



A PACKAGE DEAL

Dana Littlejohn

A Package Deal

Dana Littlejohn

This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

A PACKAGE DEAL

First edition. June 19, 2021.

Copyright © 2021 Dana Littlejohn.

Written by Dana Littlejohn.

Tag:

One drunken night turned Phillip's life upside down. Could Janet be just what he needs to turn it right side up?

Blurb:

A drunken decision in college changed Phillip Drake's life forever. Once the chaos slowed, he knew the life he'd planned with his girlfriend, Janet, could never happen. An unforeseen tragedy brought Phil home to his family with a son. When Phil sees Janet for the first time in three years, he runs the other way not wanting to put his own wants before his son's needs. Will Janet get the chance to show Phil that she would be what's best for him and his son?

Chapter One

Phillip Drake sat in the back of the limo holding his son close to his chest as the small boy slept peacefully. He watched the scenery go by for a while and then looked down at the child.

His poor little Tyrell had no idea how much their lives had changed. The toddler stretched in his arms. Phil smiled for the first time in two weeks. Tyrell's little fist flailed around innocently for a moment as he adjusted in his father's arms before he settled back down to sleep.

Phillip let a lazy finger slide down the light brown skin of his son's chubby cheek and sighed. Abruptly, Phil held the boy fiercely close, rocking him back and forth as tears flowed freely down his cheeks. It was up to him to take care of him now all alone and he had no idea how he was going to do that. The limo slowed to a stop, and then the back door swung open moments later.

"Mr. Drake, we're here."

"Yes, right." He wiped his face quickly. Gathering Tyrell and his things, he shifted the boy to his shoulder and slid out of the limo. "Thanks for everything, Dennis. I know you were only supposed to drop me at the church, but—"

Dennis held his hand up, shaking his head. "No thanks necessary, Mr. Drake. I couldn't leave you and your boy stranded at the church."

"When we got dropped off this morning, I... Well, I guess it didn't occur to me how we would get home," he explained softly.

"Yes, well, you had other things on your mind." Dennis closed the door. "Again, Mr. Drake, I'm sorry for your loss. I hope everything turns out well for you."

"Thank you, Dennis."

Dennis turned to leave but looked over his shoulder. "Will you be alright? I mean, you know, you've got someone you could call?"

"Yes, one of my friends is—Oh, here he comes," he said with a nod.

Dennis turned to see a man approaching them. He smiled and tipped his hat before returning to the car.

Phil nodded and watched the limo drive away as he waited. "Thanks for coming, Rick."

Rick leaned into the shoulder Tyrell wasn't on. "Of course, man. It was bad enough I couldn't be with you at the funeral. I was definitely going to be here when you got home."

“It’s okay. I knew they couldn’t give everyone the time off.”

Rick followed him into the house. He stood in the vestibule of the little house and took a deep breath. Rick clapped his shoulder and they walked into the living room together.

“The whole place screams of Monica, Rick.”

“I know, dude. It’s going to be rough for a while if you decide to stay here. Have you even thought that far ahead?”

“Not really. We only just moved in a little over a year ago. Grab us a beer. I’m going to lay Tyrell down.”

Phil returned and sat in his chair. Rick handed him a bottle. They sat quietly drinking.

“I don’t have the words, man,” Rick finally said. “I wish I could say something that could help, but this situation is outside my field of practice.”

“What? Professor Browning is speechless? That’s got to be a first,” Phil said with a chuckle. “Your students would never believe that.”

Rick laughed. “That’s true, but even my psychology majors would be hard-pressed for any words that would ease your pain, my friend.”

Phil took a deep breath. “That’s because there are no words,” he muttered. “I’ve made my peace with being a single father. I will raise my son alone and we will be happy.”

“Alone? Why must you be alone? You’re a young man with great potential and a not so bad looking face. Surely another woman would be glad to have you *and* your son. The boy will be your way in. He’s the handsome one,” Rick added in a teasing tone.

Phil shook his head. “No, that’s just too much to deal with.”

Rick stopped drinking and tilted his head. “What do you mean?”

“Rick, when my son gets older, he will start to notice the obvious differences between us.”

Rick nodded. “Yes, I know Phil.”

“Tyrell may not question his light brown skin tone or even his curly hair, but those green eyes he got from Monica. He will one day ask me why he looks different from me. I have to prepare for that and explain to him where the scars on his leg and face came from the accident that took his mother from us.”

“Won’t her family be able to—”

Phil leaned forward to rest on his knees. “Monica’s family have made it clear that they want nothing to do with me or my son. They didn’t approve of us being together in the first place.”

“Phil—”

“I come with a lot of baggage, Rick. Why would another woman want to deal with all that?”

“Yeah, but—”

Phil shook his head. “No, I will just focus on my son. It’s up to me to keep Monica’s memory alive for him.”

Rick’s shoulders slumped. “Alright, Phil. You’re my boy. You know I’ll help in any way I can.”

Phil smiled. “Yeah, I know. Thanks, man.”

“I’m going to let you rest, man. You really look like crap. You call me if you need anything.”

Phil chuckled and followed Rick to the door. “I will, Rick.”

“I mean it. *Anything*,” Rick emphasized.

Phil nodded and bumped his fist against his friend’s. “Thanks, man.”

Phil shut the door behind his friend and went into the bedroom. As he pulled his pants off, he sat on the bed then abruptly fell over, and cried.

“COME ON, MAN. SHE’S a real hottie, Phil.”

Phil drank half his bottle of beer in one gulp. “I told you, Jeff. You can have my share of all the pussy that comes up in here,” he said with a laugh.

Jeff laughed with him. “Thanks, dude. I appreciate that. Besides, she thinks you’re the cute shy one in the crew.”

“She doesn’t think you’re cute?”

“Bro, I’m a track star. You know how it is. I treat pussy the same way I do the hurdles: hit it fast and finish quickly to run and jump to the next one in line!”

Phil laughed with his friend. “You should be tired.”

“Nah, I can be tired later. I got two more years here. I’m young, strong, and healthy, and this is a big-ass campus. You should run with me, dude. We can get all the ladies. You are sweet and shy, and I’m bold and daring. We’re the dynamic duo! Women love that shit. We’ll have them eating out the palms of our hands.”

“Why are you still bugging me about this? I told you. I got a girl back home. We went to two different schools, but we’re gonna hook back up when we’re done with school.”

Jeff shrugged. “I’m just trying to help you get some love while you’re here. When in Rome, man.”

Phil shook his head and finished his beer in another long gulp and then accepted the one that Jeff offered him.

"Thanks for the concern, man, but a promise is a promise."

"What's up, fellas? You guys still up here drinking?"

Phil and Jeff looked toward the door and raised their beers in greeting.

"Hey, Dennis," Phil said.

"Sup," Jeff greeted with a nod.

"You guys are still up here watching the game when we got a dancer working her ass off downstairs?"

"Dude, the beer is up here, though," Jeff said.

"And the game is almost over," Phil added.

