

Chapter One

Harmony

It was a dark and crisp warm summer night on the Island of Tahiti. Cocktails and caviar on every servers' tray. Candles flickered off the table and the dim lighting from the flames enhanced the ambiance of the free-spirited night. Men with peppered thin hair, olive skin, and toothy grins relaxed their tense demeanor. There was ample amounts of ass and tits to go around for each horny investor. Women of various shades and sizes giggled at lame jokes and stroked the egos of multi-millionaires in their borrowed stiletto pumps. We were all playing a friendly game of cat and mouse. The only rule to the game is make sure the check clears in the morning and never fall in love.

This was the kind of night where panties were not required for sheer dresses. My silk cami maroon dress clung to my ample breast as the sound of the drums caused my hips to sway. My honey dipped auburn tresses kissed the center of my back. As my womanly essence captured the attention of every man in the room. I laughed and sashayed my way past familiar bad boy millionaire faces. One by one they tried there hardest to make me there most prized possession. I was just there in the room for a good time. My heart was not ready to enter a new world romance. I held

my heart closer towards me, never allowing not even the sexiest bachelor get close to me.

After two songs on the dance floor. I could feel my thighs sticking together from all the extra body heat on the dance floor. As soon as Katy Perry latest hit concluded. I climbed the winding stairs up towards the ladies' room. The carpeted stairs helped relieve some of the pressure on my aching feet. I scroll pass a few groupie chicks plotting and getting high in the hallway. I nearly choked from their second-hand smoke. I scurry pass them and make my way into the unoccupied bathroom.

I'm standing in the mirror running water over my face. Suddenly the bathroom door opens. Slightly startled I'm surprised to see the familiar face of my good friend Samantha Reese.

This is my first time I've seen her since we arrived at the exclusive invite only party. As soon as our stiletto pumps and red lipstick knock on the door Samantha kick me to the curb. Within five minutes she ditches me for the first guy she sees with blonde hair, blue eyes, and a black AMEX card. Or as I presume some prestigious jerk with disposable income.

"Harmony, are you ok?" Samantha says with slurred words.

I glance at Samantha out of the corner of my eye. She looks like a train wreck. Her blonde hair is sticking to her face. Her cute floral print mini dress is ripped on the shoulder and her scrappy sandals are broken. Part of me wants to smack some sense into Samantha and drag her out of these types of parties. I would, and I have tried in the past. Every time I try to tell Samantha about boundaries and not allowing dirty old men to fill her up for money. She curses me out and accuses me of not being a supportive friend. Before you put Samantha in one of those categories like the

Kardashian or Blac Chyna. Samantha is smart, well rounded, and a bit of a party girl from Southern California. She grew up mildly privileged and ventured off to college outside of Cali. Once Samantha stumbled out of familiar territory she found that paying thousands of dollars for an education was wasteful. When it was easier to upload sexy pics on Instagram, workout every day, date rich, and overly expose your life and body to millions of strangers would keep you out of debt. Well, let's just say Samantha parents weren't too happy. But, Samantha never missed a party or a meal.

After the last party, I promised I'd go to the parties with Samantha and protect her, from herself. Samantha always says she's not like me.

She's not as articulate and sophisticated with charm and edgy like me. She says I think I know it all because I passed the bar exam on the first try. I maybe a bit of fashionista and an upcoming lawyer at a local black owned practice in Atlanta. But, there are some things about me that I wish I could share and not give care about what anyone thought.

"I'm fine. Why?" I lied.

Samantha was five shots in as her blood shot red eyes glazed back at me inside the bathroom mirror. She twirled her manicured nails in between her platinum blonde hair. Samantha tosses a cricket smile towards me and says, "I'm worried about you babes. You sure you're okay?"

I rake my hands through my hair a few times in the mirror and reapply my lipstick. I grab Samantha by her hand and gently walked her over towards the toilet. Samantha puts up a small fight as the music from the party grows ten times louder than moments before.

Samantha sits down comfortably on the toilet. As a good friend, I pull her hair back from her face and gently rub her shoulders. I can see it in her eyes that she's half ashamed of herself and the other half is about ready to puke all over the floor.

“Harmony?” Samantha says with a quiver.

“Yeah, sweetie. I'm here.”

“I think it's time...”

“Time for what?” I question.

“Time for me to go home.”

“Ok. I'll call us a cab and we'll head back to the hotel.”

“No!” Samantha yells.

“What? You said you want to go home.”

“Not that kind of home...” Samantha replies strongly.

A tear begins to slide down from her eye as she looks back at me. Samantha's face becomes scrunch as the words from her mouth are nowhere to be found. She looks back at me for answers. Answers to questions that plague her jumbled in mind. It's true what they say. Alcohol gives us courage to speak our minds and pay the debt later.

I squeeze Samantha shoulder and kiss her forehead. She rests her head against my shoulder as a slow sob forms into an empty cry. In this moment, I realize Samantha and I have a lot in common. Although we both exist in a world filled with beautiful people and things. There is

something missing on the inside that makes us both feel incomplete. For me that is a different kind of love. For Samantha that this is acceptance. A tear began to fall from my eye as I too desperately in this moment want to go home.

Chapter Two

Maverick

“Come in Maverick. We’re ready for you.” Donovan says as he holds the glass door to the conference room open.

The Harmonized Truth: A Broken Woman

I clear my throat and walk confidently into the conference room. My freshly trimmed beard, tailored black suit, Michael Kors cufflinks, and suave debonair good looks gives me the extra boost of confidence for the most important meeting of my life. I've been working at Stone Age Realty Group for ten years. I'm one of the most sought-after realtors in the state of Houston. My face is one of the most recognizable and dare I say photogenic across the state.

By the way I carry myself you'd never know that I grew up in one of the worst projects in America. My father was addicted to crack, and I lost my mother in a car accident when I was ten years old. I was in and out of the foster care system until I was eighteen. On my eighteenth birthday, I promised myself that I was going to have the best future. I knew the only way to hold that promise was to go off to college. Graduated top of my class with a masters in information technology and a minor communications degree from the University of Texas. Day after graduation I knew my charm, wit, and good looks would lead me to many

doors with a lucrative career. Broadcasting was my first choice. But it would take too long to reap the benefits of success. I knew real estate was a profitable and earnest way to make a living and the best way to raise a future family. Ever since I walked through the doors of Stone Age Realty Group, I never looked back.

I took a seat across from John Miller, President, David Pearson, CFO, Mark Sullivan, Director of Regional locations, and Donovan Charles, brand ambassador and social media strategist. All four gentleman I respected and admired a great deal. I wanted to be a part of their millionaires' boys club. I deserved the private jet and high-profile clients. An opening had become available in Atlanta. The opportunity to run my own office and build the location from the ground up. I was hungry for change and I was honored the firm was looking at me.

John flashed me a toothy grin and head nod as he extended his right hand giving me a firm handshake. Mark, Donovan, and David followed suit. I

adjusted my red tie and posture as I sat confidently across from my future constituents.

“Maverick, let me begin by saying thank you for all of your hard work and dedication to the firm. It has not gone unnoticed. “Mark state with a stern look in my direction.

“Thank you, sir, it means a lot to me.”

“David, John, and Mark and I have been keeping an eye on you for quite some time now. You’re resourceful, strong, innovative, and dare I say forward thinking.” Donovan reaffirms.

“I think what we all are trying to say Maverick is that we are lucky and fortunate to have you apart of the Stone Age family.” David adds.

“Thank you, gentleman, it’s been an absolute pleasure growing and contributing to the success of the organization.”

John clears his throat. He looks over at the other men with a strong glance. Suddenly the mood inside the room goes from light to heavy. I can feel my

heart beginning to race. I take a few deep swallows and brace myself for whatever is coming next.

“I don’t think this is easy for any of us to say, but...” Donovan starts.

“We don’t want you to get the wrong idea Maverick. It’s just that we do have some reservations about you.” David adds slowly.

“Reservations?” I question. “What reservations?”

“We are concerned that a young man of your status will outgrow Stone Age sooner than later.” John confesses.

“Maverick, we think you will be the perfect person for the Atlanta location. However, we all strongly feel that at each point in our lives. We missed the opportunity to focus on what really matters in life. Family.”

I’m stunned. My mouth agape. I can hardly believe my ears. “I’m sorry gentleman. What are you saying?”

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“What we are saying is Maverick, we want a leader who is happy within his profession and personal life. Quite frankly, you don’t seem happy in your personal life.” Donovan states.

I laugh.

“What’s so funny?” John asks.

“I have someone special in my life.” I lie.

“Really? Who is she?” David asks.

“I’d rather not say her name. But, we’ve been going strong for about a year now and well it’s getting serious.”

All the men take a sigh of relief and look at each other with a smile.

“Oh Maverick! That’s fantastic news! We were all worried that you were this workaholic with no stability or home life.” Mark admits.

“Sorry. We misjudged.” Donovan adds.

“Maverick, I think I can confirm for all of us that we want you to head our Atlanta office. What do you say?” John asks.

“I’d say when does my flight leave because here I come Atlanta!”

John, David, Mark, and Donovan all stand and congratulate me. We exchange warm hugs and strong handshakes as men. I wave goodbye and exit the conference room relieved and stressed. Relieved that I got the gig. Stressed that I lied to the firm about my relationship status. There was a sudden amount of sadness taking over me. A sadness so strong that I needed to silence with some gin. The emptiness of love could wait another day. Today I want to bask in the glory of the next level of my success.

Chapter Three

Harmony

Ding! Ding!

The aroma of coffee beans and sweet delectable sugary treats fill the air of the BUDDY café. It's only a few minutes before noon and the tiny café with Christmas lights from yesteryear hanging over the door is brimming.

People of all ages, sizes, and ethnic groups buzz in and out of the café with warm drinks to warm up their chilly fingers. Bright smiles and warm kisses are not amiss as couples from fifteen to eighty-two sneaks in a kiss

occasionally. It's not quite the holiday season at BUDDY café. But, Justin, the young red-haired freckle face late twenty something owner is quite fond of the holiday season. Thus, he sees no valid reason to not remind people of the special feeling that crawls into our hearts near the end of the year.

Just as the cash register opens and shuts and the tip jar jiggles from happy customer. Suddenly the mood changes when hurricane Harmony comes torpedoing through the door. Without so much as wink or smile Harmony barges over to her designated table in the corner. Perfectly nestled inside the corner of the store with an open view of the window and the front.

Dressed in her lucky navy-blue Michael Kors pants suit with a ruffled blush blue blouse. Harmony is extraordinarily beautiful. With her layered black bob cascading down her narrow shoulders and red pouty lips. Harmony only wishes that she felt half as good as she looked on the outside.

Harmony tosses her camel colored tote onto the small coffee table and flops into the seat.

Shoulders slumped over she quickly buries her head inside her chest.

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“Was it that bad sweetcakes?” Justin asks gently placing a hot cup of coffee on the center of the table.

“Worse.” Harmony confesses defeatedly. “They told me to they will keep my resume on file.”

“Ouch! Kiss of death.” Justin grimaces.

“Ouch is right...I’m doomed!” Harmony whines. “I wore my lucky suit and bra.”

“Well, maybe it’s not that lucky honey bun?”

Harmony tosses Justin a death stare.

Justin quickly tosses his hands up in defeat. “Sorry. My bad Harmony. Just trying to lighten the mood up in here.”

Harmony folds her arms and rolls her eyes. “I’m so not in the mood Justin.

This was my third interview this week. If I don’t get a job soon...I’ll have to borrow money from my parents.”

Justin pulls out the vacant chair and takes a seat. “Eek. Yeah, we definitely don’t want to have mommy and daddy down our throats again.”

Harmony scoffs. “Right. I’m still paying off that last loan they gave to me. Believe me my mother’s lays into me every chance she gets.”

Justin clears his throat and reaches for Harmony’s hand across the table.

“Give me your hand sissy.”

“Why?”

