighs. “Is that what you think? Do you think I’m just going to walk away from you after last night?”

“Why wouldn’t you? This is only a temporary, one night only type of thing. You don’t have to stay and pretend that you want more.” Her voice sounded strong, but if he walked away right now she would slowly start to die inside. *Please, please, please, don’t let him leave.*

“Oh no you don’t.” His hands gripped her upper arms as he stared at her. “You’re not pushing me away Keisha. I may not have realized what you meant to me before last night, but there is no way in hell I’m going to walk out that door and let you believe that I don’t want this. That I don’t want you.”

All she could do was look at him. Her voice had left and she couldn’t get a sound past the lump in her throat. The way he was looking at her made her melt. Her body started to respond to him and her pussy began to pulse as she remembered all the things they had done to, and with, each other last night.

“I’m not going anywhere Keisha, so you had better get used to this. Plus, you know this is what you want. Us. Together. I saw it in your eyes last night as we made love. I felt it in the way you touched me, the way your body opened up for me. You want me just as much as I want you. I dare you to deny it.”

Lying was not an option. She knew he would be able to tell. Truthfully, why bother trying to hide what she felt. Life was too short and the one man she loved more than anything was telling her that he wanted her. Leaning toward him, she brought her face close to his, her

lips touching his with the tiniest amount of pressure. “I don’t deny it. I want you Greg. I’ve always wanted you.” Her hips rotated just a bit, reminding of him of their position in the tub. “So, what are you going to do about it?”

Chapter Six

The next few weeks were pure bliss for Keisha. Her best friend was back and more than anything else, he was hers. They spent every moment they could together, including nights and weekends. They had to be apart from each other only one time during and that was because she had to travel for work. Even then, they spoke by phone for several hours before she went to bed that night. They talked about work, what they would do when she returned, their plans for the weekend. Anything and everything to keep their telephone connection going for as long as possible. Not many men would sit on the phone for hours with his woman, but Greg did. He didn't get bored and want to hang up or try to hurry her up so that he could get off the phone. Instead, he made sure she knew that he would stay on the phone as long as she wanted him to.

As she lay in bed that night at the lonely hotel, she realized that Greg had come to mean so much to her. If he left, she knew she would survive, but the hurt would be almost unbearable. She missed him. Really and truly missed him. No one had ever gotten under her skin the way he had and it scared her a bit. For all her tough girl talk and hardcore visage, she could still get hurt by those who loved her. The thought that Greg, with his All-American boy next door looks, actually wanted her was sometimes hard to believe.

He was strong enough to deal with her mood swings and tantrums. Sometimes he would just look at her with a smile on her face while she ranted about whatever issue she was upset with at the time. When she finished, he would just open his arms, crook his finger in a "come here" motion and wait for her to sink into his body. His strong arms would

engulf her and he would simply sit with her until she was calmed down. Keisha also realized that Greg was quite possessive, but not in a bad way. Although she had a glimpse of his personality over the years, once they became a couple, things changed drastically.

When they went out to eat, they never met at the restaurant anymore. He always picked her up at the condo—if he wasn't already there—and they went together. If another man was dumb enough to look at her a bit longer than Greg felt was appropriate, he would move his body to shield her from the other man's eyes. Having six feet two inches of pissed off Marine giving you the evil eye always cooled the ardor of anyone who tried to step to her.

Even though they had known each other for more than four years, this new side of his personality was a turn on for her. When they would go home at night, her body would be humming, ready for him to claim her again. He had never disappointed and she didn't think he ever would. Every time they made love, he showed her how special she was to him. With every kiss, every touch, he claimed her as his woman all over again. She had no reason to doubt his love for her. Although he had never said the words, she knew how he felt.

People said those three words all the time and they meant nothing. A man would tell a woman 'I love you' just to get what they wanted from her, but there would be no truth behind them. The words were used as a way to manipulate and cajole a woman into believing something that wasn't true. Greg didn't need to use words to show her how he felt. He showed her every night as he worshipped her body and whispered how beautiful she was. He showed her every time he cradled her face in his

hands as he gazed into her eyes. The love was there and she was okay with waiting for him to say the actual words.

Now, that's not to say that she wouldn't welcome the words when they came, but she didn't *need* to hear them. At least that's what she kept telling herself as the days went by and he still said nothing.

They were headed up to see Greg's family for the weekend and Keisha was a bit nervous. The trip from Virginia to New Jersey would only take about three hours, but it was enough to have the butterflies in her stomach doing flip-flops. She knew Greg's family and had met them several times over the years that they had been friends. Everyone had been very nice to her and so she shouldn't be worried.

The truth was that she was scared shitless. His mother had only known that Keisha was his friend, his best friend, but still only a friend. Now she was going to meet her as Greg's girlfriend, someone whom he cared about. No longer just a friend, she had moved into a new category and all bets were off. He had confirmed to her that he had never dated a black girl before, but he believed that his family would have no issues with the two of them dating. Although it should have made her feel better to hear him say this, it didn't. Families had a funny way of having very different reactions to people changing from "friend" status to "girlfriend" status, especially if the woman in question had mocha skin and the man did not.

"Greg, have you told your parents about me?"

“Keisha what are you talking about? You’ve met my family numerous times. Of course they know about you. What’s wrong with you today?”

“Nothing’s wrong. I’m just asking if they know that things have changed between us. If they know we’re dating now.”