"Trust me, dudes, the view is much better downstairs. Come on," Dennis said excitedly, picking up the cooler that was between them. "If you want your beer, you have to come down and get it."

Phil and Jeff followed Dennis downstairs. Halfway down the stairs, the music got louder, and darkness took over. They entered the large living room where their frat brothers were sitting in a circle of chairs. The circle was much smaller than it would be any other time of the year since most of the men in the house had left early for Christmas break. The only lighting in the room came from the Christmas lights around the ceiling and the fireplace.

In the center of the circle, they could see the dancer move around in front of a guy. They walked closer. The catcalls and whistles were just as loud as the music. Dollar bills were being tossed into the air at her, being tucked by the man she danced in front of and the guys to the left and right of him.

Dennis walked them around the circle to two empty chairs opposite the dancer and put the cooler between them. The rest of the men greeted Phil and Jeff with rough hugs, hand slaps, and raised beers as they passed them, making their way to the chairs. Dennis took a beer from the cooler and slapped them both on the back.

"Enjoy the show, buds. She'll make it over to your chairs in rotation."

Jeff dug in the cooler and handed Phil another beer. "Here, bro."

"I already have one."

He shrugged and pushed it into his hand. "So, what. Now you're double-fisted."

Phil shrugged and drank from his open bottle of beer. He watched the woman who danced across the room from him in the lap of one of his housemates. The lighting was too dim to really see what she looked like. From the reaction of the guys who were groping her, as well as tucking money, Phil got the impression they were pleased with her looks as well as her body. He tilted his beer again and watched her work as he drank.

The dancer sashayed over to the next man as the fellas grabbed at the fluffy white trim on her little dress, throwing it at each other. Others tucked dollars in the white garter belt that was visible just under her butt cheek. One hand after another slapped at her ass as it bounced before them as dollar bills continued to rain down on her.

"Look at that ass bouncing, Phil," Jeff said in his ear when the dancer spun around, shaking her breasts in the next guy's face. "It just screams fuck me, doesn't it?" he asked pretending to smack her bottom. "How can you say that you don't want to stick your dick in that tight ass?"

Phil sat back, putting his own empty bottle on the floor. "I told you guys. I have a girl."

"Uh-huh. Well, perhaps you're not drunk enough," Jeff said with a laugh. "Marcus!"

"Yo!" came the answer from across the room.

"Make your boy Phil a real drink with the special stuff."

"For real? Coming right up!"

Moments later Marcus appeared by his side. "Here, Phil, drink this. It may help change your mind."

Phil lifted a brow. "What is it?"

"Just bourbon and soda with a little something special to relax you. It'll put hair on your chest," Marcus added with a wide grin.

Phil shrugged and took a drink. His focus went back to the dancer. She moved on to the next man. His frat brothers gathered around, stuffing her breasts with dollars, and grabbing her ass as they put dollars in her garter belts, refusing to wait for their turns.

"Dude, this is your chance. She'll be to you, in like three more people," Jeff said excitedly to Phil.

Phil turned to him. "Chance for what?"

"To get some pussy, with no strings attached, Phil. Haven't you been listening?"

Phil rolled his eyes. "I thought we already went over this. I got a girl," he told him slowly, slurring his words.

"Finish your drink. You'll change your mind in a minute," his friend assured him.

Phillip made a frustrated noise. and swallowed the rest of his drink.

Jeff laughed and slapped him on the back. "Now the party can begin."

Phil shrugged off his roommate's arm. "Whatever. You're a pain in the ass, you know that?"

"Here, dude, have another drink. The more you drink, the less of a pain in the ass I'll be," he said, laughing again.

Phil snatched the beer from him before turning his attention back to the dancer.

Jeff jumped to his feet and went around whispering to a few of the other men. Many of them laughed and fished money from their pockets, handing it to him before they went to other men themselves. As they whispered to those men, they did the same.

"Phil, switch places with me," Jeff said when he returned to his seat.

"What? Why?"

"So, I can talk to the dancer before she gets to us."

Phil rolled his eyes and grudgingly switched places with him. "You need to work on that."

"On what?"

Phil took another swig from his bottle and then put it on the floor with the rest of the empty bottles. He punched Jeff in the arm.

"On being a pain in the ass. It's a character flaw," he said, laughing aloud.

"Dude, after tonight, you won't think I'm a pain anymore. You're going to love me," Jeff said, punching him back.

Phil waved away his statement and then jumped to his feet. "I gotta pee."

He stumbled to the restroom and somehow managed not to pee on the floor as he held on to the wall, trying not to sway. When he returned to the party, several of his housemates clapped him on the back, laughing and smiling at him as they exited the room.

"We got you, man!" one said.

"We gonna hook you up, Phil!" said another.

"This is your night, Phil!" another one hollered.

Phil dismissed their words, having no clue what they were talking about. He reached his seat and sat heavily, leaning his head back. His head felt like it was swirling.

"Hey, Sleeping Beauty, you're missing all the fun."

Phil jumped at the feminine voice near his ear, and his eyes popped open.

"Oh, wow, it's my turn already?" he asked, looking around. "Hey, where did everybody go?"

"We're all alone, baby, and you get to have a special dance," the dancer said, coming around him to sit on his lap.

"I do?"

Boldly, she loosened his belt and pulled his pants open. "Uh-huh. I hear you're the sweet and shy type."

"I am?" he asked, watching her hands.

She chuckled and stood up to yank on his pants legs. "Yes, you are. That's rare for a frat boy."

Phil's head hit the back of the chair as he slumped in his seat from her tugging. The sounds of his friends faded away. He looked around to find the room empty. A shiver raced up his back. His butt and legs encountered the cool cushion bringing his attention back to the woman kneeling before him.

"Let's see if we can do something to wake this guy up," she said seductively, then took his sleeping cock into her mouth.

Though his penis fell from her mouth several times, her tongue coaxed it to stiffen. He was hard in no time. Phillip started to moan as he slipped in and out of consciousness. His eyes opened and closed as blissful sensations rose within him. Goosebumps rose on his skin as the amazing blow job continued. The last time he felt so good Janet made it happen.

Janet.

Janet's face formed in Phil's mind's eye. Janet continued sucking his cock, and it felt incredible. He did not want to wake from this latest dream. Suddenly, the feeling changed. Incredible euphoria shot through his body. His eyes popped open. The dancer now sat on his cock. Her face was twisted in obvious pleasure as she rode him hard.

"Hey. Wait, you—" Phil started, but ecstasy stopped his words.

"Relax, baby, it's going to be good. I'm almost there," she groaned out.

The dancer moaned loudly in his ear. Her inner core clamped down on him as her movements increased. Phillip got the impression she was on course to a powerful orgasm. To his amazement, he felt his own climax rising. The woman increased her movements bouncing on his cock until she gripped a handful of his hair and buried her face in his neck. Her body trembled with her climax as she relaxed onto him. Phil gripped her waist to move her limp body over his cock. Moments later he screamed his release to the four walls. In the distance, he could hear the cheers and clapping of all his fraternity brothers on the other side of the door.