“Because if you don’t you’ll continue to scare off all of my customers and I’d hate to have to forbid from the store.” Justin sends a fake wave to passerby.

“Fine. Here.”

Harmony places her right hand inside of Justin hands. Justin begins to soothe Harmony’s nerve by gently caressing and squeezing her hand.

“Now breathe Harmony and try to relax.”

The Harmonized Truth: A Broken Woman

“I’m breathing. Now what?”

“Good. Try to think of something positive.” Justin suggests.

“I don’t know. Um, I like birds and trees. Oh, and butterflies.” Harmony says with a crooked smile.

“Good. Keep going.”

“Warm cookies. Buy one get one sales. My nail tech is so sweet.”

Justin slowly releases Harmony hand as she continues to ramble on and on about the things she likes.

“What’s wrong?” Harmony inquires.

“Nothing.”

Harmony leans forward. “Why’d you let my hand go?”

Justin pushes his chair back and gets up from the table. He straightens his crisp black apron and takes two steps towards Harmony.

“Honey, my work here is done.” Justin whispers. “If you can control the mind you can control everything else. Don’t give up just yet, you’ll find the right firm for you.”

Justin squeezes Harmony shoulders and walks towards the counter to help the next customer.

Harmony still inside the busy café as her cup of hot chocolate went from hot to lukewarm. Just as she had from the then and now upon entering the café. Harmony smiled at her longtime friend at the café and tossed him a wink. She was grateful for his clarity and wisdom amid her chaos. A skill Harmony was still learning to master.

Harmony took two sips of her hot chocolate and reached inside her tote bag for her cell phone. She reaches inside her wallet for a business card she had held onto from Law School. Blackmon & Associates were one of top law firms in the state of North Carolina. Feeling bold and gutsy Harmony dialed the number and set up an appointment.

Chapter Four

Maverick

“Ah man be careful with that alright, it’s an antique!” Maverick yelled across the room.

“Man, hush! Everything in this dusty old condo is an antique including you.” Tony joked as he pushed a box of valuables in the corner.

“Yeah, yeah alright. I see you been drinking some of that hater juice this morning Tony.” Maverick retorted. “You break it, you buy it.” Maverick added as he taped up a box of his vinyl disc collection.

It was moving day as Maverick, Tony, and Shawn loaded the U-Haul truck of valuables down two flights of stairs. Tony, the husky one of the trio complained nonstop as beads of sweat began to form on his forehead. Maverick directed his workers with a stern fist and sharp attitude every chance he could get. Shawn, the ladies’ man with charm, wit, and no job tried to schmooze his way into convincing Maverick to let him lease the

spot for the next three months. As much as Maverick loved Shawn like a brother. He knew Shawn and his taste in women would have his former neighbors all up in his best friends' business and his.

“It sure would be nice to wake up to this downtown view of Houston every morning.” Shawn stated as he held a lamp in one hand and an end table in the other.

Maverick laughed and walked over to Shawn. “Yeah, it is something ain’t it. A, make sure the realtor highlights that when people are viewing the property.” Maverick laughed.

Shawn shook his head. “Ha ha. You think you’re so funny. We’ll see who has the last laugh.

Tony gasped for air as his six feet three two-hundred-and-fifty-pound fluffy body leaned against the front door. “Man...what are yall doing up here?” Tony questioned. He wipes his brow and frowns in Shawn and

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Mavericks direction. “Yall need to move your asses alright...I’m hungry and I’m tired as hell.” Tony confessed.

Maverick and Shawn looked at each other and burst into laughter.

“Oh, that’s funny!” Tony scoffs. “I’ll see who laughing when I walk up out of here and leave you girls to finish by yourselves.”

Maverick continued laughing as he began to remove his awards and wall art from the living room wall.

“Alright man chill. You gone get to them fifty cent hot wings at Juju’s Joint.” Shawn retorted waving his hand in Tony’s direction.

“Uh huh. Don’t come waving your broke begging hands in my direction either.” Tony warned as he walked towards Mavericks bedroom.

Maverick stood back and glanced at his best friends with joy and admiration. The group had come a long way since there college days at the University of Texas. Maverick was always the anal perfectionist of the group. The one the guys always cracked on for staying up late cracking the

books for an exam. Too square for frats and college campus parties.

Maverick always had his head in his books. He'd fight his roommates over study time in his room. Constantly interrupting make out sessions with fresh and consenting young women. Maverick always knew in his heart and mind that if he wanted to make something of himself. He'd have to sacrifice his present for his future.

Shawn on the other hand couldn't keep his hands or parts to himself.

Shawn was known around town as the ladies' man or as the ladies nicknamed him Mr. Freak Nasty. Shawn wasn't shy about his thirst to sample all flavors of women. His philosophy was, you are only young once so why not go for it. Too bad his good looks nearly cost him his scholarship and spot on the basketball team. Unbeknownst to him, Shawn had found himself in bed with his coaches' wife. And well coach wasn't too happy when he found Shawn inside his bed with wife's legs on his shoulders. If it wasn't for the championship and the vow to never touch

the coaches' wife again Shawn would have never made it out alive. Shawn always had to learn life the hard way. With three kids and two baby momma's Shawn was in no rush to take on life responsibilities anytime soon.

Tony grew up in the Bronx and moved down south when his parents split when turned thirteen. As the only boy in his immediate family Tony found his way passion in the kitchen. On campus Tony was known for hooking up a pack of Roman Noodles and making it a Gordon Ramsey special. We all knew Tony loved to cook. But Tony never had the guts to tell his folks that he wanted to drop out of school to learn to cook professionally. His mom and pops were not having their son behind the stove. So, Tony grilled his way through school as a communications major. Two years after college he quit his prestigious job at a marketing firm and opened a food truck with his girlfriend. A few extra pounds later Tony was finally chubby and happy.

Three hours and two soda pops later Maverick and his best friends from college were half way finished with packing. All that remained was a big orange leather couch that Maverick just couldn't decide to part ways.

"I know you not taking that big ugly couch to Atlanta with you?" Shawn questioned.

Maverick shrugged his shoulders. "I'm thinking about it..."

"Man, I always told you that thing was ugly from the time Nicole pushed it through the door." Tony added.

Shawn laughed and flopped down on the couch. "Oh yeah,

Nicole Parker. I remember her. She had you whipped around her pinky toe."

"Hold on. Hold on. Don't know woman have me nothing alright. Yall tripping." Maverick stated defensively.

"Well alright then...let's toss this sucker to the curve." Tony retorted.

"Grab the other end Shawn."

Shawn and Tony pick up both ends of the couch and began heading towards the door.

After five seconds, Maverick yells, “Stop! Put the damn couch down!”

“Uh huh! Whipped” Shawn jokes.

“Whatever man.” Maverick adds. “It not like that...Nicole was the one and I can’t get rid of the couch.”

“Maverick it’s been two years. It’s time to move on. “Tony reaffirms squeezing Mavericks shoulder.

“Yeah man, I’m sure she’s moved on to some...” Shawn quips.

Maverick shoots Shawn a stern look daring him to say another word.

Shawn tosses his hands up and shakes his head. “Nothing. Nothing at all.

“I think what Shawn is trying to say is it’s time to move on. Right Shawn?”

Shawn nods approvingly. “Yeah, you got a whole new city of beautiful women to meet. Let her go or...”

“Or what?” Maverick asks.

“Settle things before you go.” Shawn confirms.

“Nah.” Tony shakes his head adamantly. “I say leave it and move on.”

Maverick takes a few minutes to weigh his options. Seeing Nicole would give him closure and confirmation to start over fresh in a new city. Or it could open old wounds that never really healed? There was only one way to find out.

“I’m going to set up a meet.” Maverick states confidently.

Chapter Five

Harmony

We need to talk. The text message read. Harmony could not believe her eyes. She read the text three more times just to make sure she read it

correctly. Suddenly her heart sank in the middle of her stomach. Palms became sweaty. Mind began to race.

“Harmony sweetheart, are you okay?” Nikki, her best friend asked.

Harmony couldn't hear the concern inside her friend's voice. Her mind was too busy calculating the last twenty-four to forty-eight hours she and her Devon had spent together.

Nikki waved her hand across Harmony's face. “Hello Harmony?!”

Harmony looked up towards her friend dazed and confused. This was supposed to be Nikki's night. She'd recently gotten promoted to online buyer at Mila & Marley fashion boutique. Nikki wanted to share her good news with her best girlfriend Harmony. But something was eating at Harmony that Nikki just couldn't ignore.

“Huh? What did you say Nikki?” Harmony inquired.

Nikki shook her head and sipped her red glass of wine. She glanced over at her peculiar friend and rolled her false eyelashes.

The Harmonized Truth: A Broken Woman

“Tell me what’s got you so worked up suddenly.” Nikki quizzed.

Harmony shrugged her shoulders and places her cell phone face down on the table. Harmony takes a deep sigh and says, “Devon needs to talk.”

“Okay. So, talk to him.” Nikki joked.

Harmony shook her head adamantly and said, “Nope.”

“Why not?”

“Because I’m not ready to deal with whatever he’s ready to talk about.”

Nikki nodded her head and turned the other cheek.

“Spill it!” Harmony demanded.

“Nope.” Nikki replied stubbornly.

“Nikki Childs, don’t make me stab you in the knee with my fork!”

Harmony threatened pointing her used fork in Nikki’s direction.

Nikki laughs. “You already know what I’m going to say Harmony. But, since you want me to say it anyway. I will.”

The Harmonized Truth: A Broken Woman

“Fine. Whatever it is I can handle it.”

Nikki scoots up her chair and leans toward Harmony. “You self-sabotage every relationship you get in.”

Harmony gasps and rolls her eyes. “I do no such thing.”

“I knew you would say that, so I’ve been keeping score.” Nikki reaffirms.

“Oh, I’ve got to hear this.”

Nikki laughs and clears her throat. “First there was Darrell. He didn’t make enough money for you, so you dropped him. Kyle, couldn’t satisfy your needs in the bedroom, so you cheated on him with Mike. Mike was good to you. He gave you everything you ever could want and more. But you ghosted him because you said he was too clingy. And here we are...”

Harmony rolls her eyes and flips her long hair over her shoulder. With a stern finger she states, “They were not good enough for me.”

Nikki burst out in laughter. “Girl stop it! You just a big ole liar!”

“Whatever. You don’t have to believe me. I know the truth.”

“Mhmm. And what about Devon?” Harmony inquires.

“Well, from the outside looking in girlfriend. You are more cold than hot for this brother.”

“I beg your pardon.”

Nikki takes a few more sips of her drink and says, “You barely talk about him, I haven’t heard any nasty details about the bedroom, and when he calls you freeze up like the city of Chicago in winter.”

Harmony was taken aback by her friend’s raw honesty. It was as if Nikki was living inside her head. Harmony knew deep down inside there was some truth to what Nikki was saying. Even if she found it hard to digest.

Harmony grabbed her glass of wine and sipped the remainder in one swallow.

“Damn! Slow down Harmony” Nikki warned.

Harmony shook her head and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand.

Suddenly tears began to well up inside of Harmony's dark brown eyes.

Nikki grabbed a napkin from the table and began to dab her friend's eyes.

“Oh, I'm sorry sweets. I didn't mean to make you upset with my big mouth.”

Harmony wipes her eyes and says, “No, it's not that. It's just that you're so right about me and it's hard to accept.”

“Well, I'm no expert Harmony. I just call it like I see it. Maybe it's time you be honest with Devon. I'm sure he will understand.”

Two tears began to slide down Harmony's left cheek. Harmony could barely comprehend the words coming up heart and out of her mouth. She couldn't believe she was being so open and vulnerable with her friend. No one was supposed to see this side of Harmony. Not even Nikki.

“Sorry. I don't know why I'm crying.”

“It’s okay. Just say what’s on your heart.” Nikki insisted as she caressed Harmony right hand.