“Well, I don’t know if I mentioned it specifically, but so what. They know you’re coming up with me and they know we’ve known each other for years. So what if we’re dating. What are they going to say?”

“Well, I just don’t want there to be any issues.” For some reason, she had a really bad feeling about this weekend.

“Baby, it doesn’t matter if there are issues. I don’t answer to my family and you ought to know that by now. If the two of us being together causes issues for someone, then that’s their problem.” He reached over and grabbed her hand and brought it to his lips for a kiss. “Come on Keisha, don’t be like this. You don’t have anything to worry about.”

His phone began to ring so he detached their hands and clicked the hands free unit hooked onto his ear so that he could drive and talk at the same time.

“Greg here...Hey man, how’s it going?...We’re on the way up there now...Me and Keisha....Yeah, of course she’s coming...Tonight?...Damn, I don’t know...Let me get back to you...Okay, I’ll give you a call when we arrive.” He disconnected the call and turned to her briefly.

“That was my cousin Ray. He didn’t know you were coming with me and made plans for us to go out with some of the guys.”

“Okay, so go.” She really didn’t mind that his cousin made plans. She wasn’t the clingy type and wanted him to have fun with his friends while they were visiting. “I don’t mind hanging out at the hotel. Go, have fun.”

“Uh, no. I don’t think that would be a good thing.”

“Why not? Go, have a few beers with your friends. Come back to me when you’re done.”

“I don’t really want to go out tonight Keisha. I’ll give Ray a call when we get to the hotel. He sees me all the time when I come up here.”

“I see you all the time as well. I can spare you for one night Greg.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Good.”

“Are you sure you’re okay with me going out with the guys tonight? I think I’d rather stay here with you and see what trouble we can get into. There’s a beautiful king-size bed with our names written all over it.”

“Get out of here you crazy man. I’ve ordered room service for one, including a bottle of wine. I have a new novel by my favorite author on the nightstand and I’m going to sit back and relax tonight.” After the long drive today, he knew she was worn out. Over the years, he had come to realize how much she hated sitting in one place too long. So the fact that she was tired enough to *want* a night of relaxation and reading said a lot. That was the only reason he was going out tonight. He liked

his cousin, he really did, so if there was going to be any night when he would leave Keisha to hang out with Ray, it would be tonight.

Their goodbye kiss was enough to make him change his mind about going. He wanted to stay with her and break in their hotel room bed...and the bathtub...and the couch.... Hell, this woman made him want to do things with her that he had never considered before. Whatever good he had done in his life to have this woman love him, he would do it all over again just to keep her by his side. No one had ever meant as much to him and he would do anything and everything in his power to keep her by his side.

“Greg, get out of here and go have fun. I’ll be here when you get back.”

“All right, I’m leaving. So, when I get back, will you be naked under those covers?”

“You’ll just have to wait and see. Now go have fun with your cousin.”

“Bye babe.”

He left the hotel met up with the guys at their favorite pub. The place was kind of run down and he wasn’t sure why they continued to come here when there were better, newer establishments in the neighborhood. Never the less, this was their place. Ray and Greg had spent plenty of nights hanging out at Mick’s Place whenever Greg made it home. Most of their buddies hung out here as well and they were always guaranteed to see one or two of them when they dropped in. Tonight was no different.

The place had a stale, old beer smell to it, but amazingly enough, Greg didn't find the smell unpleasant. It was just different. As he sat nursing a beer and laughing a bit with his buddies, he felt a soft hand flutter on his neck. The eyes of his buddies all seemed to narrow and he knew exactly who it was. Angel. Her name was ironic, since she was definitely no Angel. The spawn of Satan was more like it. He removed the hand from his neck without turning around and addressed the one woman he wished he had never met. "What do you want Angel?"

"Oh Greg, don't be like that. I heard you were coming into town this weekend and wanted to catch up." She looked at the other men at the table and gave a slight nod to his cousin. "How you doin' Ray? Haven't seen you around here lately."

"Why would I see you Angel? I've been hiding from you."

She ignored him as she turned back to Greg, again trying to get his attention and pissing him off even more. He should have stayed at the hotel with Keisha. "Angel, why don't you leave us alone and go play with someone else. We're busy."

"So, I hear you're in Virginia. I've always wanted to visit down there. Maybe I can come and stay with you for a bit. You know, get to know each other again."

"No."

"No? What do you mean no?"

"I mean, no. As in no way, not happening, don't even think about it." It was sad really, because Angel was the classic beauty, or at least what everyone thought of as a classic beauty. Her brunette hair brushed along the top of her ass, her green eyes stood out against her lightly

tanned skin, she had a slim body—reflective of her constant need to be more beautiful than any other woman around her—and her face was actually quite stunning. It wasn't until you got to know her that she became ugly. She had the personality of a viper and he regretted the day he allowed her to get her claws in him.

He had been young, fresh out of basic training when he met her at Mick's one night. To a young man who felt he had the entire world in front of him, she looked like the perfect addition to his life. That was until he realized that she was playing him against his cousin Ray. Each of them had been with her without the other knowing. She had been promising her time and attention to both, using each of them for what she could get out of them. They didn't find out until they had come to Mick's together one night when she was there and both went to introduce her as their woman. The shock of it had caused a rift between him and Ray that took months to get over. They both realized that she wasn't worth it, but it had taken a toll on him and how he viewed relationships.