WHEN HE OPENED HIS eyes again the sun-lit room had darkened. Phil sat up with a sigh and then reached for his cell phone. He pressed the number two button and waited.

"Yes, hello?"

"Hi, Mom, it's me."

"Phillip! Sweetheart are you alright?" his mother asked, her voice full of relief. "We haven't talked in so long."

"I know, Mom. I'm sorry. I just got caught up in some stuff, and then one thing led to another and then—"

"Phillip, what's wrong? Have you been crying? Has something happened?"

His mother's knowing nature and concerned tone made the tears fall again. He could barely speak without choking on the words.

"Mom, I have so much to tell you."

"Come home, Phillip. We will sort it all out when you get here."

He nodded as if she could see him. "Okay, Mom. I'll be home tonight."

PHIL PULLED UP IN FRONT of his childhood home. He gave a quick look to his sleeping son in the back seat, and then rested his head on the steering wheel with a thud. A sudden door slamming turned his attention. His mother rushed down the walkway toward the car. Phil got out of the car to meet her on the passenger side.

"Phillip, we've missed you so much. Why did you just disappear like that? It's been almost three years since you've been home," his mother inquired, holding him close.

"I know, Mom, I'm sorry."

"As if that's not bad enough it's been almost a month since we've heard from you. You can't just drop off the Earth like that. We were scared to death."

Phil opened his mouth, but his mother held up a finger to silence him.

"Don't you dare say you've been texting because that doesn't count!" She took a deep breath to compose herself. "But, okay, that's the past. You're here now. Let me look at you."

She looked him over, then caressed his face.

"So much has happened, Mom. I don't even know where to begin," he said softly.

"Yes, I can see that. Come inside, sweetheart. Your sister is here. We will do whatever we can to make it right."

Phil stopped her from pulling him away. "Wait, Mom. I have something to show you. Well, *someone*."

He turned away from her confused look to reach inside the car. He lifted his son from the car and turned him toward her.

"This is Tyrell."

His mother looked at the sleeping toddler then sent a questioning look to him. Phil nodded, answering her unasked question. A slow smile brightened her face as she took the child from him.

"Hello, Tyrell. I'm your grandma," she muttered as they walked back to the house.

"Phil! I'm so—"

"Rachel, shh," their mother said and turned Tyrell's sleeping face toward her.

Rachel's mouth closed then quickly dropped open again. Phil's mother continued out of the room as his sister pulled him to the living room.

"Okay, Phil, talk. Where have you been? Mom was convinced that some crazy cult had you and let you text home periodically to keep suspicion away," his sister said with an eye roll. "I had a hard time convincing her that it was really you, especially since we haven't heard from you in the last month."

"I know, I know. I'm sorry, Rachel. I was just so stressed out with school, fatherhood, trying to be a good husband—"

Rachel held up a hand. "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Hold the phone. Okay, I was already stunned by the baby, but a husband? You got married and didn't even tell us?"

"Monica and I got married so Tyrell would grow up in a normal family environment."

"Monica huh?" she said with a raised brow. "So how did you meet this, Monica?"

"Oh. Well, we met at a party a few years back. She was the, umm, entertainment."

Rachel wrapped her arms around her chest. "So, in other words, she was the stripper at one of your frat parties."

Phillip shrugged. "Something like that."

Rachel shook her head. "So where is she now? Why didn't she come with you?"

Phillip sat back against the cushion and exhaled. "She's dead."

Rachel gasped. "Oh, Phil. I'm sorry. What happened?"

"Okay, I put Tyrell in your old room, and he is still asleep. He really is the sweetest little thing," their mother announced coming into the room. "Come into the kitchen so we can talk. I've made you something to eat. I can see you haven't been eating well," she added making a face at him.

Phil looked at his sister and offered his hand. Together they followed their mother.

"So let me get this straight," Rachel began taking a bite from her sandwich her mother offered. "You and Monica got married just so that Tyrell would have a chance at a *normal family*?" she asked, making quotation marks in the air.

"What?" his mother shrieked filling his glass. "You got *married*?"

Phil nodded. "Yeah, but—"

"So, you didn't really love her?"

Phil shrugged. "No, Rachel. Not really, but—"

Rachel's brow lifted. "You're saying you felt nothing at all for this woman?"

"Well, yeah. I mean, it wasn't *that* kind of love, but I did have some love *for* her. I mean, she was the mother of my son, and we were friends. I just wasn't *in* love with her."

"Phil, did it ever occur to you that you could have been a good father and her friend *without* marrying her?"

"Your brother is not that kind of man, Rachel. He did the right thing and married her. What's her name, sweetheart?"

"Her name was Monica, Mom, and yes, Rachel. It did occur to me, but I didn't want to be a *baby daddy*," he explained, doing his own quotations in the air. "They don't really have any rights to their kids. I wanted to have an equal say and be a part of Tyrell's life."

"That's a nice name. How did you and your Monica get together?" his mother said taking a seat.

"She was the stripper at his frat party, Mom. Super romantic," Rachel supplied with an eye roll.

"She was what?" his mother yelled. "Phillip!"

He glared at his sister. "Rachel!"

"Hey! That's what you said." She took another bite from her sandwich and lean back against the chair with a shrug.

"Phillip?"

"Mom, listen, that may have been the way we started, but that's not really who she was. It was a one-time gig that she did for the money. Monica and I became good friends and very close."

"Yes, Phillip, I can understand that, but didn't you think your actions were a little reckless from the start?" his mother questioned.

"Yes, Mom, I realize that getting drunk and allowing some strange woman to ride me was probably not the best idea that I've ever had," he snapped.

"I'm sorry, Phillip. I'm sure you have gone over that scenario several times since it happened. I don't mean to bring up what can't be changed."

"No, Mom, I'm the one who is sorry. I didn't mean to bark at you." He picked up her hand and kissed it.

She patted his cheek. "No apology needed, sweetheart. So where is Monica now? I'd like to meet this woman who made such an impression on my son. Why didn't she come with you?"

Phil sighed. "She died, Mom. She and Tyrell were in a car wreck two weeks ago."

"Oh my God, Phillip!" She stood and brought his head to her chest. "I'm so sorry. Was Tyrell hurt, too?"

Phil nodded. "Yes, but his injuries were nowhere near as bad. He will heal up fine."

His mother put her hand to her chest and exhaled. "That's good to know."

"You know, Phil, you could have told us what was going on with you. In fact, you *should* have told us in the beginning before everything got crazy," his sister chastised, then stuffed the last piece of bread into her mouth.

He turned to her. "I know. I meant to. I just... I mean, everything seemed to happen so fast. Monica and I were his parents, equal in everything that we did for Tyrell. We were a family. Now—"

"Now you're a widower and a single father," his mother said finishing his sentence. "That is a lot for anyone to handle, let alone a young man trying to make it in the world nowadays. Your sister is right, Phillip," she added, returning to her seat. "You may not have felt so overwhelmed if we were there to help you from the beginning."

Phil nodded. "I know, Mom. I'm sorry."