“I don’t think Devon will understand because I barely understand the reason behind my actions. I don’t mean to hurt him...I just.”

“You just what?”

“I just don’t know how to love someone outside of me.” Harmony confesses.

“Say that.”

“Say what?”

“Say everything you just told me. I’m sure Devon will understand. And...if he doesn’t.” Nikki states.

“And what?”

“We move on. We kick him in his balls and then we move on.” Nikki jokes.

Harmony laughs.

“See, now that’s the beautiful girl I know and love.” Nikki reaffirms.

“I love you too Nikki.”

“Good. Drinks on you tonight.”

Later that night after another round of drinks and cute guys flirting with Harmony. She went home to the studio apartment she and Devon shared. Slightly buzzed. Harmony felt a renewed attitude to help approach the relationship differently. Harmony turned the key inside the door and hit the light switch. Within a matter of seconds, she couldn’t believe her eyes. The tv and Devon’s favorite chair were gone. Harmony walked over to the kitchen counter to find a note written in permanent marker.

I’m sorry. We’re threw. The note reads. And just like that Harmony was alone in the world, again.

Chapter Six

Maverick

“I’m glad you called.” Nicole whispered inside Maverick’s ear. The softness of her angelic breath tickling his earlobe.

His heart skipped a beat as his mouth turned to cotton. Maverick could barely look across the table. Nicole had that type of effect on him. Her electrifying femininity and sultry voice combined with her elevated intelligence caused a tingle in Maverick’s spine. Nicole was a Trinidad American beauty who grew up in the cold streets of Brooklyn. Her

grandmother relocated the family to Houston when she married her grandfather more than twenty years ago. Nicole was the only girl of two boys. Her mother Brenda a housekeeper with many male suitors. Nicole's father was never in the picture.

When Nicole stumbled into Maverick's life she'd studied him like a praying mantis. Waiting patiently inside her Honda Accord each morning dressed in her favorite yoga pants. Nicole was always in between jobs and men. Rent was due, and Nicole had decided it was time she used her womanly presence to get what she wanted. Two years and some change ago the thing or someone she wanted most was Maverick Reeves.

For two weeks Nicole watched Maverick from a distance and learned his practical routine. Maverick was a simple man with quirky needs. He always parked in the same spot. Never split the pole. Stretched for thirty minutes before working out and he always smiled at himself in the mirror. Nicole found him strangely cute. Besides his wash board abs, chiseled facial

features, dark brown bedroom eyes, and toned physique Maverick never not once tried to hit on Nicole or any other woman.

Nicole knew she'd have to work a lot harder to get Maverick's attention.

Flaunting her toned physique wasn't just going to cut it. Nicole needed to take drastic measures if she wanted to capture Maverick attention.

On the eve of a crisp fall Saturday morning Nicole slashed her back tires.

She knew Maverick seemed like the type of man that needed to come to a damsel in distress situation. Nicole waited patiently inside her car for

Maverick to pull into the gym's parking lot. Just like clockwork Maverick

pulled into the lot and headed towards the gym. Nicole knew it was time to put on her best performance.

“Oh My God! I can't believe this.” Nicole yelled.

Maverick paused mid step and looked around the parking lot. He was startled to see a beautiful woman almost in tears. On instinct he drops his gym bag and runs to aid the beautiful woman.

“It’s my car. My tires are busted.” Nicole proclaimed.

“Don’t worry about it. If you have a spare in the back I can change the tire for you.”

Nicole wiped the false tears from her eyes and said, “Could you...? I mean, if it’s not too much trouble.”

And for the first time Maverick and Nicole’s eyes met. Within that moment they were inseparable.

A small candle flickered on the small round table. The dim lighting inside the restaurant set the tone for a romantic evening. A live jazz band crooned the crowd with soft melodies. As the city night lights sparkled against the pitch-black sky. Two glasses of white wine rested on the table. As

Maverick looked suave and debonair in his black suit and red tie. His woodsy scented cologne matched her subtle confidence. He felt like a man in charge of the world. Yet his loins felt like hot butter on grits whenever his eyes locked into Nicole. She and only she had that effect on him.

Maverick cleared his throat and took two sips of his wine. He leaned forward and reached for Nicole's manicured hands.

"It's good to see you too Nicole." Maverick admits.

Nicole grins and rubs Maverick's hand. "It's been a while."

"When I called...I didn't think...I didn't know."

"I know. I don't blame you." Nicole admits. "It's my fault mostly...the way I left things between us."

Maverick shifts in his seats and pulls his hands away from the table.

Memories of lonely nights in bed alone, numerous voice messages, unanswered text, suspicious gifts, arguments, and eventually the break up.

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“It’s in the past. Let’s leave it there.”

Nicole laughs.

“What?”

Nicole shakes her head. “You always do that...drives me insane.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You shut down or minimize the problem, so you don’t have to deal with things.”

“I do not.”

Nicole tosses up her hands. “You’re right. I give up.”

“Was it that easy for you?”

Nicole furrows her brows and leans forward. “Was what easy?”

“Giving up on us.”

Nicole shakes her head. “I thought you called me to see if we could...”

“Reignite the flames?” Maverick questioned.

Nicole shrugs her shoulders. “Perhaps.”

“Is that what you want Nicole?” Maverick pauses and leans forward.

“Would it make your panties moist to know that the man you once loved is begging you to come back into his life?”

“Maverick, stop being so damn dramatic. I’m here because you called me. Why are you here?”

Maverick bit down on his bottom lip and rubbed his temple. Nicole had a valid point. What made him get inside his car and drive to a dimly lit restaurant to see his ex? Curiosity and closure. He told himself repeatedly.

But the longer Maverick sat across from Nicole the pain and angst of being stabbed in the back by the woman he once loved hurt too much to bare.

Images of Nicole inside their bed with another man flashed vividly through his mind. As a man, seeing your woman with another man in the throws in passion was almost unforgettable. But it wasn’t the act alone that put the nail in the coffin. It was Nicole’s word that shattered his heart the most.

“Close the door and wait your turn damn!” Nicole yelled over her shoulder.

Maverick walked out of the apartment and never spoke to Nicole again.

“I came here to say goodbye.” Maverick confessed.

“Goodbye? Maverick comes on stay. We are just catching up.”

Maverick pushed his chair back and stood up in front of the table.

“I’ve said enough. I just needed to be sure of my decision. Take care of yourself Nicole.”

Nicole scoffed. “So, you just gone leave me here...”

Maverick glanced over his shoulder and smirked. “Not at all. I’m sure you’ll cook up a scheme...you always do.”

Harmony

One month. Devon was out of Harmony's life. It was truly over this time. Harmony accepted the ugly truth. Life was rewarding her with a brand-new chapter. She'd cleaned her studio apartment from nook to cranny. Replacing her comfy loveseat with a chaise lounge. Earth tone pillows and window dressings complimented her personality and new perspective on life. Scented candles added to the home décor. Positive affirmations on post it notes, and index cards helped Harmony regain her clarity and confidence.

Harmony marked her calendar each day with a red marker. The red marker was a constant reminder that not only was life worth living. But that Harmony had life goals that she needed to accomplish. The first goal was securing her financial future.

Harmony gave herself thirty days to market and brand her skills and qualifications.

With the right attitude she was bound to obtain employment sooner than later.

Harmony knew that without a relationship. She would be able to get her life back on track and refocus all her energy on her law degree.

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Harmony was practicing yoga via YouTube when her cell phone began to chime on the counter. From the sound of the ring Harmony knew it could only be one of her favorite people in the entire world. Her cousin Kimberly.

“Hey Kim, what’s up?” Harmony asked short breath.

“Guess what Harmony?!”

“What?”

“I think I have the perfect gig for you. Are you ready?” Kimberly stated excitedly.

“Ok. I’m listening what the gig? Is it contract? Full time? Part time? Benefits...?”

Kimberly laughs. “Dang, slow down speed racer. I’m about to tell you the details now.

“Sorry. Go ahead.”

“Well, one of the firms inside the office building that I work for is currently doing some rebranding. So...I was thinking.”

Harmony paused.

“Hello? Harmony...are you still there? I can hear you breathing through the phone. Say something.”

“I don’t know about that Kim.”

The Harmonized Truth: A Broken Woman

“What’s not to know? I mean, companies are always in need of a good legal team.

Besides it’s good money. We’ll get to have lunch every other day and not to mention there are some fine men in suits that work in this building. Did I mention they are single and mingling ?!” Kimberly emphasized.

Harmony sucked her teeth. “Will you stop it. I’m not interested in no man right now. I’m trying to get my life together. How do you know I can get my foot in the door?”

Kimberly giggled. “I know everything and everyone that’s how...duh. Why don’t you get yourself together and just come check things out for yourself? If nothing else, you can keep this as just an option.

“Ok. I’ll be there in an hour tops.”

“Great! Oh, and don’t forget to shave your legs and show a little skin.” Kimberly added.

Harmony rolled up her yoga mat and jumped for joy. Harmony knew God worked fast. Just not as quickly. With hope and enthusiasm in her heart Harmony felt good about the opportunity. There was nothing that could steal her joy away. Nothing.

Chapter Eight

Maverick

“Good evening Maverick! We have been expecting you!” The blonde hair blue eyed attendant smiled broadly.

“Thank you. Thank you very much.”

“My pleasure. Please allow me to show you your accommodations for your new home. My apologies. My manners have escaped me. I’m Carolyn.”

“Nice to meet you Carolyn.” Maverick smiled.

His luggage was on its way up to the extended stay luxury hotel. The Rosemont Park Suite would be Maverick temporary home. Until he was able to plant roots in his new

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home city of Atlanta. As soon as Carolyn opened the door to the luxury suite. Maverick nearly tipped over in his polished Ted Baker shoes. The breathtaking view of the city skyline from extended vertical windows surrounded the room. Each window had a different view of the city. Maverick eyes were mesmerized as such an exquisite view of a beloved city for many.

A small tear began to well up inside his left eye as Carolyn escorted Maverick throughout each room. Each room was bigger and grander than the last. Stainless steel appliances. Granite counter tops. Vaulted ceilings. Jacuzzi bath tub and shower, and bath towels with Maverick initials. It was almost as if Maverick was living in a dream. But, his eyes were wide open.

“So, what do you think?” Carolyn smiled and asked.

“I think I’ve just made it to heaven on earth.”

Carolyn smirked. “I’m glad you feel that way. Here are your keys and access code to the penthouse, rooftop, private deck access, parking, and of course our complimentary spa and gym. If you need anything, please don’t hesitate to give me a call.”

“Will do.”

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Maverick watched as Carolyn wiggled her way towards the front door. As soon as the door closed behind her Maverick released a sigh of relief. Maverick dropped his coat over the leather couch, loosened his tie, and placed his cell phone on the end table. With more tears welling up inside his eyes Maverick walked towards the window. Thoughts of his childhood and adult life clouding his mind, driving his emotions full speed. The world within arm's reach. The only thing staring between him and the next opportunity was just glass. Within the moment Maverick realized he had finally come full circle in his life. From rags to riches most would say or come to tell others of his success. But in Maverick eyes it would be a story of grace and grit. Maverick knew that although he was standing alone in the larger than life room. He had not gotten to this place on his own. Maverick knew he owed his success to his hard work, discipline, drive, focus, and commitment to his future. But all those things could not have been possible without a strong foundation. That foundation began with his mother Ruth. Ruth, a single mom with barely a high school education. She always instilled in Maverick that life was more than just his surroundings. And while Maverick was young she fed that fire and desire inside his loins to go after everything life had to offer. Maverick owed her everything. He firmly understood he was indeed the sum of his mother's prayers.

Maverick wiped his eyes with the back of his hand and walked over to the table for his cell phone. Within minutes he was sharing his monumental moment with the first one he ever loved, Ruth.

“Hey mom, it’s me Maverick...”