Ever since that night when she'd been caught by the both of them, she had tried to get back in their good graces. Each time he came home, she propositioned him to come home with her, to pick up where they left off. Never again. Especially now that he had Keisha. No one could take her place. Keisha was The One. He had not yet said the words to her, but he knew he loved her. More than anything in this world, he loved Keisha. After being with her these past few weeks, he was surprised—but not unhappy—to find that Angel no longer tempted him. She no longer garnered his attention, not even to look at her beauty in appreciation.

Yeah, he was ready to call it a night. Keisha was waiting for him at the hotel and he wanted to hold her in his arms. “Ray, can you get another ride home? I’m going back to the hotel.”

Ray looked at him with a twinkle in his eye, “Going back to your woman?”

“Yeah. I’m done looking at your mugs tonight.” As Ray stood up to say goodbye, Angel stepped in front of Greg and blocked his path.

“What woman Greg?”

“Angel, this is really getting old. Move out of my way.”

“You brought a woman here for the weekend?”

Greg ignored her and walked over to Ray. “All right man, see you at Mom’s house tomorrow afternoon. Don’t forget to bring the barbeque rub you promised.”

“You got it. Tell Keisha I said hi. See you guys tomorrow.”

“See ya.” With a wave and mock salute to his other buddies, Greg walked out into the night and back to the arms of his woman.

“Ray? Who’s Keisha?” Angel couldn’t believe Greg kept doing this shit to her. Didn’t he know she was the best thing for him? Plus, she wanted to get the hell out of here and Greg was her ticket to someplace else.

“Why do you want to know? Keisha is none of your business Angel. Leave Greg alone. He doesn’t want you.”

She wasn’t letting this go. “Is she his girlfriend? Are they serious? What kind of name is Keisha anyway? Wait, is she a nig—”

“Angel if I were you, I’d shut my mouth right now. If you say one more thing about Keisha in my presence, so help me, you’ll live to regret it.” She saw that Ray was completely serious, so she shut her lips against the nasty word that was about to come out of her mouth.

She got up to leave the table, more pissed now that she had been when Greg left. How could he choose *her*? That woman would never be accepted by his family. Would she? Well, she’d heard Greg say something about a barbeque tomorrow. Angel would find a way to make this woman leave him and then she would be there to pick up the pieces.

Chapter Seven

Keisha woke up slowly and pressed back into Greg. He was curved behind her, spooning her body with his. His hand rested lightly on her breast, as if holding on to her in his sleep. Snuggling her body against his, she replayed the events of the night before and couldn't help but moan at the turn their lovemaking had taken. It was amazing. While she had not expected him back for a few more hours, when he had returned last night she could admit that she was happy to see him. A few hours all alone were fine and dandy, but she wanted her man with her. She missed him and was glad when he walked through the door and pulled her into his arms.

He had slowly stripped the hotel bathrobe from her body and proceeded to kiss and lick and love on her until she had become a blubbering mass of sensation. Her rasping voice begged him to make love to her, pleaded with him to give her what she needed. Stubborn man that he was, he had made her wait for it. Her skin tingling, her legs shaking from the numerous orgasms he'd given her just from his mouth and fingers alone, he teased and tempted her until she was almost speaking a foreign language. When they finally came together, he surged into her body with such force that she screamed. Not in pain—well, maybe a little bit of pain—but mainly in pleasure and ecstasy. She wasn't sure what happened tonight to make him come back to her and make love with such abandon, but she was happy it did.

They made love several times last night until neither of them could move a muscle. Exhausted, they had fallen into a deep sleep, holding on to each other as if nothing else mattered.

Keisha felt Greg waking up and pulled his arm tighter around her body. She loved being with him like this and thanked her lucky stars every day that he had stormed up to her condo that night so many weeks ago with his demands for an explanation.

“Good morning beautiful.” His sleep filled voice always gave her goose pimples.

“Good morning yourself handsome.” She rolled over and kissed him quickly on the mouth. “Breakfast?”

“Of course. I’m starved. You took advantage of me last night so I need to regain my energy.”

“Don’t even try it. I was sitting here minding my own business until you came in here and ravished me.” She smiled as she said it. They both knew that she loved every minute of their lovemaking.

“All right, love. Let me get up and shower before we eat.”

“Okay.” Keisha didn’t put too much stock in his calling her “Love.” He always did and she always thought of it a figure of speech. Admittedly, it felt good whenever he said it, so she wasn’t going to question it.

Breakfast ordered, Keisha walked into the bathroom and looked at her man showering. Damn, he was fine. She could question all day long what he saw in her and why he had chosen her, but she wasn’t going to worry about that right now. She looked at the clock and calculated the amount of time until breakfast would be delivered. A wicked smile came on her face as she opened the shower door and stepped into the shower with him.

“Want a little company?”

He turned to her, his body slick with water and soap. "Only if it's you."

She turned away from, knowing what it would do to him and pressed her ass against his rising erection. "Do me first."

"Oh, hell yeah..."

Later that afternoon at the home of Greg's parents, Keisha realized that he had been correct. His family welcomed her into the fold with open arms. When everyone discovered that they were a couple, his parents, and a few of his other relatives, gave them a knowing smile. What surprised her most was what Greg's mother said to him. "Well, it's about time Gregory. I've been waiting for you to wake up and smell the coffee for years now." She then turned to Keisha, "Honey, I don't know how you put up with him for so long while he was being a dunce. I'm glad you did though. I've always known the two of you belonged with each other. Now, you two go and get something to eat. Gregory, go help your father with the grill. Ray brought the barbeque rub and your father won't let anyone else but you touch that grill."