"What about Monica's family, Phil? Have you talked to them about Tyrell? Will they help you with him?" Rachel asked.

He scoffed. "Oh yeah, we spoke all right. Monica wasn't very close to her people. They made it very clear that Tyrell was *my* son. Her mother told me that he is my responsibility and that I would be taking care of him alone. They've washed their hands of me and Tyrell."

"Well, that was nice of them," Rachel said, rolling her eyes.

"It's all right, Phillip. You have us. You will just have to come back to Indiana so you can be close to us. You'll just stay here until you find a house in town and get your affairs straight in Kentucky."

"Thanks, Mom. I—I know I shouldn't have dropped off the radar when all of this started. I just—"

"Yes, you should have," she said in that chastising mother tone. "Adults need help, too, Phillip. I missed my first grandson's birth, first words, crawling, first steps—" She stopped her rant and sighed giving his hand a squeeze. "But I understand how overwhelming all of this must have been. You're here now and so is Tyrell. That's all that matters."

"Phil, when is Tyrell's birthday? He looks about two years old," Rachel asked.

"Yes, he will be two September tenth."

"That's great! His birthday is only a few days away from mine."

"Wonderful! We will have a big birthday party for both of you. We will invite everyone and introduce Tyrell to the family," his mother added.

"Come on, Phil. Let's get the rest of your stuff from the car. You might as well get settled into your old room," his sister said, pulling him from the chair.

He looked over his shoulder to his mother.

"Relax, Phillip," she said and stood. "I will check in on our little prince."

Phil nodded and followed his sister out the door. They were quiet as they walked, but as he pulled the folded playpen from his trunk, his sister broke the silence.

"You know, Phil, Janet still asks about you all the time."

Phil froze at the mention of her name but quickly regained his composure.

"I know she still cares for you," Rachel continued, grabbing a bag from the backseat.

"I can't think about that right now, Rachel. I have Tyrell to worry about."

"You can't make Tyrell happy if you're not happy, Phil. Kids have a knack for picking up on those things. If you could just talk to Janet and tell her what happened, maybe—"

"Maybe *what*, Rachel?" he asked, slamming the trunk. "Maybe she'll take me back... after I dropped off the planet without saying a word for almost three years? After I basically left her for another woman? Yeah, I just don't see her forgiving me for all that, Rachel. I mean, would you?"

"Phil—"

"Janet and I are *done*. I gave up that life...a life I desperately wanted, and I miss like hell! I gave it up for my son and I'd do it again!" he screamed in borderline hysteria.

He shoved Tyrell's things under his arm, dropped them, then picked them up again before she grabbed his hand.

"Phil, you don't have to be unhappy in order for your son to be happy. You could have someone in your life *and* have your son." Her tone was calm as she continued. "If Janet knew she would—"

"No, Rachel!"

Rachel jumped at the sharpness of his voice and dropped his hand. Phil sighed, taking her hand in his again, and spoke softly.

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to snap at you. It's just, sacrifices had to be made for me to focus on my son. Only Tyrell matters now. You understand?"

She nodded. "Okay, Phil. Let's get you guys settled in."

Chapter Two

Phil ran into the building straight to the information desk.

“Hi, my name is Phillip Drake. Someone called and said my wife and son were in a wreck. Can you tell me where they are?”

The woman at the desk nodded and consulted her computer. “Yes, Mr. Drake, they are still in the emergency room. I will buzz you in,” she said and pointed to the double doors across the room.

“Thank you,” he said rushing through them. “I’m looking for Monica Drake,” he said to the first person he saw.

“I don’t know which bay she’s in, but you can check with the nurse at the desk,” the woman offered, pointing the way.

With a grunt, Phil went to the desk. “I’m looking for my wife, Monica Drake. Someone called and said she was in a car wreck.”

The nurse nodded and checked a clipboard on her desk. “Yes sir, Mrs. Drake is in bay five. Right around there.”

Phil looked where she pointed and nodded. “Thank you.” He walked quickly around the large desk and pulled the curtain to bay five aside. Phil gasped at the sight of her. Tears stung his eyes instantly. A man stood beside her adjusting the heart monitor she was attached to.

“Sir, may I help you?” he asked.

“I’m...I’m Phillip Drake. Monica’s husband. How is she doc? Will she be all right?”

The man smiled and offered his hand. “I’m not the doctor Mr. Drake. I’m Tony, one of the ER nurses assigned to care for her. “

“Can you tell me how she’s doing, Tony?”

“Well, she’s pretty banged up as you can see. It was a few cars in the wreck I hear. Witnesses say she took the brunt of it with the pickup truck running right into the driver’s side of the car.”

Phil raked through his hair with his fingers. “Oh my God. What about my son? Our baby had to be in the car with her.”

“Yes, a toddler was with her, but they take all children to the pediatric ward on the fourth floor. I don’t know anything about him.”

Phil felt numb. Tears finally reached his cheeks as he nodded.

Tony touched his shoulder. "The doctor ran a lot of tests on Mrs. Drake when she got here. We should have results very soon. I just gave her something for the pain to help make her a little more comfortable."

Phil continued to nod. "Okay."

"I'll give you some privacy."

"Thank you," Phil said as Tony closed the curtain behind him.

Phil took a deep breath and wiped his face before moving closer to the bed. A grimace look was locked on her pretty face with each staggering breath she took. Stitches lined her swollen lip and a few lacerations on her cheek were attended to. He pressed his lips together to silence any other gasps. He stroked her blood-soaked hair careful not to press against the bandages there.

"Monica?"

Her eyes fluttered. She smiled and turned to face him. His heart ached at the sight of the bruises already forming around two knots on her forehead. When she couldn't turn all the way she tried to readjust her body.

"No, Monica. Don't try to move," Phil said pulling a chair closer to the bed. "I'm here."

"Tyrell? Doctors wouldn't let me see—"

"I haven't seen him yet. The nurse, Tony, said he's on the fourth floor."

Monica frowned when she nodded. "Phil, I'm sorry. I should have waited for you," she forced out.

Phil shook his head. "No Monica, this is my fault. Nothing is more important than you and Tyrell. I should have left early like you suggested."

"No Phil. I was being a bitch for no reason. I know you can't just leave work just because I say so." Tears fell onto her pillow as she sniffed. "I'm sorry."

"Stop it there's nothing to be sorry for."

"Phil, you're a good man. Promise me if anything happens to me, you'll take care of Tyrell. I don't want my family to get him."

"Happen to you? Nothing is going to happen to you. You're going to heal and be fine. I'm going to be right here to take care of you."

"I don't know, Phil. It's really hard to breathe." Monica's words came out through each harsh breath she took.

Phil looked at her chest as she took ragged breaths. Monica coughed. Tiny blood drops landed on the pillow. Phil leaned back.

“Monica?”

Monica coughed again and then took a deep breath. Suddenly the heart monitor began to screech.

“Monica! No, no. Nurse! Tony!”

Tony rushed into the bay with two more people. One of them pushed Phil away from the bed while another yanked the pillow from under Monica’s head.