Chapter Nine

Harmony

Harmony could feel her heart racing inside her chest. It didn't matter the number of times she held her hand up against her chest. Her nerves were getting the best of her today. Harmony blinked several times at the modern glossy architectural building. She watched from a good distance as men and women of various hue smiled broadly in swift motion. Each person seemed happier and more at peace than the last. Harmony closed her eyes momentarily and envisioned herself walking through the glass doors. Swiftly dressed in her new Michael Kors blazer running off to court. Her hair would swing in the wind as Harmony would smile casually at passersby. Harmony opened her eyes once more as she stood outside of Stone Age Realty. Harmony felt deep down in her gut that she belonged inside the ground-breaking organization. There was only one thing left to do. Go inside.

Ok. Harmony, pull it together. You are brilliant, strong, and capable of handling any opportunity.

Harmony began to repeat to herself. That is until her feet began to move towards the front door. Harmony looked down at her four-inch black pumps to signal her feet to move towards the door. Although her feet were pointed in the right direction, nothing. Harmony was scared out of her wits mind. I mean, there she was a strikingly beautiful, ambitious, and clever young woman on her way to conquer the world. When suddenly she felt trapped mentally inside her head as all the possible scenarios of what could go wrong went through her head.

Harmony knew just who to call to help her through her crisis. Kimberly.

The other end of the phone line rang two times before Kimberly answered anxiously.

“What?! What’s wrong? ...Did you forget your resume...panty hose?”

Kimberly fired off rapidly.

Harmony began to weep in between laughs. “No. Harmony weep. “I’m stuck. I mean, not stuck like in the middle of the road. But more like every time I try to walk inside the building I can’t.”

Kimberly sighed. “Oh, you just got the interview jitters.

“Yeah, something like that.”

Kimberly popped her tongue squealed. “Ok girl, this is what I want you to do. You ready?”

Harmony nodded her head. “Yes.”

“Turn around three times in a circle and click your heels.”

“And what’s that supposed to do?”

Kimberly laughed. “I don’t know. It worked for Dorothy.”

Harmony released a laugh. Instantly her nerves began to subside.

“You’re so crazy.”

“I know. Now get off the phone and go secure the bag.” Kimberly concluded.

“Bye.”

With the support of her best friend in her corner Harmony was in the right mindset to handle anything. Shoulders squared, legs extended, hips swaying, and a bright smile to match her banging outfit Harmony was set to kill.

Two hours and fifteen minutes later Harmony felt confident walking out of the boardroom of the company’s top executives. Harmony felt good about the interview. She had showed up and showed out. Each interviewer smiled back at her as she riddled off her accomplishments and explained how she would add value to the organization. When the interview was over Harmony exchanged business cards with all three dashing handsome men and walked out of the room.

Harmony was half way down the marbled hall ways when she heard her name called in the distance. At first instinct Harmony thought something was wrong. Were her nipples on hard during the interview? Lipstick on her teeth? Did she slur her words or over compensate her strengths for lack of experience? Harmony took a deep breath and realized maybe, just maybe her head was going into overdrive over nothing. Harmony turned around slowly and glanced over her shoulders. Her eyes suddenly widen by the sexy specimen of hot chocolate in a tailored suit running towards her direction.

He was dipped in hot chocolate with caramel colored eyes. The body of a Greek Adonis as chiseled physique ran towards Harmony. It was like something out of a dream or romance novel. He ran with such sex appeal in his black suit that Harmony could barely hear the words coming out of his mouth.

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“So sorry to bother you...I missed your interview this morning due to a prior engagement. Good things from the partners. Maverick James. And you are?”

“Harmony. Nice to meet you Maverick.”

Maverick reached for Harmony’s right hand and gently planted a kiss on the back of her hand. Harmony couldn’t help but smile broadly. She was instantly drawn to such a charming and devilishly handsome gentleman.

“Ms. Harmony, I just wanted to provide you with my business card. Please do keep Stone Age Realty in mind for all of your future endeavors.”

Blushing. “I’ll do just that.”

The elevator arrived, and Harmony slowly walked inside. As the doors began to close Harmony seductively waved goodbye. Her eyes met his and within that moment Harmony knew she would never forget Maverick James.

Chapter Ten

Maverick

There was something about her that Maverick just could not forget. It was more than six months since Maverick had felt arise in his loins instantly from such an attractive woman. Harmony. Her name lived on his lips as the flash of her beautiful smile ran through his mind. To say that he was

smitten would be reckless and impulsive. That was not Maverick at all. Yet, Maverick couldn't deny the simple touch of her hand inside his or the look inside her eyes that pulled in all the way in had him instantly trapped inside her web.

As soon as the elevator doors closed Maverick stood in the hallway a minute longer than usual. He couldn't believe how such a beautiful angel had suddenly crossed his path. He was not expecting to meet someone so soon after his move to Atlanta. But he wasn't denying the fact that Atlanta was home to the big apple bottoms, sexy silky chocolate women, and southern enigmatic charm. Everywhere he went women would give him that look of "I want you". From the grocery store, gym, the lobby of the hotel, and even at the corner gas station. Women were immediately drawn to his quiet confidence and model physique. Although many were quite stunning physically, nothing else could measure up to Maverick's standards. Maverick wanted someone mysterious and confident. Beautiful not egotistical. Caring not a push over. Bold not reckless. Sweet and sexy at the

same time. He couldn't determine if all of that was inside Harmony just from a simple exchange. But, his heart strings had instantly been pulled in her direction.

With his curiosity peaked, Maverick walked back into his office with a little extra pep in his step. While swiveling around in his chair Maverick summoned his receptionist Belinda into his office.

Belinda wiggled her wide hips through the front door as her plaid Target skirt scurried up her thick thighs. Belinda striking blue eyes bounced off the sunlight as her pink glossy lips smiled in Maverick's direction.

“Good afternoon Mr. James. How can I be of assistance to you?”

Maverick clears his throat and flashed his smile. “Before I say anything Belinda I want you to know I value your opinion. And if our conversation makes you uncomfortable, please let me know.”

“Yes sir, I most certainly will.”

“Good. Now, one of our interviewees has caught my attention from her charm and beauty. I was wondering...would it be alright... I don't.”

“Oh, I see. You want to know more about her, is that it sir?”

Maverick pauses. “Yes and no.”

“I understand your dilemma. Professionalism is a must. Yet, your heart is curious to know if your future just walked into your life.”

“Right.” Maverick confirms.

Belinda begins to nod her head and pace back and forth across the carpet.

She fidgets nervously with her hands. Maverick watches her nervously from afar. Patiently waiting for a good sensible idea.

“I got it!” Belinda exclaims.

Maverick jumps to his feet in excitement. “What?!”

“A thank you note with flowers.”

“Huh?” Maverick replies confused.

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“Here me out sir, please.”

“I’m listening. Go ahead.”

“A thank you note for her time and interest in the company is a special touch. And well the flowers are just to get her attention specifically in you.”

“Hmm...that may be a good idea.”

Belinda jumps for joy. “Ohh. I just love, love! It makes me warm and fuzzy all over.”

Maverick agrees. “So, let’s go with that idea and see how it works shall we.

Her name is Harmony.”

“Oh, my dear she was absolutely breathtaking. I saw her earlier. I’ll get right on this for you Mr. James.”

No. Thank you Belinda. I really appreciate it.”

Chapter Eleven

“It been three days and still nothing.” Harmony sighed.

“Don’t worry these corporate jobs take a few minutes to get your foot in the door. But once you’re in there...you’re trapped.” Kimberly confirmed as she sipped on her hot cup of coffee.

Harmony rolled her eyes. “That’s easy for you to say. You’re employed. You sound like one of those super optimistic people when life is going well for them. They think the world is the same for everyone else.

Kimberly shook her head and shifted her position on the big oversized couch inside her studio apartment. Kimberly’s mood was slowly shifting by the second from her happy place to instantly regretting inviting Harmony over to hang out.

“Let’s just talk about something else. Just to get your mind off everything.”

Harmony sighed and rested her head on her pillow. “I guess.”

“Good. Now, let’s watch a movie or have some girl talk. I know you have some tea to spill.”

Harmony nodded her head. “Nope. Ain’t nothing going on over here but bills, bills, rent, and bills. I wish I had a man to come help me pay for some of these bills.

Kimberly couldn’t help but laugh. Not at Harmony but in agreement with Harmony.

“What’s so funny?” Harmony asked curiously. “I’m just telling you like it is for me.”

Kimberly took a few sips from her hot cocoa and glanced in Harmony’s direction. As the hot cocoa simmered and slid down Kimberly throat.

Kimberly was enticed by the warm liquid to let her best friend in on the inside scoop of her love life.

“I’m actually laughing with you Harmony.”

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“Really?” Harmony laughed. Leaning in for more info she exclaimed. “Girl, tell me what’s going on!”

Kimberly shook her head and placed her I Love Me mug on the end table behind her.

“I’ve been talking to this guy named Ben for a good minute.”

“Uh oh. Stop it right there.”

Kimberly paused. “What?”

“You been seeing some guy for months and I’m just now hearing about this. Some kind of friend you are Kim.” Harmony declared.

Kimberly shoves Harmony slightly on her shoulders.

“If it was that serious, trust me. I would have been told you about it.”

“True. You can’t hold water.”

Harmony laughs. “Anyway, so we’ve been seeing each other. Only a few times. He’s a police officer after all.”

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“Ooouu, sexy! I love a man in uniform.”

“Well, you won’t love this part.”

“Oh great. Here it comes.”

Biting down on her bottom lip. Kimberly averts her eyes and says, “He’s married. With kids.”

“Kimberly!” Harmony exclaims.

Kimberly jumps up from the couch and widens the gap between her and Harmony. With her hands running rapidly across her box braids she begins to pace the floor.

“I already know what you’re about to say and...”

“And what? You know I don’t approve.”

“Right. Neither do I. So, that’s why I cut it off...or I’m trying too.”

Kimberly confirms.

“What do you mean try? Either you’re seeing him or you’re not. There is no in between Kim.”

“I don’t think you get it Harmony.”

“I don’t.” Harmony declares. “Help me to understand, please.”

Kimberly slowly gathers her courage to sit back onto the couch next to Harmony. She fidgets with her hands a few seconds and opens her mouth to speak.

“I’d be lying if I said things just happened. Nothing just happens. I wasn’t expecting to fall for him at all. I was stuck on the side of the road and my stupid cell phone had died. I only had twenty bucks in my pocket and a few credit cards. So...”

“You were scared and alone. Understandable.”

Kimberly agrees. “Right. I was a nervous wreck. I was stuck on a dark road on the wrong side of town. I didn’t know what would happen to me. You know how obsessed I am with First 48 and the ID channel.”

“I do.”

Kimberly smirks. “So, I was just sitting there inside my car hoping and praying someone especially a cop would come by. I had my emergency lights on. But I didn’t want the car battery to die either.”

“How long were you out there? Any businesses nearby?”

“I don’t know. Maybe a few minutes or an hour. I wasn’t watching the time.”

“Ok. So, what happened?”

“I sat in my car for a few minutes longer asking God to give me strength to walk down the street to the nearest gas station for help. Or at the very least not to get robbed while waiting. And suddenly I see an unmarked black Sedan pull up behind me.”

“What did you do?”

“Lock my doors. Duh?”

“That was smart thinking.” Harmony agreed.

“By this time my heart is beating inside my chest fast and hard. I thought I was going to die. I see headlights and suddenly the driver door opens.”

“Oh My God!” Harmony exclaims. “Did you have a knife or anything?”

“Nope. Nothing. I was about to die.”

“R.I.P. Kimberly.”

“Right. Suddenly I see the driver walking up to my window with a flashlight. At first, I couldn’t see his face because of the flashlight in my eyes. I could tell he was white by his hand.”

“Damn, where’s a fine brother when you need one.”

“Ok. Can a sister get some dark chocolate before she dies?”

“Amen.”

“So, long story short he taps on my window and I look up at the bluest eyes I have ever seen in my life?”