As Greg watched his mother walk away, Keisha couldn't help but laugh at the look he had on his face. Wow! Greg's mother *wanted* her to be with him.

"Did you just hear my mother? She called me a dunce." He turned to her with a look of shock and pleasure on his face. "See, I told you not to worry about anything."

"You did. I guess I never should have doubted you." She grabbed his shirt and pulled him down until his lips were touching her. "I'll have

to make sure and apologize properly when we get back to the hotel room.”

“We can leave right now if you want.”

“No, I don’t want. You promised me food, so I’m expecting you to deliver.” Giving a brief kiss filled with promise for later, she pulled away and pushed him toward the grill.

As the day progressed, Keisha had never felt so relaxed. Food was plentiful and Greg was always by her side. Touching her hand, hugging her close to his body, kissing her. Yes, things were good. The only niggling thought in her mind was that things were too good and she was a little concerned it wouldn’t last. Not necessarily a pessimist, she tried to be realistic and perfect situations like this never really happened without a hiccup or two.

So, when the beautiful brunette came walking into the backyard, she should have known there would be trouble. The only problem was that she was so blinded by the acceptance from Greg’s family that it never occurred to her that this was the catalyst that she had expected and dreaded all in one package.

It seemed as if no one saw the woman but her. She had on jeans and a t-shirt that were molded to her slim body. Stunning was the only way to describe her. The perfect woman, those were the first words that came into Keisha’s mind when she saw her. She seemed extremely comfortable here, so Keisha assumed she was a family member or close friend. As she turned back to one of Greg’s cousin to ask who she was, she heard a loud gasp as several people turned their heads towards Greg’s location.

What she saw caused her to freeze in place as her world came tumbling down around her. The beautiful woman had her arms wrapped around Greg's waist and was kissing him as a lover would. And Greg seemed to be kissing her right back. At least he hadn't pushed her away yet and that was the same thing. He was kissing this other woman right in front of Keisha and his entire family. This could not be happening. There was no way Greg could be doing this to her. Although it had only been two or three seconds, it felt like minutes to Keisha as she felt her heart being ripped into pieces.

She then watched Greg pull the other woman from around him and pull his lips away from hers.

"Angel, what the hell are you doing? Why are you at my parent's home?"

"Greg, honey, don't be like that. You invited me over here after our date last night at Mick's. You said you wanted me to meet your family. Greg what's wrong with you? I'm sorry we couldn't spend more time together last night, but I had to work."

"You're crazy. No, I didn't."

Keisha realized that Greg must know this woman and there had to be some truth to what she was saying. She knew Greg had been out last night and he had come home earlier than he said he would. Could he have been with this other woman? Funny thing was, not once had he turned to search for Keisha during this fiasco. All of his attention was solely focused on the woman in front of him and suddenly Keisha felt embarrassed and out of place. He had forgotten about her. After everything they had been through together, all the years of friendship, and these past weeks of loving each other and finally being a couple. He

had thrown her to the side again for another woman. Someone who was everything she wasn't. No matter how much she wanted to deny what had just happened, she knew it was true. Greg had never loved her. Had never felt the same way about her that she had felt about him.

Slowly she stood up and the motion brought everyone's eyes toward her, including Greg. As she looked into the eyes of his family, she saw varying emotions from pity to sadness at what was unfolding right in front of them. However, the person she cared most about was simply staring at her. He didn't move fast enough for her liking and that made it even worse. Her anger at the situation was rising fast and she knew she needed to leave before she said or did something she would regret. As she turned to leave, Greg called out her name—actually he bellowed it.

“Keisha! Where the hell are you going?!”

No this motherfucker didn't. If she didn't like his mother so much, she would have another choice name to call him, but out of respect for the wonderful woman who had raised such a despicable asshole, she would keep her thoughts inside. So, while she stopped to turn around, she did not answer him. Her arms crossed over her chest as she tapped her foot. If looks could kill, he would have been writhing on the floor in acute pain from the torture being inflicted upon his person.

He finally detached himself from the woman, giving her a look of disgust, and walked over to Keisha. “I asked you a question Keisha. Where do you think you're going?” He stood over her as if he was the wronged one. How dare he? She was the one who had just been humiliated in front of his family and friends and he had the nerve to act

like she was the one who owed him an answer. If she was bigger, she would kick his ass. Since she wasn't, she chose the next best option.

"Where am I going? I'm leaving." She turned to Ray who was standing off to the side. "Ray, can you please take me to the hotel?"

"If you take one step out of this backyard, I will never forget this."

That was it. Her temper flew through the roof and she could no longer hold back her anger. "Screw you Greg Jordan! How could you kiss another woman in front of me? How could you humiliate me in front of your family and friends?"

"I didn't kiss her! If you had been watching, you would have seen that."

"I was! I saw her come right up to you and kiss you. Is this the kind of woman you want? If so, then you can have her. I'm taking my ass back home where I belong. You can stay here with your new girlfriend if you want."

Just then a voice interrupted them and they both turned toward the interloper. "Hey, are you his friend from Virginia. I thought you guys were just friends. He didn't mention you last night when we were together."

Barely holding on to her temper, Keisha turned back to Greg. Her voice was strained from the effort to try and hold it together. "If you don't get her out of my damn face, I'm going to put my foot so far up her ass she'll taste my shoe polish for weeks."

"I don't give a shit what you do to her. I don't have anything to do with this Keisha. She's lying."

“Do you deny that you were out with her last night while I waited for you?”