“Mr. Drake you’re going to have to leave,” Tony told him.

Two more people arrived and pushed Phil further away from the ongoing commotion. Abruptly the curtain was pulled closed in front of him. Before he could protest another person came and guided him away from the bay.

“Mr. Drake, please let them do their work. You will just be in the way. As soon as they know something one of us will come for you.”

“Yes, yes, of course. My son. Tony said he would most likely be on the fourth floor.”

The woman nodded and guided him back to the information desk. “Yes, let’s find your son. What’s his name?”

“Tyrell Drake. He’s just a little guy, not even two yet.”

She put the name into the computer. “Yes, he’s here. Room four twenty-four. I’ll let the nurses up there know you’re coming.”

Phil turned to leave, but a man appeared beside him.

“I’m sorry Mr. Drake. Your wife is gone,” the man confirmed.

Phil nodded as the tears fell freely. “All right, doc. I’m going up to see my son.”

“No, you’re not.”

Phil’s head tilted. “Excuse me. He’s on the fourth floor. I’m going up to check on him.”

“I can’t let you do that.”

“What? Why not?”

“You should have left work early like your wife asked you to. Your negligent behavior killed your wife. I can’t let you kill your son. Take him away.”

“What? No.”

“It’s your fault your wife is dead, Mr. Drake. You should have gone home and taken the drive with her,” the doctor said with a flippant wave.

Two security guards appeared and grabbed him by the arms.

"Wait! What are you doing? Let go of me!"

Phil continued to fight and pull away from the men as they dragged him toward the exit.

PHIL JUMPED UP FIGHTING the sheet that had wrapped around him. He looked around frantically patting the bed then looked over to Tyrell's empty playpen. He leaped from his bed and moved groggily from room to room.

"Look who's finally awake, Tyrell. It's your daddy," his mother said in baby-talk when Phil showed up in the doorway of the kitchen, breathing hard.

"Daddy! Daddy!"

The toddler laughed, making happy squealing noises at the sight of him. Phil sighed with relief. He rubbed his son's head lovingly as he walked past to sit at the table.

"Hello, little man. Are you having fun with your grandma?"

"Eat! Eat!" Tyrell said, slapping the table of his highchair.

Phil's mother chuckled and slid the spoon into Tyrell's mouth.

"Hi, Ma," Phil said then leaned forward to place a kiss on her head too. "How long have I been on zombie mode?"

"Well, it was clear that you needed the rest. You were exhausted when you and Tyrell arrived. All you've really done for the past four days was eat and sleep."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to just leave him like that."

She waved away his apology. "Oh, pish posh. It gave me time to get to know my grandson. We have been having a wonderful time together. We went shopping to get Tyrell some clothes, this highchair and lots of food for the both of you. Didn't we, sweetheart?" she said, nuzzling noses with the toddler.

Tyrell laughed and grabbed his grandmother's nose.

"Are you feeling better, Phillip?"

"Yes, I am I guess I did need the rest. Thanks, Mom." Phil ran his hand through his hair. "Mom, I have to go back to Kentucky. There are still a few more things I have to take care of. Will you—"

"Of course, dear. Do what you must. Tyrell will be perfectly safe with me."

"Thanks, Mom." He removed his son from the highchair and wiped his face with the washcloth his mother handed to him. "Hey, little guy. You're going to stay with Grandma for a few days, but I promise Daddy will be back and we will be together again."

In reply, Tyrell laughed and grabbed his father's nose. Phil kissed his son's forehead then handed him to his mother.

"I'll be back as soon as I can, Mom."

PHIL RETURNED TO HIS mother's house to find the driveway blocked by several cars. Extra cars even extended up and down the street on both sides. He drove around back to the alley and entered the house through the patio doors. A rush of people attacked him with hugs and loud greetings.

"Phil! Welcome home!"

"Oh my god! You look great!"

"Your little boy is so cute!"

Hugs and shouts of greetings came all at once from family members, old friends, and neighbors. Phil smiled, trying to speak to them all. Though the outward show of love and support felt good after the week he'd had, Phil was focused on seeing his son. He caught a glimpse of his sister and pushed through the crowd to get to her.

"Rachel, what's going on? Why are all these people here?"

"For my party, Phil. I told you about it before you left."

"Tonight, was your party? I'm so sorry. I totally spaced."

"Shame on you, Phil," she said in a teasing voice and then laughed. "I knew you'd be back in time. I wasn't worried."

"Where is Tyrell?"

"He was in the kitchen with Mom."

Phil made his way to the kitchen, passing out handshakes and kisses as he went. He walked into the kitchen where he found his mother holding Tyrell's hands as he bounced up and down on the floor. When he saw his father, he let out a loud happy noise. Hearing his son squeal at his presence and calling his name filled Phil with joy. He walked over to them without a word and scooped his son into his arms.

"There's my little guy. I missed you so much, Tyrell," he said, hugging him.

"Hello, Phillip. Did you take care of everything you needed to do?"

The memories of the past week came flooding back to him. He squeezed his son a little tighter as the boy kicked violently, trying to get Phil to release him.

"Not everything," he admitted.

"Is everything okay?"

"Can we talk about that a little later, Mom?"

She gave him a questioning look but nodded, saying nothing else on the subject. "Of course, dear. You remember Mrs. Harris, don't you, Phillip?"

Phil's eyes popped open at the sound of the woman's name. His main focus had been on his son, and he really hadn't noticed the woman opposite his mother at the table at all. He looked at the familiar face of the older woman and smiled.

"Of course. I'm sorry, Mrs. Harris. How are you?"

Phil kissed his mother, and Mrs. Harris accepted the kiss he placed on her cheek.

"It's perfectly all right, Phil. Welcome home. I have had the chance to spend time with this beautiful little boy of yours. He is very sweet."

"Thanks. He is great, isn't he?" he said proudly, shifting Tyrell to his hip. "Has he eaten, Mom? It's pretty late. I should get him ready for bed."

"Of course, he has, Phillip. Go ahead and put him down for the night. We'll talk later."

He nodded at them both, moving quickly through the crowds of people to his bedroom. He went through the motions of changing Tyrell out of his clothes and into his pajamas before rocking him to sleep. Once he was sure Tyrell was asleep, he slipped out of the room. Moving through the crowd once again, he caught his sister's eye. Interpreting her questioning hand gestures, he pointed to the backyard to let her know where he was going.

She nodded at him and continued dancing around, and Phil headed to his destination. More family and friends pulled at him, but he managed to dodge them and their questions, ducking into the laundry room and out through the garage. Blowing out a breath, he leaned on the door and relaxed.

"Oh brother!" he said and moved across the grass to the alley and sat on the front bumper of his car.

Phil watched his family and friends through the door for a little while. He loved them and wanted to catch up, but he just wasn't in the mood to party at the moment. He rubbed his temples as he thought about the situation in Kentucky. With a sigh, he shifted his body to lean across the hood. The thumping beat of "Sexy Back" filtered through the door. After a few bars, his head started to bob as he mouthed the words.