“Great a damsel in distress and you sleep with him.” Harmony concludes.

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“Not quite. I didn’t sleep with him right away. We called a tow truck and went for coffee nearby and just talked.”

“Talk? That’s all you did was talk.” Harmony questions.

“You’re not understanding me Harmony. There was something magical and erotic mentally stimulating conversation over coffee I have ever had. It was like I was looking at the male version of myself. And...?”

“And what?”

“That’s when I knew...I loved him.”

Harmony was rendered speechless in that moment. She suddenly realized that although love had thrown her friend a curve ball she found something magical in the midst. Although Harmony could not believe the unusual circumstances in which Kimberly had found herself within. She couldn’t deny that there was something more behind the magic in her friends. Something that she thought she had with past lovers or part time flings. But it was nothing compared to the spell that Kimberly was under.

Kimberly was in love. Harmony was not one to crush or spoil the significance of what her own heart desired. Instead she put away her million questions and judgement and embraced her friend with two arms.

After all, isn't that what you do when your friend falls in love?

After two movies, coffee cakes, hot cocoa and several trips to the bathroom Harmony arrived home. Still coming down from her chocolate high and recovering from Kimberly's bomb. She noticed a bouquet of flowers at her doorstep. Long stem red roses with a simple note attached.

Harmony looked around her apartment door nervously to see if one of her neighbors were pulling a trick over her eyes. No one in plain sight.

Harmony bent down slowly to pick up the flowers. On instinct she inhaled the scent of the flowers. Not the most pleasant smell she concluded as she frowned her nose. Curiosity led her to open the small card attached to the bouquet. Suddenly Harmony wanted to desperately remember who on earth would send her flowers out of the blue. It wasn't her birthday, she

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wasn't sick, and her new job offer was still up in the air. The last thing Harmony would expect is a rekindling from an ex-lover. All those doors were securely closed Harmony assured herself. With a light shrug of her shoulders, Harmony opened the envelope. A simple card in black hand writing read: Dinner tonight at 8pm. Meet me in the lobby of the Hilton. P.s. Bring a single red rose. Signed -an admirer.

Harmony couldn't help but blush. Her heart was already skipping an extra beat by the chivalry. Without question she had decided that this scavenger hunt was worth exploring. After all love always happened unexpectedly.

Chapter Twelve

Maverick

Maverick wiped the small beads of sweat forming on his brow with a hankerchief. He was nervous. More nervous than usual. This was not like Maverick James. Maverick had handled more aggressive hot shot lawyers, CEO's , and outside the box realtors in his lifetime to handle the unpredictable. But, this was different. This was new and unfamiliar territory. Maverick was tipping around in uncharted waters pursuing a woman he had only met briefly. But in that moment he had determined that she was worth going out on a limb for at all cost. There was a spark and well he owed it to himself to see the possibilities of a heavenly sent match.

Would she show up? Would he greet her with a hug or a handshake?

Would she turn around the moment she saw him? Maverick didn't know.

His questions were coming rapidly. While the burning answers rested in the

beautiful hands of Harmony. Maverick sipped slowly on his chilled ice

water as he crossed and uncrossed his legs in his black suit. Tonight, he went without a tie. He wanted the appearance of just relaxing and getting to know each other as just friends. Freshly shaved, woodsy enigmatic cologne, college ring on his pinky, and a buttoned down white collared shirt to highlight his cocoa brown eyes. Many women batted their eyes in his direction. They wanted a taste or even a few seconds of the sinfully sweet dark chocolate sitting in the corner all alone. Maverick, the perfect gentleman, smiled his pearly whites in their direction and averted his eyes back to his bejeweled watch. And with that special signal onlookers knew he was off the market for the night.

It was five minutes til eight and Harmony was still nowhere in sight.

Maverick heart sank inside his chest from dismay. He knew the flowers were a bit much of a statement. But, he wanted to make a statement without scaring her away. With his patience wearing thin Maverick decided

to call it a night. Adjusting his suit and cufflinks Maverick retrieved his cell phone from his corner pocket and dialed Belinda.

“Mr. James, I didn’t expect to hear from you so soon. Something wrong?”

Maverick sighed. “Afraid so. Our plans a bust. Could you send a car to the hotel?”

Belinda couldn’t believe her ears. She wanted to convince her new boss that maybe he was overreacting. After all it was on five minutes until Harmony’s arrival. Belinda knew better than to overstep her boundaries.

“Yes sir. I’ll call a car for you right away and return your call when it’s in route.” Belinda confirmed.

“Thank you, Belinda...for everything.”

Maverick ended the call and shoved his phone back inside his pocket. He headed over to the bar to grab a drink before hitting the road.

“Cranberry and vodka on the rocks.” Maverick ordered.

Within a matter of seconds Maverick drink was inches away from his hands. Only two sips in when he turned around to find Harmony had arrived. Maverick could barely catch his breath. Harmony looked more beautiful than the last time he had laid eyes on her days ago.

Her long cinnamon legs bouncing off of the dim lighting. Dressed in a body hugging red dress that hugged her hips and emphasized the curvature of her petite breast. Her long brown thick luxurious curls cascading off her cold shoulders. Harmony held a single rose in between her manicured hands as her big round eyes searched the room.

Maverick knew this was his moment to capture her attention. He tossed his drink to the back of his throat, text Belinda to cancel the car, and walked confidently towards Harmony. It was now or never.

Maverick cleared his throat and extended his hand in Harmony's direction.

“You look amazing tonight.” Maverick confessed.

Harmony couldn't help but blush as she pushed her hair behind her ears.

“Thank you. Remind me, have we met before?”

Maverick took a small step back and smiled. He wanted to choose his words carefully. Seeing as though he could either come off as a stalker or prince charming in Harmony's eyes.

“Allow me to apologize if this sounds a bit strange. We met briefly at my office at the elevator recently. You were an applicant and well I was late from a meeting.”

Harmony stared back into Maverick dark brown eyes. She could tell he was more nervous than before. She thought it was cute and attractive how bashful he became standing in front of her.

“I remember. It's good to see you again. Are the roses from you?”

“Yes.” Maverick confirmed with a cricket smile.

“Nice touch.”

“Thank you.”

“Your card was missing a name. Please do me the honor of sharing it with me again.”

Maverick extended his right hand and waited for Harmony to plant her hand inside his. With her right hand inside his right-hand Maverick could feel the spark growing between them once again. He held her hand a minute or two longer and smiled.

“I’m Maverick...your date for the night. If that’s alright with you?”

Harmony couldn’t deny Maverick charm and her instant attraction and effort he went through to get her alone. With an open mind and heart, Harmony replied, it will be my pleasure Maverick.”

Chapter Thirteen

Harmony

It was possible. I repeated to myself as I sat across the small dinner table. It was possible to love again. It was possible to be happily in love. It was possible for me have an open heart. I pinched myself quietly underneath the small table. I couldn't believe I was sitting across from a handsome stranger that had gone through all the trouble to see me. No one had ever done anything half as special for me before. I told myself that know matter what happened at the end of the night I was still happy and grateful for the evening.

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“I hope you don’t mind me saying this...but you are quite beautiful.”

Maverick confessed.

Harmony smiled. “No please. Keep them coming. Your compliments make me smile.”

Maverick nodded his head and blushed.

“I’m quite flattered to have captured your attention. In all honesty, I’m a little nervous.” Harmony confess sipping from her glass of water.

“Nervous? Please don’t be. If anyone is nervous, it’s me.”

“How so?”

Maverick cleared his throat and leaned forward. “I’m new to the city and I have not been out on the dating scene in a while.”

Harmony releases a small chuckle. “Trust me, it’s not as easy as people may think. Dating is hard wherever you live.”

“No kidding.” Maverick admits.

“I’m sure you have options being a handsome man and all.”

Maverick was caught off guard by Harmony’s honesty. Harmony could not believe the words coming out of her mouth. It was like she had suddenly stepped outside of herself for once.

“I can’t complain. How about yourself?”

Harmony shrugs her shoulders. “I do alright. End of story.”

Harmony couldn’t help herself she was beginning to really enjoy Maverick company. Her guard wasn’t completely all the way down just yet. The truth of the matter is Harmony still needed employment. Her lifelong golden rule was to never miss business with pleasure. Never.

“I’m really enjoying our conversation.” Maverick confessed.

“So am I. However, I do have to be honest with you.”

“Sure.”

Before her nerves could get the best of her Harmony spoke her mind.

“I really would like an opportunity to join the legal team at Stone Age Realty. And I don’t want to have a conflict of interest. So...?”

“So?”

“I don’t know where we can go from here.” Harmony nervously admits.

Maverick dabs the corner of his mouth with his napkin and places his palms on the table. He clears his throat and stares up towards Harmony.

With the sharpness of his tongue, Maverick says, “ I understand your conflict.”

“Do you?”

“I do. I was actually concerned with the matter myself. I don’t want to put you or myself in a compromising position. And..?” Maverick admits.

“And what?”

“And I don’t want to lose the possibility of you being in my life either.”

“Oh I see.” Harmony replies sullenly. “I think I should just go.”

Harmony begins to rise from the table. She reaches for her single rose when she feels Maverick hands graze her palm. She looks up and her eyes meet his. Within that moment Harmony can contest to the feelings Kimberly felt when she met Ben. For a few seconds, Harmony stopped breathing as all rational thought began to escape her brain.

“I don’t want you to leave.” Maverick confesses. “I’m enjoying our time together and maybe we figure out the rest later.”

Harmony pulls her hand back slowly and begins to weigh the pros and cons inside her mind. Staying would mean she would be responsible for what happens next. Good or bad. Her heart and spirit would be caught up in a whirlwind that would lead her down an unforgettable spiral. But if she left, her heart would wonder what ever happened to the handsome stranger who sent her beautiful flowers. Harmony knew never to tempt fate or trust anything less than her gut instinct. In that moment with her eyes locked into Maverick, Harmony made a tough decision. One that she knew she would never regret despite the consequence.

The Harmonized Truth: A Broken Woman

“Let’s work this out.”

Chapter Fourteen

Harmony

Six months later....

I was in a weirdly euphoric happy place. I had become one of those people. You know the ones from the Hallmark channel or holiday family commercial. When you're at home on your couch eating pop tarts and drinking orange juice. You silently wish to God that someday you experience the type of joy and balance in your life as those people. Although they are actors and some big corporation is paying a big advertisement company to pull the wool over the public eyes. You still want that life.

In six months my life had suddenly changed. My employment was secure as a legal analyst for Stone Age Realty. I was apart of a multi team of outstanding brash lawyers with sharp minds and quick tongues. We handled legal battles from tenant law suits to suing the state over tax cuts and property liens. People looked to me for answers, tactics, and creative ways to save the company money. I felt well respected and empowered by my peers and upper management.

Like I said I was happy. I was a happy person on the inside and it showed on the outside. But no matter how happy I was I couldn't share all of my happiness with my new acquired work friends or my close friends. I was in love. Or I was falling in love with my boss Maverick James. That night at the restaurant we talked for hours. We talked into the sun came up inside my car. Neither one of us wanted the night to end. I didn't want to leave a moment in between us not saying what was on my mind or heart. Not much was on my heart now besides my gut instinct about the man sitting next to me with hypnotizing dark brown eyes. There was something about his eyes that pulled me all the way into his world. Pulled in so deep that I felt like I was drowning in the sea of love on the first night. Immediately with Maverick I felt safe. Safe enough to be my clumsy, nervous as a wreck. He assured me that I was safe with him. Safe in his arms and in his heart. I was nervous at first to take a step outside my comfort zone.