At that moment, Ray walked up to them and tried to interject, “Keisha, it wasn’t—”

“Shut up Ray. I’m not mad at you, but if you try to defend him, I will be. Tell me Greg, did you see her last night?” Ray just shook his head and pulled Angel away. Angel’s yelling and screaming faded as Ray practically carried her to the gate and placed her on the front porch, away from the family gathering. Although that made Keisha feel better, she was too far gone to stop now. Seeing the beautiful woman with Greg had brought back all the insecurities she had about dating someone like him. The old thoughts of how he was too gorgeous for her and she would never measure up to be the kind of woman that he should have on his arm.

Her rational brain knew that wasn’t the case. But on the other hand, she knew that whether or not he had actually done anything or not, she would always have to contend with women like this as long as she was with Greg. She didn’t want to live her life that way and have to constantly worry about the woman around the corner that would try to take him away from her. Although if he was truly hers, then the simple fact that another woman wanted him really wouldn’t matter.

Thoughts racing through her mind, she realized that he had never even said that he loved her. Sure, he cared about her, but loved her? No, she no longer thought he did and had no desire to fight this battle with him. Not now, not ever. Life had been good for them and that bitch had come in here and caused her to have more doubts about Greg’s feelings for her. If she wasn’t already gone, Keisha swore she would

punch in her damn face. She shook her head to clear her thoughts as Greg continued speaking.

“Keisha, listen to me. It’s not the way you think. She was at the bar when we walked in. Why don’t you trust me? Why were you about to leave just now without finding out the truth?”

Keisha looked around and saw that his family was trying not to pay attention, but they couldn’t help but overhear the conversation. This was not the time or place to have this conversation. She wanted to go home.

“Greg, I don’t want to fight with you. Stay here with your family. I’m going home.”

“No, I’ll take you back to the hotel. We need to finish this.”

“No, not to the hotel! Home. To Virginia. I’m leaving and I don’t want you to come with me.”

“Well, that’s just too damn bad. If you’re leaving then I’m leaving with you. You can be pissed at me all you want, but I’m not going to let you just walk away from me, from us. She was starting trouble Keisha and I refuse to let this come between us. You want to leave? Fine, we’ll leave. But I’ll be damned if I’m not by your side when you do.”

She stood in front of Greg with her hands fisted at her side while she weighed her options. Greg was a stubborn man and she didn’t want to fight with him anymore today. Her heart couldn’t take it. At some point she realized that it was no longer about the woman who had caused a scene. This was about them, their love for each other—or lack thereof—and their relationship, or whatever they called it at this point.

Keisha lifted her head and walked away from Greg and toward his mother, who was wringing her hands.

“Mrs. Jordan, it was so very nice to see you again. I hope I did not cause any disruption to your family.”

“Dear Keisha, it was never you. That woman came in here and spread those lies. Don’t listen to her Keisha, don’t let her nastiness come between you and Greg. You are the only woman he has brought home to meet me. Please give him a chance to explain.”

Keisha couldn’t think right now. Greg was staring a hole into her back and his family was all trying to give her words of encouragement to listen to him. It wasn’t that she would not listen to him, because she probably would. It was that she was listening to her own mind more than her heart. Her heart told her that Greg loved her and that she should brush this under the rug. Her mind screamed at her that this would not be the only woman who would try to cause trouble between them. She didn’t know if they were strong enough in their relationship to weather that storm. How many other women would she have to fight off? Would there be others who felt they had the right to come into their lives and kiss her man? Damn, she should have stomped a mud-hole in that tramp when she had the chance.

It took everything she had to keep her dignity in tact as she said goodbye to Greg’s father and cousin. Goodbye’s finished, she made her way to the front of the house and the car. She waited for a few minutes as Greg said goodbye to everyone as well and when he arrived to the car, she silently got in and turned toward the window. Avoidance was her friend at the moment.

“Keisha, we will talk about this. Don’t think you’re going to get away with ignoring me.” She heard him sigh as he continued speaking to her, “I still don’t understand why you wouldn’t trust me. Why you automatically assumed that she was telling the truth.”

She knew no amount of explanation would ever make sense to Greg. He would never understand what it felt like to be invisible, even for those few short seconds. She never wanted to feel that way again.

Chapter Eight

Greg could not believe what was happening. That bitch Angel had caused all these problems and now Keisha was no longer even speaking to him. The drive back to the hotel had been horrible. She never glanced in his direction. Not once. Each time he tried to pull her into a conversation about what happened, she ignored him. Whenever he tried to touch her, she pulled away. While he would never force her to do anything she didn't want to do, he was not going to allow her to ignore him. On this, he would not budge. He refused to let something like this come between them. The woman he loved would not walk away from him because she wouldn't take a moment just to listen to what he had to say.

He was in the sitting area of the hotel room as Keisha moved around in the room. Almost afraid to go in there to see what she was doing, he knew he had to do something. She had to talk to him. He lifted off the couch and walked towards the door separating the bedroom from the living area and opened the doors without knocking.

The sight in front of him almost knocked him back. She was packing. Keisha was leaving him.

"Keisha, what the hell is going on?" He stormed into the room and walked right up to her. She was not just going to leave him without a fight.

"I told you I was going home Greg."

"Why?" The sound was torn from his throat as he realized what this meant.