"There is no need for you to bring sexy back. It doesn't look like its left you."

Phil's eyes popped open, and his body sprang upward. His heart raced, and his breathing quickened at the familiar sound.

Janet

"I saw you fighting your way through the crowd to the door, but then you disappeared. I took a guess that you ducked out the garage entrance."

A chill ran up Phil's spine making his nipples hard despite the seventy-five-degree temperature. Janet's velvety smooth voice had the power to caress and soothe his mind and excited him at the same time. Phil closed his eyes to enjoy the shudder that raced through his body. Slowly he turned, almost afraid to see what Janet looked like. When he opened his eyes again, Janet stood before him.

Phil swallowed as his gaze fell over her. The black tank top fit smoothly over her full-rounded breasts. The jean shorts showed off her curvy figure and long shapely legs. Though it had been three years ago since he'd laid eyes on her, it didn't seem like she'd aged a day.

Damn!

Phillip wanted to stand or at least speak, but his mouth didn't want to work, and his knees felt like cooked noodles. He had to grip the car to stop himself from falling over on his face.

Janet extended her hand. "I thought you might want a beer."

Grateful for the distraction, Phil exhaled loudly. He hadn't even realized that he had stopped breathing. He grabbed the beer and gulped down half of the bottle in two loud gulps.

"Thanks," he managed to squeak out.

Janet nodded and sat next to him on the bumper. The tension between them felt like static electricity in the air. Phil had a million conversations prepared for a million scenarios of this possible meeting. He knew Janet was waiting for him to say something, but every time he opened his mouth, too many words rushed to his mind at the same time, resulting in nothing audible. In frustration, Phil gulped down the rest of his beer. They sat side by side on the back of his car, both leaning over on their knees. He rolled his empty beer bottle between his hands and sent a sideways look over to Janet who met his gaze.

"So... how you been?" Janet said finally, breaking the awkward silence.

Phil nodded nervously. "I'm... I'm okay, Janet."

Janet's brow rose. "Really? You don't look okay. I mean, you look fantastic, even better than the last time I saw you, but you know that's not what I meant. It's your eyes that give you away, you know."

When Janet leaned over and caressed his face, he could have sworn his heart stopped.

"Those beautiful bright, sparkling eyes always told me what was really going on inside of you."

Janet's touch sent another shudder through his body. Instantly, his dick got hard. Phillip closed his eyes and pressed Janet's palm to his face.

"Janet...." he whispered.

Janet followed it with a low erotic noise of her own. Her hand pressed against Phil's clean-shaven face, urging him to his feet as she rose with him.

"Phil, I've missed you so much," Janet whispered slowly, closing the gap between their faces.

"Janet, I've missed you, too, but—"

Janet stopped his explanation as she pressed her lips hard against his. Janet pulled at his mouth gently. She moved her fingers from Phil's cheek to the back of his head to grab a handful of his hair. She pulled Phillip's head back, ending their sensual kiss and exposing Phil's neck. Bending down, she put tender kisses along his throat and his bobbing Adam's apple. Phil sighed his enjoyment.

Janet's touched heated his skin. His cock pressed harshly against his khakis, and his torso suddenly felt overheated in the button-down blue shirt he wore. He was grateful that he had pulled his tie off as soon as he left the courtroom earlier in the day or this scene wouldn't be possible. It would have been extremely tight and constricting at the moment. Suddenly, the unpleasant events of his past week surged forward in his mind and overtook the pleasure of what Janet was doing to his body.

"Wait, wait, Janet, please," Phil gasped softly, pushing her away.

Janet stepped back. Her beautiful face twisted in confusion. The pain in her eyes made Phil turn away.

"Please, Janet, don't look at me like that."

"How am I supposed to look at you? I don't know what's going on. Help me understand, Dusty," Janet said with obvious restraint.

Phil winced. "I haven't heard that name in years."

She wrapped her arms around her chest. "Well, I hope not. I'm the one who gave you the name." Janet dropped her arms and clasped her fingers. "Do you remember how you got the name?"

Phil smiled and turned back to her. "Of course, I do. I came to your house covered in dust from jogging. You said, hey dusty butt. Don't you sit your ass on my couch until you take a shower." He chuckled at the memory but quickly sobered. "I loved it when you called me that. It made me feel special."

"You *are* special to me. I know you know that. Talk to me, Dusty," Janet added, moving closer. "Tell me what's happening. Better yet, tell me what happened to *you*."

The confusion and pain that strained her voice made Phil turn away from her again.

"I thought we had something special. I guess I was wrong."

Phillip's heart ached and he spun to face her. "Janet, I swear, I never meant to hurt you. I only did what I thought was right at the time. Now I—"

Phil's explanation was cut short again as Janet yanked him back into her arms. Janet kissed him hungrily, pulling him even closer. Phillip's head spun dizzily, and his knees finally buckled. He leaned against the car to keep him upright. Janet broke the kiss, leaving Phil breathless and almost panting with need.

"I've missed you so much, Dusty. Please, come back to my house with me. Let me hold you," she said, nuzzling his neck between kisses. "You can tell me what's happened, and we will fix whatever it is together."

Oh God, yes! Phil's body screamed.

Janet's kisses were intoxicating. She pressed her pelvis against his cock grinding against it through the thin material of his shorts. His body remembered every caress from Janet's hands. The very hands that were sliding up and down his back and gripping his ass. Phil's body continued to cry out, but his brain refused to cooperate. The disheartening memories returned to his remembrance, making him pull away from the joy he felt in Janet's arms.

"I'm so sorry, Janet, but I can't," Phil said, choking on the words that tore at his heart. Reluctantly he walked back into the house without a backward glance.

Chapter Three

Phil stretched leisurely then turned to his side. Janet's beautiful body lay sleeping beside him. He smiled as his gaze fell leisurely over her. She had gained a little weight in all the right places since he had last seen her. Her breast seemed fuller, hips wider and sensual and her booty popped and looked so damn good! He was stunned that she could look even sexier with age.

He moaned softly as a surge of excitement ran through his body. Slowly, he reached for his semi-hard cock. He had wanted to tell Janet how sexy she looked but had no desire to wake his sleeping beauty. He pressed his lips together to muffle another moan afraid he would wake her. His other hand gripped his nuts, and he continued to stroke his cock with a firmer grip. He squirmed beside her. Janet's eyes fluttered open, and she turned to smile at him.

"Mmm, are you starting without me, Dusty?"

He chuckled. "I didn't mean to. You looked so beautiful laying beside me asleep, I couldn't help myself. You have that effect on me."

"Really? Here, let me do that for you," she said reaching for his hand.

Phil's body shook with anticipation as he watched Janet leaned down and covered his cock with her sweet mouth.

PHIL FELT HIS BODY being pushed, and his eyes popped open. "Huh? Rachel?" he asked sleepily, looking over his shoulder. "What is it?"

"I came to check on you and intercepted a phone call."

Phillip rubbed his eyes and rolled back over. "Take a message. I don't feel like talking to anyone," he said miserably.