The Harmonized Truth: A Broken Woman

For our first date Maverick rented a horse and carriage as we galloped our way through downtown Atlanta. He wore his lucky socks with rainbow colors, jeans, and a collared shirt. I on the other hand wore a simple flowy floral print dress that accentuated my curves. Maverick held my hand as we bumped along the crowded streets. The view of the horses wide behind made us both chuckle a few times. For lunch we shared our childhood tales of growing up with single moms and multiple siblings over chicken salad and fries. I looked at Maverick in great admiration as he shared with me his passion for life came from his beloved mother. Silently I thanked her, and my eyes got lost inside Maverick dark brown eyes. There were things about my childhood that I had to withhold. At least for now. I could feel my own secrets spilling over on my lips to tell Maverick all the good and bad things that made me who I am. But, I couldn't find the courage and somethings just didn't belong on a first date. Onlookers passed us by and smiled with love and hope inside there eyes. A few strangers winked in our direction. I could see what they saw between Maverick and I. We looked good

together. Like paid actors walking and breathing out of a catalogue. There was something about the way Maverick would graze my arm. Pull me closer to share something with me. My favorite part was the fact that he wasn't afraid to express himself with me. Every now and then between laughs he'd lean over and plant an innocent kiss on my cheek. I like that. I like that Maverick made me feel like a lady.

Over the next couple of months our love story blossomed into an exclusive relationship. I didn't want to see anyone else. I was hooked on Maverick and he was infatuated with me. Our only conflict came within the workplace. We had agreed to keep our romance a secret or private as Maverick liked to call it. It was important for the employees to take him seriously. And for me, it meant I needed to earn my status as a hard-working attorney for the firm and not some Jezebel sleeping her way to the top. We both had a lot to prove and lose if anyone found out about us. I guess you could say we were ready to risk it all.

The Harmonized Truth: A Broken Woman

Every morning I would receive a text message from Maverick. I would casually roll out of bed and reach for my cell phone on the night stand.

You would think it would be a simple good morning text. But nope, nothing is ever simple with Maverick. I open my eyes and just to read:

“Good morning beautiful. I hope that you slept well. I couldn’t help myself. I couldn’t wait to wake up this morning. Just knowing I get to see you drives me wild. See you soon. -M.J.”

I couldn’t help but smile at the thought of falling in love with such a unique and special man. He belonged to me and someday the world would know it.

As soon as I step my foot inside my small office I shared with a red haired freckled face attorney name Cassandra. She pulls me inside our office and slams the door shut.

“Um, good morning Cassandra.”

The Harmonized Truth: A Broken Woman

Cassandra starts hyperventilating. Her pale skin begins to turn rosy red.

Her manicured nails wail in the air.

I place one hand on my hip and tap my foot waiting anxiously for

Cassandra to spill her guts.

“Cassandra! Spill it!” I exclaim.

Cassandra jumps nervously outside her skin. “Ok I’m just so excited I can barely contain myself.”

“Well your nerves are working my nerves so spill it.”

“So, Randall and David and I over heard one of the partners talking in the break room. They were all hush hush when we walked by. But, luckily David has a good ear and can read lips.”

Harmony shrugged. “I’m not getting any younger Cassandra. Today please.”

“The partners are looking for one of the new lawyers to represent a new production company that they are schmoozing over right now.” Cassandra confirms.

“And who is the client?”

“Black Sheep Productions. They are a multi-million-dollar company with real estate in New York, Los Angeles, and now they are looking for a home here in Atlanta!” Cassandra shrieked.

“Omg this is gigantic news! Do you know what that type of representation can do to a firm and the lawyers career?” Harmony concluded.

Cassandra couldn't help but to bounce up and down in excitement.

Harmony joined right along with her in the fun. This was great news for her budding career. The firm acquiring such a high-profile client could lead to even big and better fish.

“There's only one tiny problem.” Cassandra admitted.

“Only one lawyer will be considered for representation.”

“Oh shit!”

“Oh, shit is right. Good luck.” Cassandra confirmed.

Cassandra walked out of the door and left Harmony alone with her thoughts. As soon as the door shut Harmony realized things would never be the same after today. Today meant she would have to choose between her career and her man.

Chapter Fifteen

Maverick

I was falling. Falling fast in love. It was almost scary how fast I was falling in love with Harmony. She was perfect in everyway imaginable. Just being in her presence made my soul smile from the inside. I always felt childlike with her being next to me. Maybe I was looking for love. Maybe I wasn't at

the time. But somehow love found me in it's midst and wouldn't release the hold it had on my heart. I'd been in love before. But nothing close or like this.

Whatever it was about Harmony I couldn't take my mind off her for a second or minute. All of my thoughts and ideas would lead me back to the day we met, her smile, that contagious laugh, and the way she looks confused when she hears or sees something she doesn't understand. Yeah, I am a man in love.

As much as I try to tell myself that nothing is growing inside of me or that maybe I'm moving to fast. I can't help but light up like a Christmas tree when she comes into a room. I try my best to play it coy or be stern with Harmony when we are in a room full of clients or co-workers. I avoid eye contact or hold back my smile when I look in her direction. As one of the directors of the firm I can't set the example that fraternizing is acceptable in the office. My colleagues look up to and respect me a great deal. Besides

I'm still catching my bearing in the new city. So, I tend to leave my heart at the front door when I come into the office.

But Harmony does not make it easy for me. Not one bit. Every time I see her long legs strutting across the carpet or the way she wiggles when she walks away. It drives me crazy. Sometimes I have to catch myself from starrng at her from across the room. Always careful not to be seen in a compromising position or showing favoritism. My colleagues were almost enamored with Harmony as much as I was too.

“She’s really good on her feet. I like that. Sharp mind.” Brian stated casually over a cup of coffee.

“Good job bringing Harmony on board the team. Brilliant way of approaching conflict and providing resolutions.” Joan confirmed in passing one day through my office door.

Harmony was just that magnificent that if you were in her presence for more than five minutes she would have you under her spell. I couldn't help but wonder what she would look like inside my bed. Underneath my

covers. Naked. Sleeping peacefully next to me after making love. But after three months of dating Harmony wasn't quite ready to take that step in our relationship.

“I just don't want to rush into anything that either of us would regret.”

Harmony stated over pancakes and strawberries one Sunday morning.

Her words hit me like a ton of bricks. I wasn't expecting that curve ball so suddenly in our relationship. But I knew Harmony wasn't the type of woman that would spread her legs for any gentleman suitor. She was selective in every way possible. It was one of her many attractive qualities that I liked about her. I would be lying if I said my manhood needed some sexual healing to relieve myself of the daily stresses of work. And since Harmony was not giving up the loving between us. I had to learn to work my way through my eagerness for flesh. Working out. Cold showers. Masturbation. And when nothing else worked I prayed for peace and self-control.

I was resting on the couch watching a new Netflix series when Harmony called me. On the second ring I picked up. It was a Tuesday night, so I was a bit caught off guard to be hearing from her early on in the week. Usually Harmony would send me a cute selfie of her or a sweet message letting me know she's thinking of me. This time nothing. I was a little perturbed. But I hoped that it wouldn't show up in my voice.

“Hey baby, what are you up too?” Harmony stated seductively.

I sat up on the couch and leaned forward with the phone inside my ear. I rubbed my head a few times and replied. “Just hanging out on the couch. What's up?”

Harmony laughed. I could tell she was nervously preparing to ask me something. But the right words were been chosen carefully.

“I was just thinking that maybe this weekend we could go skating in the park. What do you think?”

I pause briefly to pull up my calendar on my phone. I had some work things planned up until six in the afternoon on Saturday. But I was free on Sunday.

“Looks like I have a pretty busy schedule for the upcoming weekend sweets.” I lied.

“Oh that’s too bad honey bun. I was hoping that maybe we could spend some time together. Work has been pretty hectic lately.” Harmony confessed.

“Oh yeah I know. New clients coming into the office soon and well you know how that goes when we’re trying to lock in fresh meat.”

“I do. By chance, who’s the client?”

Within that moment I realized I was being baited for information. I didn’t like the overall vibe of the conversation. I felt as though I was being

manipulated into providing detailed information. I was being used by my girlfriend/employee. I knew I had to end the call before things went from bad to worse in seconds.

“Just some mid level production firm based out of the big cities. I don’t want to bore you with the details. Anyway, I’m starving. I’m about to whip up something in the kitchen. Can I give you a call back in a bit?” I lied.

“Sure. I understand. I don’t like my man waiting for food. Take care of yourself and we’ll talk soon.” Harmony added.

As soon as I hung up the phone a sigh of relief overcame me. I felt tight in my shoulders and extremely uncomfortable. It was an odd feeling. But one that was all too familiar. One of the many reasons I was afraid of when Harmony was hired on with the firm. I thought she and I both could separate the business and our personal life. But, suddenly I was beginning to regret my decision. If it had to come down to it. Unfortunately, my relationship with Harmony would have to go.

The Harmonized Truth: A Broken Woman

Chapter Sixteen

Harmony

I deserved to be selected to represent the firm with the new client. So what if I had been with the firm for only a short period of time ? My time was up next and I deserved every bit of the piece of pie. Helping a growing firm secure a big money client would have me to gain the respect of the directors and my colleagues. And the few that I was close to would just have to get over the fact that I was selected and not them.

I know it may sound vain or as if I'm ego tripping but oh well. My mother always told me to go after whatever I wanted in this life. And that's exactly

what I intended to do. But first I needed an ally to make sure I executed my plan perfectly. I knew just the person to call.

“Kimberly, my beautiful friend...what are you up too?”

“Whatever you want or need the answer is no. Don’t even waste your breath buttering me up.” Kimberly warned.

“Really Kim? I didn’t even say anything yet.”

“Ok. Shoot. My mistake. It’s one of those days.” Kimberly confirmed.

“Well, there this guy and I ...”

“No.” Kimberly interrupted.

Harmony began to pout. “You won’t even allow me to finish my sentence.

You really are tripping today Kim.”

“I’m sorry Harmony. Maybe I’m just not in the mood. You know how I am days before my period arrives.”

“Yeah, a walking lunatic.”

“See, keep dancing on my bad side. You’ll be talking to the dial tone next.”

Harmony took a deep breath and exhaled. “Sorry Kim. I’m just going to say it and hopefully you will help me. Alright?”

“Fine. As long as it doesn’t involve me driving a getaway car, hiding in bushes, or getting naked for money I’m all ears.”

“Good. I want this big client at work and only one lawyer will be selected to represent the firm. And I want it this badly.”

“Ok. So, what’s the problem?” Kimberly questioned.

“I’m sort of dating my boss and I want him to give me a leg up on the competition.”

Kimberly gasps.

“Hello? Kim...are you there? Hello?”

“I’m here.” Kim coughed.

“Did you hear what I said?” Harmony whispered through the phone.

The Harmonized Truth: A Broken Woman

“Yes, I heard you. I’m not sure why you are telling me your business.”

Kimberly replied with an attitude.

Harmony paused for a second and reconsider the words coming out of her mouth. Was she really ready to hear her friends criticism over her new relationship ? Could Kimberly not judge Harmony not so harshly?

Harmony knew that now that her secret was out in the open there was no taking it back. She had to deal with the consequences.

“That’s not the reason I called Kimberly. I need your advice on standing out in the workplace. You know perhaps you can give me some tips on how to get in good with my man so he can hand me the job.” Harmony confessed.

Kimberly cleared her throat and flicked her tongue. Her attitude still very much apart of the conversation.

The Harmonized Truth: A Broken Woman

“Well, you are my girl so I want to see you with the W. But, I can’t lie and say I’m not perturbed by this interappropriate relationship with your boss.

I’ll save that part for when I see you in person Miss Thing.”

Harmony jumped for joy. “Thanks Kim. I knew I could count on you!”

“Mhmm. Just remember you owe me when you make it big.”

“I got you girl.”

“Ok so this is what you need to do....” Kimberly declared.