She turned away from him and walked toward the window. “Greg, I love you, but that’s not news to you. I’ve told you that before.” She clasped her hands in front of her as she looked out at the view. “I have always been here for you. Always been your friend, always been here to stand by you. But today...today I saw something that I can’t fight.” She turned to him and he saw the tears in her eyes and it almost broke him. “What if I’m not enough for you?”

“What the hell? Why would you think that? You’re more than enough for me. You’re all I need Keisha.”

“Really? Because what I saw today was a glimpse of what our future would look like.”

“I don’t understand. You’re talking in riddles. I would never betray you!”

“And I’m not saying you will. But there will always be women who will want you. I will always have to justify my presence in your life when the next best thing comes your way. I cannot change who and what I am Greg. You cannot change who and what you are. Eventually you will come to resent me for being in your life, for preventing you from having the type of woman you have always wanted.”

“Keisha, stop, you don’t know what you’re saying.”

“Yes, I do. Greg, listen to me. I’m rough around the edges, always have been and I always will be. I don’t do dainty. Hell, I could probably do better in hand-to-hand combat than half the men in your family. I’m comfortable in cammies and boots, or just hanging out watching sports all day. You’re used to women who eat salads all day and only drink water with lemon. Women who get their nails done every two weeks

because they don't know how to function being less than perfect. Stunning, beautiful women like the one who walked into your parent's backyard today. I can't compete with that Greg. Never could and I'm sure as hell not trying to start now. Why would I stay here and prolong the inevitable? Eventually, I won't be enough and not only will I lose the man I love, but I'll lose my best friend." She stood up and walked to the suitcase, picked up more clothes and placed them inside. "You have to let me go."

"No. I don't." He jerked the suitcase off the bed and her clothes scattered all over the floor. "Why would you say this bullshit to me? Do you really believe this? Do you think that I could be with you like this, love you the way that I do and simply allow you to leave me? It's not even for a legitimate reason. You're using what happened today as an excuse!" The fury in his voice was coming through loud and clear. He could hear the strain on his vocal chords as he forced the words out of his mouth.

"Why are you doing this Keisha? Why are you leaving me?"

He watched her take three deep breaths as if trying to calm down, but then she let the words explode from her mouth and his heart dropped to his stomach at what he heard. "You forgot about me today! Do you realize that? I was standing there in the backyard while you were completely engrossed in the woman standing in front of you and I was forgotten. You never even glanced my way until I moved."

She took both of her hands and pushed him back away from her, her anger was so strong. "I was an afterthought. The average looking black girl you just so happened to be fucking! It's like I was invisible again after all this time. It took you years to realize what was right in

front of you and as soon as a beautiful woman, a beautiful white woman, shows her face, I'm relegated to the background again. I was humiliated and you did nothing. How could you Greg? I love you so much and you don't give a shit about me." She collapsed on the floor in a heap, tears coursing down her face.

Oh God, what have I done? Greg was speechless. He hadn't forgotten about her, he had been so damn angry with Angel that he was trying to hold on to his temper. He never imagined that Keisha would feel that he hadn't remembered she was there. Of course he had. His mind had been whirling with thoughts of what her reaction was to seeing a strange woman kiss him. He had to make this right unless she would leave him and that was the one thing he could not take right now.

He sat down next to her, pulling her into his arms, even though he knew she probably wanted to be anywhere else but with him. Thoughts of how to make this right swirled around in his head.

"Keisha, listen to me. If you hear nothing else that I say to you today, hear this. I love you. I think I have always loved you. Sure, I was a little slow on the uptake, but I have never seen my life, my future, without you beside me. What you saw today does not change the simple fact that you mean everything to me. You are the only woman I have ever brought home to meet my family. I think they were all aware of how I felt even before I was. It was no surprise to any of them when we announced we were a couple. Baby, don't you realize that every important event in my life during the past four years begins with, "Keisha and I were..."

"But Greg—"

He pulled her across his lap so that she was facing him. He wanted her to look at him when he said the rest, because he wanted no doubts in her mind that he meant every word that came out of his mouth.

“No, Keisha. No more. It’s my turn now. I know that I can be pushy and overbearing on occasion.” At her look of disbelief, he amended that statement. “Okay, I can be pushy and overbearing on a regular basis.” His heart flipped when she smiled at him, but stayed quiet, ready to listen to what else he had to say.

“I won’t apologize for being who I am. The man that I am is who you fell in love with. Life with me won’t be perfect, but I promise you that you will be the only woman who will own my heart. I will never forget who I belong to because you are always with me, even when you’re not there physically. You never have to be concerned with another woman Keisha.” He couldn’t believe he was going to confess this, but he needed to say the words. “All of the women I have dated were always compared to you. When they were found lacking, I moved on. I think that’s why none of my relationships have worked out. None of them were you.”

He watched as silent tears fell down her face. Unable to bear to see her cry anymore, he used his thumbs to gently wipe the wetness from her eyes. “Don’t cry baby. Please, don’t cry. I love you so much Keisha. You mean everything to me. Don’t leave me. Please.”

“I’m not going anywhere. You have no idea how long I’ve waited for those three little words.”

“What do you mean? I’ve said them to you before.”

“Yes, but not since we’ve been lovers. I never knew if this was just a fling for you.”

“Why didn’t you just ask me? I would have told you how I felt.”

“Um, no. If I have to ask then it’s not the same.”

“Keisha, I could have sworn I told you. How could you not know how I felt about you?”

“Well, maybe I wasn’t paying close enough attention. Maybe I need a refresher course in how to express love without saying the words.”