"I was going to do that, but it sounded important. It was a woman. She said her name was Mrs. Cleveland."

Phillip's head snapped back around. "What?"

"A Mrs. Cleveland is on the phone."

He flung the sheet off him and leaped from the bed before his sister could say anything else. Stopping in the bathroom, he washed his hands and splashed some cold water on his face. He forced himself to take deep breaths before he took the phone off the kitchen table.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Phillip, this is Mrs. Cleveland. Have I caught you at a bad time? Are you able to talk?"

"No, ma'am, I'm not busy at the moment. I can talk," he answered, easing himself into a chair.

"That's good. Forgive my intrusion. When I didn't get an answer on your cell, I asked the lawyer if they had another number to reach you."

Phil's lips twisted. "That's fine, Mrs. Cleveland, what can I do for you?"

"I wanted the opportunity to speak to you before we went to court and maybe discuss things to eliminate the hearing altogether."

"I'm all for that, Mrs. Cleveland. To my understanding, all you have to do is tell the court you changed your mind about challenging me for custody."

The laugh that reached his ear held no joy. Phil looked at the phone and frowned.

"Oh, come now, Phillip. You want us to just drop this, and we can't do that. However, I will say that this court thing wouldn't be necessary at all if you would just give up your parental rights. You are young enough to start over. Surely, you will meet another woman and have more children. Why be burdened with this one?"

Phil scoffed. "Tyrell is not a burden to me. He's my son. I love him."

"Tyrell is *our* grandson. He belongs with his family."

"I *am* his family, Mrs. Cleveland. I'm his father."

"Let's think about Tyrell for a moment. It would be difficult for you to take care of him being a single father. Working all the time to make ends meet wouldn't be good for the boy or your relationship with him."

Phil palmed his forehead. "Mrs. Cleveland—"

"Mr. Cleveland and I have the means to take good care of him and be home with him. He will have a good life with us. If you were to give him to us, you could start over without the inconvenience of having a child."

Phil shook his head. "Mrs. Cleveland—"

"You're a young man, Phillip. You should be living your life footloose and fancy-free. We will give you visitation if you want, and we wouldn't even ask for child support. You could go back to the life you had before he was even born. Wouldn't you like that life back?"

Phil had to pause on that thought. Life before Tyrell included Janet. Mrs. Cleveland suggested he could have that life back if he would just hand over his son. Tyrell would live with them, they would assume all the responsibility, and he could go about his life as if he didn't have a son if he chose. Is that what he wanted?

Tyrell's smiling face appeared in his mind's eyes. His little face lit up every time Phil walked into the room. Phil smiled at the thought and shook his head.

"Tyrell is my son. Taking care of him is not a burden. I welcome the responsibility, and I am looking forward to sharing a life with him, Mrs. Cleveland. I will not give him up," he repeated with finality.

"Phillip, stop being selfish for just a moment, will you? Try to see that being with us is what's best for Tyrell. What kind of life is he going to have growing up with you... a single, black man in the world today?" Mrs. Cleveland asked harshly.

Phil took a deep breath, pushing the air out of his nose slowly. "Mrs. Cleveland, with all due respect," he started slowly. "My being single or being a black man has nothing to do with my ability to be a good father."

"I love my grandson, Phillip. He is the only thing we have left of our daughter."

Phil looked at the phone wide-eyed. He scoffed, and a disbelieving laugh left him. "You have got to be kidding me. You people disowned Monica as soon as she told you she was pregnant with Tyrell."

A low gasp came over the phone.

"Oh, you didn't think I knew that, did you? Monica told me what you said. She tried to handle everything on her own since you guys weren't going to help her, but she couldn't. That's why she looked for me in the first place."

"That is not how it happened, Phillip. You have been misinformed."

"Misinformed? I guess I was misinformed at the funeral, too, huh? You had the nerve to remind me that Tyrell was my son and fully my responsibility." Phil's voice rose with emotion.

"We were merely—"

"You were merely what? You had no intention of ever seeing us again until the insurance company contacted you. They only called you because they didn't have a direct number for me. They had my old cell number. You realized after talking to them that, with Tyrell as Monica's beneficiary, whoever had custody of him had control of that money."

The shocked gasp was loud in his ear. "Phillip! How dare you accuse us of—"

"Of *what*? Of coming up with this ridiculous fight for my son to gain control over the money his mother left for him? Perish the thought." His words dripped with obvious sarcasm.

Mrs. Cleveland was quiet for a long moment, but he could hear her breathing hard into the receiver.

"We may have spoken a little too quickly in our grief, Phillip, and that may have led to some confusion on your part," she said finally. "We just wish to have our grandson in our lives," she added in a calmer tone.

Phillip shook his head as he tried to calm himself as well. "Look, Mrs. Cleveland, clearly we're at an impasse. I'm not going to willingly give up my son, and it would seem you have no intention of backing down from trying to take him. Under these conditions, I think anything else we say should be said before the judge."

"Very well, Phillip. I guess I will see you in court, then."

"Yes, you will. Goodbye, Mrs. Cleveland." He hung up the phone and dropped his head onto the table next to it.

"Is there anything we could do, Phillip?" Rachel asked, coming into the kitchen. "I wasn't eavesdropping, but I couldn't help but hear your conversation once your voice got loud."

Phillip sat up and sighed. "Oh. Sorry. I wasn't trying to get loud." He pushed his chair back and went to the refrigerator.

"So, what are you going to do?"

He returned to his chair with a can of soda. "I'm going to fight them. I'm his father, he belongs with me."

"So, they want him since he's beneficiary?"

"It's amazing how a little money can change a person's mind," he said after taking a long sip from the can.

"Well, I'm not worried. You're a great guy, and I think you'll be a great father," Rachel said, grabbing his hand.

Phil smiled. "Thanks, sis."

"No problem. I've got to go. I'm bushed. I had a hectic day. Mom called me at work since you weren't answering your cell or the house phone. She said she and Tyrell would be back by the weekend."

Phillip nodded as he took another gulp from his can.

"So, what are you about to do now?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. I guess I'll just go back to bed."

"You look like crap."

"I'm doing a little tailspin right now, but I'll be alright," he confessed with a shrug.

Rachel kissed the top of his head. "Okay, little brother. Take it easy. It'll all turn out for the best. If you need anything, you promise you will call me?"

Phil held up two fingers and gave her a half-smile. "Scout's honor."

Chapter Four

Phil felt numb as he walked to the bathroom. After donning the pressed pants and shirt he turned toward the mirror. His hands shook as he tied his tie. He shrugged on his jacket, and then splashed a little cold water on his face. With a deep breath, he stuffed the cleaner's bag into the trash and left the room.

He entered the courtroom and took his place at an empty table before the judge's bench. A short while later, an older couple sat at a table parallel to his. Phil could feel their burning stares on him. It took all his willpower to keep his gaze forward on the empty bench. His knee bounced under the table uncontrollably as long agonizing moments passed. When the judge finally appeared, followed by a stenographer, he sprang to his feet, rattling the table.