Chapter Seventeen

Harmony

I arrived in to work early the next morning. Seven thirty to be exact. I pulled into the parking deck and sat inside my car for a good ten minutes before walking inside. I needed to talk to God first. I wasn't to comfortable with some of the things that Kimberly suggested I do. But I knew my normal self would have to push past my comfort zone to get what I wanted. After I talk to the Lord I reapplied my red lipstick, slid my feet inside my six inch pumps, pushed my cleavage, and grabbed the basket of muffins in the backseat. They were not homemade. But it was the thought that counts. Or at least in my case the first move towards domination. Neither of my colleagues were insight. This one extra point in my favor.

I strutted my long legs inside the break room and headed towards my office. I was in good spirits as I scribbled down on a piece of paper a sweet note. Something short and sweet. I wrote: A little something sweet to start the day. Food always made people instantly like you and put there guard down. Just what I needed.

Maverick usually arrived in the office at eight or eight fifteen depending on the traffic. I knew his routine like I knew the back of my hand. His day started at six thirty with morning meditation, an hour in the gym, and forty-minutes grooming and dressing himself for the day. Maverick was a major stickler for predictability and routine. Good for business. Not so much for a clever girlfriend. I strategically placed a banana nut muffin on his desk and placed my firm bottom inside his chair.

When I heard the door open I swiveled around in the chair to catch the expression on Mavericks face. It definitely was not the reaction I was looking for.

“Surprise.” I stated with a toothy grin.

Maverick glanced over his shoulder and slammed the door shut.

“Harmony? What the hell?” Maverick stated agitated.

I rose from the chair and walked over towards Maverick slowly. Careful not to agitate him any further.

“I thought you would be happy to see me this morning. I guess not.”

Maverick placed his laptop and cell phone onto the desk and walked over towards the blinds. He made sure the blinds were securely shut. He took a deep sigh and walked over towards me. I could see he was trying to conceal his true emotions. But he was deeply fighting something on the inside. My heart sank deep inside my chest. I felt silly being inside his office especially after our agreement. I wanted to hear or at least see a smile cross Maverick’s face. Instead I could just see the frustration building in his shoulders.

“I think I should just leave.”

Maverick ran his hand over his face and walked towards me slowly. I had never seen this side of him. It caught me off guard as well. He took a step forward and I took a step back.

“Harmony, I’m sorry. I was just..not expecting to see you inside my office this morning.” Maverick confessed.

I just stood there allowing him to fall into my trap.

“Can you forgive me sweetheart ?” Maverick asked as he spread his arms wide.

I shrugged my shoulders and averted my eyes. I was pretending to be more hurt than I led on. I batted my eyes and walked over towards him slowly. Sliding my hands around his fit waist. I buried my head inside his shoulder and whispered how sorry I was for surprising him.

“You did nothing wrong. It’s all my fault” Maverick admitted.

Planting a small kiss on my left cheek he apologized again and again. Until he felt satisfied enough that he was in my good graces. I held on to him a few minutes longer. And just like that I knew that Maverick was wrapped around my little finger.

Chapter Eighteen

Harmony

Two weeks had gone by and still nothing. I was expecting the opportunity to be handed over to me. But Maverick was not catching my subtle hints.

I'd gone above and beyond to convince Maverick that I was the woman for the job. Over dinner one evening I slipped my foot outside of my shoe and played footsie underneath the table. Maverick just looked at me sideways and shook his head. After two minutes of me flirting with myself I knew I needed to step up my game. Or as Kimberly would say drop it like it's hot.

I was ready to risk it all to get what I want. I learned a long time ago that nothing comes easy in this life. You had to take it or risk not having it all.

I'd made up in my mind that the only thing missing from Maverick and I courtship was the fact that we hadn't had sex yet. Now, don't get me wrong I wanted to explore his body like the eighth wonder of the world. I was holding back. Holding back from giving him that part of me. I wasn't nervous or anything. I come to realize at twenty -eight that men viewed sex as an obstacle. Another thing to be conquered during conquering the world. In my youth I didn't quite mind taking off my clothes for the man I presumed loved and appreciated me in return. I was beautiful. He was handsome. Sex was something we both wanted, so why not. But in the end, I was always left with pieces of me to put back together again. Pieces that left me tangled in more knots emotionally than I could ever imagined. Instead of seeing sex as a pleasurable experience I always felt trapped inside myself. Or rather trapped inside other people experiences of me. I felt powerless.

The Harmonized Truth: A Broken Woman

In relationships I gave parts of me away because I wanted or needed to keep my partner. For the sake of having someone there to hold me at night or just around for comfort. I've never felt wholeness or complete intimacy. I guess you could say I became numb to sex. Every experience was like I wasn't there mentally anymore. I had ultimately become someone else. I never really healed from the scars that past lovers left on my heart. Instead I learned to carry them with me silently into each new relationship I entered. Maverick and I were no different.

I decided to put my fears inside of a tiny box inside the back of my mind. Time was winding down and my competition was revving up at work. The new contract was all anyone could talk about. People speculated that Maverick and I were seeing each other. But no one could confirm anything. I just allowed the rumors to circulate and become extra careful around my man. The rumors were less than nothing in my book. Just office chatter that I easily tossed to the backside with a chuckle and a funny story about

my childhood. When I opened my email and read that the contract would be secured by an upcoming new talented lawyer within the next 24 hours. I knew this was my last shot to secure my future. Game on.

Chapter Nineteen

Harmony

Candles flickered against the windowsill. The moonlight captured the essence of the night through the sheer curtain inside my bedroom window. Roses petals scattered across my bedroom floor . My sexy black lingerie rested on the bed waiting anxiously for the nights festivities. Two wine glasses sat evenly on my night stand next to a bed of plump juicy grapes. I gone to the spa earlier in the day to take away the anxiety building inside of

me. I was nervous. Maverick had no clue that I was planning on having sex with him. Giving him a part of me that I would hold next to me until marriage. He had no clue that I was eternally suffering on the inside each and every time the thought of becoming intimate with him or anyone crossed my mind. I'd learned to protect myself from hurt and pain. It was all I knew to survive.

That was all behind me tonight. Tonight, I wasn't Harmony. Sweet, articulate, and charming Harmony. No. Tonight I was Danielle Dereon. Fiery, aggressive, arousing, and everything a man could desire in one woman. I was a fantasy. His hidden fantasy. Nothing was off limits when Danielle came out of me. She was unapologetically a bad bitch. She often scared me at times. But she was the only one who could ultimately get me what I want in the end.

I'd set the dinner table for two. Maverick was set to arrive at my place by 9. Nine was perfect. By that time dinner was ready and so was I. For dinner I made smothered chicken covered in Southern style gravy. Roasted red potatoes sprinkled in garlic. Buttery green beans. Homestyle whole wheat dinner rolls. To start the night off on the right foot I'd purchased a bottle of the finest red wine from the supermarket. I wanted Maverick to be blown away by all of my hard work to make him feel like a king and my home could be his castle. If he gave me what I wanted.

I didn't want to scare Maverick off from my attire. I thought all leather would be too much for him to handle. He'd probably run right out the door the moment the handcuffs came out. I wanted to seduce him, not scare the poor man into rehab. My six inch red bottom black gave my long legs more sex appeal. My strapless red dress accentuated my curves and squeezed my thighs together. Every time I walked or moved an inch my sweet dress rose seductively up my plump thigh. It was almost to perfect. I

sprinkled some soft floral perfume behind my ears and neck. Just to arouse Maverick with my scent as soon as he held me inside his arms.

The table was all set and so was I. The only thing missing was some soft background music. Not to worry. Nothing got people more in the mood than Luther, Marvin, and Anthony Hamilton. Just before Maverick arrived I did something unusual for my normal self. I needed to take the edge off and get all the way inside of Danielle's head. I needed to release my sexual energy onto myself before Maverick.

So I decided to slip out of my thong and strut inside the bathroom. I closed and locked the door securely behind me. With a towel covering the toilet I push my dress over my hips and thighs. I close the seat on the toilet and turn out the light. I slide one foot out of my shoe and spread my legs slowly open. I lean back as my hands begin to slowly make there way down my torso. I can smell my womanly essence filling the room. I am wet from

anticipation. My thighs are sticky. Yet, I have not entered my vagina yet.

One leg is up against the bathtub and the other is on the tiny sink. I'm a little uncomfortable. But it's the kind of uncomfortable that rewards great pleasure in the end.

I take my right hand and insert two fingers inside my mouth. My plump lips wrap evenly around my manicured hands. I close my eyes and imagine that I am alone with Maverick three hours ahead. We are lying in bed naked with our hearts pounding outside of our chest. Our touch is insatiable as we both find it hard to keep our hands off of each other.

Sweat drips from our foreheads as our bodies become sticky and aroused in anticipation for more of each other. Maverick wraps his big strong arms around my legs and pulls me towards him . His face disappears in between my legs. His tongue takes over and explores my vagina like a man thirsty for the sweetest nectar on earth. I am aroused by his touch as I wiggle and push him further inside my love nest.

By now my hands have taken over my fantasy. Legs trembling uncontrollably. I can't stop myself. My body is set ablaze at the thought of the night ahead. I close my eyes tighter and imagine Maverick whispering in my ear that the new contract is mine and that he can't wait to tell the partners about us. I go deeper inside myself. Deeper than I've ever gone before. I'm squirting all over the towel underneath my moist ass. I'm losing control. I'm almost there....

Suddenly, the door bell rings and my one woman climax has abruptly ended.

Chapter Twenty

Harmony

I compose myself. I readjust my clothing. Run a warm hot cloth over my lady parts and reapply my lipstick. The doorbell rings a few more times.

Maverick can wait. You always make a man wait. He will always appreciate the gift more. I look at myself in the mirror. I look for the part of me that

is shy, soft, docile, timid, and quick to apologize for mistakes. She is

Harmony. I know her well. I hide her. Tuck her away safely beside my

heart. Tonight I must protect her and go after what rightfully is our.

Tonight I am Danielle. A badass bitch.

I open the door and Maverick is standing inside the doorway with his cell phone up to his ear. He tosses me a quick smile.

“Sorry. I was freshening up.” I confess.

Maverick leans towards me plants a small kiss on my cheek. He passes me a bouquet of a arrangement of flowers. They are lovely on the eye yet wildly unique like me. I accept the flowers and welcome Maverick inside my home. This is not his first time at my home. This is the first time he is unknowing walking into my trap. He looks I whisper to myself. Good enough to undress and fuck right on the living room floor. He's dressed down tonight. Black khaki slack and canary yellow short sleeve collared shirt. He smells even better than he looks. The canary yellow good on his chocolate smooth skin. I can't help but become more aroused by the sight of him. I tell myself to relax and don't do too much to scare this man away. But Danielle does not listen. Harmony is not here tonight. I pat Maverick on his cute butt and lock the front door.

The lights are dim all over. Maverick immediately notices the candles flickering on the dining room table. He doesn't say anything about the tap

on his behind. But I can tell by his lack of words that he is speechless by the mood.

“Harmony, you did all this...for me?”

I smile. “ You like it?”

“I love it.” Maverick confirms.” “I didn’t know you were planning something so romantic. I would have dressed better for the occasion.”

I laugh. “You look fine sweetheart. Now let’s get this evening started shall we.”

Maverick nods his head. I intertwine my fingers in between his as I escort him to his seat. With his chair pulled back from the table Maverick slowly takes a seat. I can tell from the look on his face that he’s uncomfortable or nervous. That’s my cue to settle his nerves. I seductively pull his chin towards me and plant a kiss onto his lips. Maverick releases a moan and I am delighted.

“Wow!” Maverick exclaims.

I walk seductively towards the kitchen and toss a wink over my shoulders. I start us off with a glass of wine and propose a toast.

“Let’s toast.”

“What are we proposing too?” Maverick questions holding his glass in the air.

“Let’s toast to new opportunities and new beginnings.”

“How about we toast to love?” Maverick questions.

“To love?”

“Yes, to love my sweet.”

“Wow. I don’t know what to say.” Harmony admits averting her eyes.