“I think I can arrange that. So, no more talk about leaving me, right? We’re in this together until the end. I need you too much to let you go.”

“No more talk of leaving.”

He cradled her face in his hands and pulled her towards him for a deep kiss. His tongue pushed its way into her mouth as he poured all of his feelings for Keisha into that one act.

“I fall more in love with you every day. I can’t help it. You’re all I need from this day forward.” They slowly removed each others clothes as they kissed. Their lips grazing, tongues dueling for supremacy, their kiss deepened as their passion increased. Once they were completely naked, they moved to the bed, Greg lying in between her legs as he propped up on his forearms.

“Greg, you have no idea how much your love means to me. Make love to me, please. I need you inside me.”

Possession and love flashed in Greg’s eyes. “No one but me, Keisha. From this day forward, I will be the only man who will make love to you.”

He moved Keisha's legs around his waist and slid his hands up her thighs, his fingers grabbing at the flesh of her soft legs and he was certain he had never felt anything as smooth. His hands came in contact with skin that felt like pure silk and he knew he had never been with anyone who made him feel this way. His feelings for Keisha compounded and increased and he could not imagine living his life without her by his side. "No goddamned other man but me will ever lie between your legs like this."

Keisha locked her ankles at the small of Greg's back, her heart practically exploding at the harshness in Greg's voice. "I don't want anyone else." She ran his hands up Greg's chest, his flesh taut and searing under her fingers.

Greg groaned and grabbed Keisha's hands, stilling her caress. "Not right now," he said. "I can't take it." He took her hands and stretched them over her head, locking their fingers together near the headboard. Greg's face dropped to only inches away from Keisha's, so close that she could see every sexy cut and groove around his eyes, and every tick of his jaw as he clenched his teeth. She felt every gasp of pleasure as he entered her body to the hilt, joining them as one.

"I love you." Keisha couldn't hold the words inside. A dam had been broken that she had no hope of repairing. She lifted his hips, following Greg's cock as he pulled away, unable to bear being apart even for one penetration.

"Wait...Oh God." Greg gritted his teeth and squeezed his eyes shut. "Keisha, baby, that feels so good. I'll lose it too fast and I want to enjoy this."

Keisha pushed against the hold of Greg's hands, reminding him that she was here with him and that it was her giving him pleasure. "I love you, Greg Jordan. We'll have our entire lives to make love. You can take me as fast or as slow as you want. No matter what happens tomorrow"—Keisha just could not shut up—"I'll love you until the day I die."

Greg's eyes popped open and gave Keisha the opportunity to see into his soul. "No dying," Greg rasped, his voice rough and hard. "Promise me you won't leave me. Ever."

"Never. We belong together." Keisha confessed as Greg continued to make love to her. "Kiss me, Greg. Please."

Greg's deep blue gaze darkened to the color of the sea. He swooped down and took Keisha's mouth in a kiss that left no doubt that he was marking her as his. He let go of Keisha's hands and softly clamped his fingers around her jaw, pushing down until she opened up and let him inside. Greg sank into Keisha's mouth, rubbing his tongue along the length of hers, merging their bodies in yet another way. The kiss slowed the powerful ramming in Keisha's hot channel and seemed to settle Greg down. Ecstasy raced through her, shooting zapping lines of pleasure to every nerve-ending in her body, creating a symphony of music inside her soul.

Greg shuddered above her and continued to drive his cock deep into Keisha's hot core, somehow lodging it farther inside than it had yet gone creating a combination of pleasure and pain as he reached her womb. Keisha tunneled her hands into Greg's short blond hair, brushing the longer strands away from his forehead.

Whispering sweet nothings in her ear as they strengthened and solidified their bond, Greg continued to make love to her. He suddenly

pulled away and lifted his head, his eyes wide, almost frightened-looking, before they squeezed shut. “Oh, Christ,” he muttered, his voice raspy. His skin pulled taut over the harsh lines of his face, and just like that, Greg came, wet heat filling Keisha’s body. He didn’t move, he didn’t ram, he just stayed absolutely still as his seed rushed like a faucet out of his cock, heating her clenching channel from the inside out in a way she had never felt before.

Keisha squeezed Greg’s hands in response, her body tensing with the need to finish and her orgasm came upon her so quickly that she lost her breath. The feeling was so intense, unlike anything she had ever experienced before. As her body calmed, she could feel his rapid heartbeat and knew that he had felt the same thing she had. She pressed her soft lips to Greg’s ear. “I’ll never doubt you again. You’re mine,” she whispered.

He didn’t move his body at her words, only grazed a kiss against her neck as he struggled to catch his breath. Her soft words continued as she rubbed her hands along his strong back. “I want to grow old together until all we can do is hold hands and sleep the night away in each other’s arms. I want to love you forever and take care of you, because nobody knows your heart better or loves you as much as I—”

She stopped as Greg lifted his head and looked down upon her. “I don’t know when it happened, whether it was when we were only friends or after you allowed me to become your lover”, Greg slid Keisha’s palm up to his chest and covered the pounding in his heart, “but I love you too, Keisha.” Wetness shone in Greg’s blue eyes, “I swear I do.”

Keisha wanted to speak, but there were no words potent enough to express the depth of emotion that filled her up to overflowing. Pure,

unfiltered love rushed through her entire being and she looked at the man who would be her present, her future, and every day in between.