Maverick places his glass on the table. He leans towards me and grabs my glass from my hand and places it onto the table. Maverick licks his lips and pulls my chin in his direction. My heart starts racing. This wasn’t apart of

the plan for tonight. I can hear my heart beating inside my ears. Maverick reaches for my hand and holds squeezes my hand. He clears his throat and stares into my eyes.

“From the moment we met, I can’t seem to get you off my mind. I wasn’t expecting to meet someone so soon. You came into my life and I can honestly say, I’ve never met someone like you.” Maverick states.

“Maverick, I....”

“I know. I feel the same. I guess what I’m trying to say is Harmony. I love you.”

“I...”

Maverick laughs. “ I know it’s a lot and you don’t have to say it back. If you...”

“I love you too.” I admit.

“Do you?”

“I do.”

Maverick wraps his hands around my neck and pulls me towards him. His lips meet mine and we kiss each other with passion. Suddenly, I was hungry for something more than food. I couldn't take my hands or lips off of Maverick. It was as if we both wanted the same thing at the same time and nothing else matters. So, I allowed Maverick to have me. Have all of me. The good . The bad . The ugly. He loved me and for now that was all that mattered between us.

Chapter Twenty-One

Harmony

I was lying in bed in our love scented sheets. When I heard Maverick talking inside the bathroom. The bathroom door was ajar. My back to the bathroom. I opened my eyes. But I didn't change positions. I wanted to hear what was being said without alarming him. I could hear Maverick

talking in a low tone. His words still sharp as a knife. I browse the room and could still see his clothing resting on my bedroom floor. My curiosity peaked. I wanted to know who Maverick was talking to so early in the morning. I wanted to know what couldn't wait until after our time was up. Someone was stealing my time with my man and that was causing my blood to boil over.

“No. I don't think she's qualified enough to handle the account.” Maverick stated.

I began to listen more closely to his words. My heart was beginning to sink inside my chest. Could Maverick be talking about me? I needed to hear my name. I needed to know if he was talking about me.

“Harmony is a contender. But my gut says she's too eager to please and will make a simple mistake that could be costly to the firm. No. I don't think we will lose her at all. Are you kidding me...? She's grateful just to be apart of the team.”

And within that moment a tear slid down my cheek. Everything that I thought I had done right or in my power went down the drain. The man I loved didn't think I was qualified enough to handle a major client. To say I was crushed would be an understatement. An all too familiar pain suddenly overcame and within that moment I felt like I had loss a major part of myself.

“Alright. I'll see you guys in a few hours. Bye.” Maverick concluded.

The bathroom door shut and the shower came on. I knew I had to get my mind and emotions in check before Maverick walked out of the bathroom. I wanted to know if he was going to be honest with me. Would he hide the truth from me? I crawled out of bed and walked into the kitchen for a glass of water. I needed to clear my head. Too many things running through my mind. I almost felt like I couldn't breathe. Like nothing else mattered in this world. Not me. Not Maverick. Not even my career. I needed a sounding board. I needed to talk to Kimberly.

“Hey you’ve reached Kimberly. I’m not available. Leave a message.”

I tried calling and texting Kimberly three more times and still nothing. I was pissed and frustrated. I needed someone to help me rationalize this new wave of emotions pounding inside my head.

“There she is.” Maverick whispers inside my ear.

He plants a kiss on my left cheek and wraps his arms around my waist. His body is damp from the shower as he stands in only a towel inside a towel.

“Morning.” I whisper.

“It’s a good morning indeed.” Maverick concurs and walks away.

I place my cell phone on the counter and finish my glass of water. My back is still turned and I count to three slowly before turning towards Maverick.

When I turn around he’s pulling up his slacks and pulling his shirt over his head. He tosses me a boyish smile and says, “Last night was...”

“It was ...special” I finish.

“I agree. I hope we didn’t. I didn’t.”

“You didn’t what exactly?”

With his clothes on Maverick walks over to me and tugs on my robe. He makes sure that it’s securely tight around my waist. He looks me inside my eyes and says, “ I want to know if it was everything that you wanted and needed.”

“Almost.”

“Almost?” Maverick questions.

I walk around Maverick and into the dining area. I pull the chair from the table and bury my face inside my hands. I release a deep sigh. Maverick pulls a chair and sits down beside me.

“What’s wrong?”

“That’s what I’m trying to figure out. Maybe you can answer that for me.”

Maverick clears his throat. “Harmony sweetie, I don’t know what’s going on. Can you at least look at me?”

Maverick pulls my hand and places his hand on top of mine. I avert my eyes and search for the right words to say just how I feel. I pull my hand away and start from the best place I know how, my heart.

“I thought you were different. Different from all the rest of them. They said they loved me too. They laid me on their beds and stared into my eyes. Kissed me with there lips of passion. And still...when it was all over they left me.”

“What? Huh? Who?” Maverick asked perplexed. “Harmony, slow down. You’re sounding like...”

“Like a crazy person?”

“No. That’s not what I was going to say. I’m lost here.”

I laugh. “ Why are you lost and confused? You have everything. The money. Power. Influence. For a time you almost had me too. I thought I could be everything you wanted. Be the perfect wife and girlfriend. Instead, you use me for your gain and just throw me away.”

“Harmony!” Maverick exclaims. “I love you and...”

“You love me Maverick...huh? Do you?!” I exclaim. “Then why don’t you think I’m qualified to handle the new account.”

Maverick begins to run his hands across his head and avert his eyes. He’d been caught in his own confession. I watched him carefully as he bit his lip and averted his eyes. I waited patiently for him to give me the answers I rightfully deserved.

“I can explain Harmony.” Maverick stated.

He began to pace back and forth across the dining room floor. I crossed my arms and widen the gap between us. I needed the truth to push through the awkwardness and save both of us from drowning. I needed to save myself more importantly.

“The partners and I reviewed your performance and reputation among your colleagues. And what we found...”

“You found what ?” I questioned.

“We found that most people only tolerated you. They found you aggressive, impatient, pushy, and down right unconcerned with other well beings.”

I couldn't believe the words coming out of Mavericks mouth. This was all news to me. I assumed I was well liked by everyone. There had to be some sort of mistake.

“What?!”

“It's true Harmony. I hate to be the one to tell you.”

“This can't be... I'm nice to everyone in the office.”

“Well, nice doesn't cut it in this business sweetheart. You have to know how to play the game.”

“I'm going to call some of them right now. I gave Mary a lift when her car got towed. Or that time Ben went on and on about his divorce I was there to listen.” I rattled.

Tears began to well up in my eyes. I couldn't believe the things that were being said about me behind my back. It felt like my world was crashing down before my eyes. Maverick walked towards me to console me. But I didn't want to feel his embrace. I was cold. Cold enough to want to hurt the closest person to me.

"Please don't touch me." I warned.

"Harmony, I know how you must feel. It's hard. But, we can get through this together."

"Together?!"

"Yes, we! We're in this together. I meant what I said last night Harmony."

"You love me?!" I exclaimed. "You don't even know what love is...you think you love me. But, you really don't."

"I can't believe you just said that Harmony. I telling you the truth."

"Oh yeah, so is that why you didn't fight for me to have the job. I heard you say you thought I wasn't qualified."

Maverick balled up his fist and bit down on his bottom lip. His frustration was building by the second. I could tell by his body language that he was holding on to his last ounce of patience.

“I did fight for you. I’m always fighting for you.” Maverick confessed.

“I can’t tell.”

Maverick stumped out of the room and left me alone with my thoughts. I stood there waiting for him to return back to our argument. This was our first argument. We had become just like everyone else. Except this time we had no one to run to help us make it to the other side. I could hear his footsteps coming back towards the living and dining room area. With my arms folded I waited until he came over to me to make peace between us. I didn’t like leaving things unsettled or incomplete. I knew this would eat at me all day. Everything playing over and over inside my head.

“I’m leaving.” Maverick stated evenly.

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I turned towards him as he stood in the same place he entered last night inside my home. I didn't move. I wanted him to come to me. Comfort me. Tell me the sweetest lie he could ever imagine. Yet, he remained in the same spot staring back at me. Our locked into each other. No words spoken. I averted my eyes and turned my back towards him. The next sound I heard was too familiar. It was the sound of the front door opening and Maverick leaving me.

Chapter Twenty- Two

Harmony

I shattered every glass inside my house. Fragments of broken glass everywhere. I didn't want to see my reflection anymore. I felt just like the glass covering the wood floor throughout my home. I was hurting so deeply on the inside. The pain almost unimaginable to bare. I screamed and yelled at the top of my lungs for someone to rescue me. Come to my aide and tell me that everything my heart desired would be given to me in due time. No one. No one came to save me. No one knocked on my door and asked to come inside to breathe life back into me. I was suffocating with the thoughts inside my head. Maverick didn't believe in me. My colleagues

secretly hated me. My best friend was unavailable. My family was no where in reach. It was just me.

Crawling around on the floor asking God to save me from myself. I needed that extra push to keep me going in this life. I needed Maverick to love me back the way I intended to love him. I wanted us to work. I believed we could. But it seemed as though everything was all a lie. A house full of intolerable lies. I didn't expect for him to give the job. I did expect for him to have my back. Go to war for me. Love me beyond my flaws and imperfections. Fight until the war inside of him was won. I believed we could have conquered the world together. But just like everything else I loved in this life. It too would all come crashing down.

I was ready. Ready to leave this all behind. To start over again. I think we all could use a reset button at some point in our lives. Today was my day for a reset button. My mind was made up. It was time for me to say goodbye and start anew on the other side. I wiped my tears and pushed it

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all out of me. The hurt, pain, rejection, fears, and so much more. I left it all on my kitchen and bathroom floor with the broken glass. I grabbed the broom and dustpan and swept it all away. I tossed the food inside the trash and carried it to the curb. I cleaned my dishes. Wiped the tears from my face and grabbed the scissors. I cut my hair. Cut all of my beautiful tresses and tossed them into the trash. For the first time in my life I saw my true self. She was beautiful. The world will remember me just the way I came into it. I cleaned my house from top to bottom. Every thing in its place. No make up or perfume on my face. I laid a beautiful white dress across my perfectly dressed bed. I sat down at my armoire for the last time and I began to write. I wrote the letter that only Maverick would find. I needed to tell him all the things I could never say with my words. By the time he found this I hope he would remember me from last night and not today.

Dear Maverick, What a powerful name for such a powerful and strong man. I hope you can forgive me someday. I was trying to be the best

woman for you. Somewhere along the way I lost myself in the process. I never told you this. But I was always running from my past. My mother always told me I was nothing more than a pretty face. That would take me very far and wide. But she never told me the rules for taking care of my heart. I never knew how to love. Love never came easy. I was always beautiful and everything I ever wanted came to me naturally. Everything except the things I needed to keep me whole. I know you may never understand the weight of my burdens or the depth of my pain. But I hope someday you will see that I was trying to love you and find me at the same time. I wish we could have conquered the world together. Instead we left each other in more broken pieces than before. I'm sorry. I'm sorry for walking into your life with my own expectations for our romance. I'm sorry for making you fall in love with an almost brand new me. I'm sorry if I ever made you question my love for you. But most importantly, I'm sorry for putting you in a position that would cost you everything you worked hard for in this life. I'm leaving this world behind. It's too much for just me to

hold onto now. It's time I let go. Let go of people's expectations. Let go of my past lovers. Let go of the pain living and breathing inside of me. It's time I let go of you and me. I loved you and I always will forever.

I left the note on the doorstep and left the front door unlocked. I took one last look at all the things inside my home. Things that I had collected over time. Things that were supposed to make me feel complete and safe inside my heart. I listened as my footsteps hit the floor and led me to the bathroom. My final resting place. I turned on the water inside the bathtub and sat patiently on the toilet. I watched as the water quickly filled the tub. There was only one thing left to do. I reached inside the cabinet for a razor. I slid inside the tub with the luke warm water and slid inside. I slit my wrist and closed my eyes for the last time.

The End

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