Epilogue

It was Greg's birthday and the Jordan family had all come together to wish him well. It was also time for Greg to leave the military, so the party served a dual purpose. "So, tell me again why you chose that big lug over me? I would have made you happier Keisha." Greg's cousin Ray was smirking the entire time he gave this impassioned speech. He knew better than anyone that Greg and Keisha belonged together, no matter how much they may have denied it in the beginning. Laughing at his outrageous statement, Keisha took a sip of her drink and looked around the yard, her eyes landing on Greg as he shared a laugh with one of his friends.

"Come on Ray. You know I would be too much of a headache for you. I actually have a brain...and know how to use it!" Mock horror on her face, she grabbed his arm and began walking towards her man. "So, tell me, what trouble have you gotten into lately?"

"I don't get into trouble. My job is to put the guys in jail who do get in trouble. Oh well, I still say if Greg hadn't seen you first we could have been great together."

"Yeah, right. You would have been running away screaming within a week. But, I do have to say you're pretty good for my ego." Laughing as they walked toward Greg, she watched him turn his head and look at her, and couldn't help but be proud to call him her man. After the previous trip to see his family, she hadn't been in a hurry to come back. She knew if that woman showed up again, she wouldn't be as composed this time. So, while they had gotten over the incident and were stronger

because of it, never again would she allow someone else to make her doubt Greg again.

Ray had called Greg three months after they had returned to Virginia to let him know that Angel had latched onto some unlucky guy passing through town. She hopped on the first plane out of New Jersey, hot on his trail when he left to go back to his hometown. When Greg told her about his conversation with Ray, Keisha had breathed a sigh of relief when she heard the news. Not that she was particularly concerned about Angel, but to know that another confrontation wouldn't take place when they returned to his hometown was a burden she was glad to get off of her shoulders.

As they walked to Greg's side, she let go of Ray's arm and joined her hand with Greg's. His face angled slightly to acknowledge her presence and gave her a sweet kiss on the lips. "It's about time you joined me. I thought I would have to steal you from Ray." He smiled, letting her know that he didn't mind one bit that she was close to his family. "I believe he thinks you came here to spend time with him." His eyes sparkled as he lifted his head and gave Ray an exasperated look. "Get your own woman and leave mine alone."

"Well, if I had seen her first she would have chosen me. You'd better count yourself lucky." He turned away to go visit with other family members, but turned back and gave them a huge smile filled with friendship and acceptance. "Seriously, he couldn't ask for anyone better to be by his side. I'm glad you two finally woke up and did something about how you felt."

"He's too damn nosey for his own good." Although his tone was harsh, Keisha knew not to take him too seriously.

“Leave him alone. No he’s not. Plus, I like him best out of all the cousins. Maybe we should have him come to Virginia for a bit. I have this friend...”

“Oh no you don’t. Today is not about you and your matchmaking. It’s my birthday and I want my gift.”

“Well, you can’t have your gift right now. That’s for later and you know it.”

“No, you don’t understand. I have another gift in mind. It’s so small it can fit in the palm of your hand. I’m not sure how practical it is though. You can’t do much with it, but I really liked it and want to make sure I keep it with me forever.”

“What kind of gift is that? It doesn't sound very good.”

“That depends on who’s receiving the gift. But to me, it's just very, very, precious.” Dropping to his knee in front of his family and friends, in almost the exact spot where she had been standing when “the incident” occurred, Greg pulled out a little black box and opened it. Nestled inside was the most beautiful ring she had ever seen. It was the perfect size and if she had ever thought to pick out an engagement ring for herself, this is what it would look like.

“Oh my.” Her voice was almost a whisper. “Greg?”

“I know I’ve said this before, but I need you in my life, by my side, and as my partner. In front of everyone I hold dear to me, I’m asking you to be my wife. Marry me Keisha.” Frozen in place, she was incapable of speaking as he continued. “Life won’t always be perfect and I know there will be times when you’ll want to give me back. But now that you’re with me, I’m never planning to leave. I will do all within my power to make

you happy. Sometimes I may say or do the wrong thing, but you should never doubt that every morning when I wake up, I want you beside me. When I go to sleep at night, you're the person I want next to me, wrapped in my arms."

"Shut up Greg. You've said enough...Yes, Yes, I'll marry you!"

As they kissed, everyone else faded into the background. Although the backyard was filled to the brim with family and friends, they didn't care. At this moment, the only two people who existed in the world were the two of them.

Keisha thanked her lucky stars that she had taken a chance so long ago and asked Greg to stay with her. Not only did she still have her best friend, but the one man on the planet who was meant to be her better half.

The End

About the Author

Reana Malori is a pseudonym for a chick with dreams of world domination. However, if that's not possible, I'm willing to settle for being one of the best interracial romance erotica writers on the market. I've been reading romance novels since the age of fourteen and know what appeals to me as reader. My goal is to always provide that same experience for the people who read my prose.

I'm a former Marine who served for eight years and has been stationed at Parris Island, SC; Camp Delmar, CA; Cherry Point, NC; and Arlington, VA. As a result, strong military men will always be a favorite topic of mine and many of my stories will continue to have a military theme. I'm a fan of Highlanders, Alpha males, and strong women who love with everything they have.

Going forward, I will continue to write books, and short stories, that will help people escape for bit and relax. Be on the lookout for many more stories as I think you'll like what you get from me. I currently live in Northern Virginia with my husband and two children. Please send me an email at reanamalori@yahoo.com. I'd love to hear from you!

Reana

Web site: www.reanamalori.webs.com

Blog: www.reanamalori.blogspot.com

Yahoo Group: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/reana_malori/