"This is an informal hearing, Mr. Drake. You may be seated."

"Oh. Sorry, judge."

Muffled laughter reached his ears. Phil's eyes shifted to the couple as he eased into his chair again.

"I am Judge Dickerson. In family court, we have no jury. I will hear testimony from both parties, review all data and facts presented to me, and then render my decision based on what I think is best for the child. Is that understood by both parties?"

"Yes, Your Honor." He sent them another look when they echoed the statement.

"Very well," the judge said as she opened the folder in front of her. "Mr. and Mrs. Cleveland, you have the burden of proving that Mr. Drake is unfit to parent this child. You must prove that the child, Tyrell Drake, will be best suited in your care rather than with his biological father," the judge explained as she flipped through the folder. "From the proof that you provide to this court, I will determine where the child is to be placed. Mr. Drake, when the Cleveland's have had their say, then you will have yours. Are the terms clear to both parties?"

Phillip nodded along with the Cleveland's.

"Mr. Drake, for the record, Tyrell Drake, is your son?"

"Yes, Your Honor, he is."

"Has paternity been established?"

"Yes, ma'am. It was done right after he was born."

The judge flipped through the folder. "Yes, here it is. And you were married to his mother as well."

"Yes, ma'am."

Though it sounded like the judge was making a statement rather than asking him, Phil wanted to say yes out loud to make the point.

"The court will interject questions where it deems fit for clarification when either party is making their case," the judge added. "Mr. and Mrs. Cleveland, you may proceed when you are ready."

Mr. Cleveland nudged his wife, and she stood up.

"Your Honor, my husband and I have no animosity toward Mr. Drake. In fact, we like him and have no desire to remove him from our grandson's life. We just want to raise our grandson in peace." She wrapped her arms around her torso. "Our Monica is no longer with us, Your Honor, and Tyrell is all we have left of her."

"You don't believe that Mr. Drake will allow you access to the child?" the judge asked.

Mrs. Cleveland sent a look over to him as she shifted from her left to her right foot before she addressed the judge again.

"Well, it's not that, judge, it's just—" She sighed before continuing. "Judge Dickerson, may I be perfectly frank?"

"Of course. This is your time."

"Judge Dickerson, I think you should know why my husband and I are really doing this. We don't think Phillip is a bad guy at all, and we don't think that he would keep us from Tyrell. He probably thinks that it would have made Monica unhappy to keep us from him. But the truth of the matter is Phillip Drake is a young, single black man who knows what type of mind-damaging situations he would be subjecting our grandson too. He really has no business raising children."

The cup Phil raised to his lips slipped from his fingers onto the table as he gasped. Snatching tissues from a box at the end of the table, he quickly started dabbing up the water.

"Forgive me, judge. I just—"

The judge didn't seem affected by his accident. She stared at Mrs. Cleveland, waiting for her to continue. Mrs. Cleveland leveled narrowed eyes on him for a moment, then turned back to the judge.

"Yes, well, as I was saying. We want our grandson to grow up to have a better life than his father could ever give him."

"Mrs. Cleveland, this court cannot take the personal opinions into consideration when determining where the child is placed. Only the facts matter. The court must have proof that Mr. Drake is *unfit* to take care of the child. Nothing less can remove the child from his father's custody," the judge stated.

"Fine. The fact of the matter is that Phillip is a black man, and my grandson is *white*," she explained in a sharper tone. "He should be raised by his white family."

"Paternity has been established, Mrs. Cleveland. Tyrell Drake is a child of *two* races," the judge pointed out calmly. "That would account for his complexion."

Mrs. Cleveland turned to Phillip and scoffed. "What can Phillip teach Tyrell about where he comes from? And let's not romanticize how he and Monica got together in the first place," she added with a sneer.

Phil felt his insides flip. His eyes widened as he investigated her dark glare.

"Oh, yes, Phillip. We know all about it. Monica told us." She turned back to the judge. "Although we are not proud of it, Your Honor, our daughter was a stripper that occasionally slept with men for money. She was hired to strip for a frat party that Philip attended. She slept with the drunk Phillip Drake and got herself pregnant," she told them then turned back to him. "First, you wanted to play at being a fraternity brother, and now, you want to play *daddy*? You barely have your own life together, how do you propose to take care of someone else?"

Phil swallowed hard. Her gaze seemed to bore a hole right through him. He was thankful when she turned away to address the judge giving him a chance to exhale.

"Your Honor, we are the only ones who can really tell Tyrell about his mother. We are her parents and want to keep her memory alive," she said, softening her tone. Her husband offered her a tissue from his pocket. She sat down, taking it.

The judge made notes on a pad within the folder. "Is that the end of your statement, Mrs. Cleveland?"

Mrs. Cleveland nodded, keeping her face hidden behind the tissues as she made obvious sobbing noises.

"Mr. Cleveland, do you have anything you want to add to your wife's statement?"

"No, ma'am. My wife speaks for the both of us," he said, wrapping his arm around her shoulders.

The judge nodded, made a few more notes. "Mr. Drake, if you would like to make a statement or wish to counter anything Mrs. Cleveland has said, you may do so. But I remind you, although informal, this is still a court of law. I ask that you be civil."

"Yes, Your Honor, I would very much like to address Mrs. Cleveland's concerns," Phillip said as he stood. From the corner of his eye, he could see Mrs. Cleveland's eyes over her tissue glaring at him. "Mrs. Cleveland is right about the way Monica and I met. Our introduction was unorthodox at best, but we made peace with our beginnings. She sought me out to tell me about her pregnancy and we decided to stay together and raise the child. We had mutual respect for each other, had become friends, and we were content with our arrangement."

Phillip felt his knees shaking again, and he suddenly felt exhausted. He poured himself another cup of water. "Forgive me, Your Honor," he said after taking a sip.

She waved away his apology and waited.

"I confess that Monica and I didn't have a conventional marriage," he continued. "But how many other marriages are like that—the parents are only together because of the children?"

He turned to Mrs. Cleveland. "Monica's mother is also right about my son. His skin is not as light as his mother's because of me, but it is much lighter than mine, nonetheless. She assumes I would not tell him about his family, but I would never dishonor his mother by not telling him about her or giving him access to her people. What he doesn't learn from me about his mom, he *should* learn from her parents."

Mrs. Cleveland's eyes narrowed at him over her tissue. He turned to the judge and continued.

"Judge, after Monica found me and we talked, I changed my major and rearranged my whole life to add her and the baby. I finished school and became a nurse. I have my own car and a house. I'm going to sell it now so I can buy one closer to my mother in Indiana. She and my sister are willing to help me with Tyrell. I am able to take care of him financially and I will have family support. Aren't those the things that really count?"

Phil leaned on the table before and shook his head. "Mrs. Cleveland is right about something else. I *am* young. I'm twenty-five years old and I have no idea what I'm doing. Fortunately, that makes me no different than any other parent with their first child. Tyrell is my and Monica's son. I am his father, and I love him. He belongs with me."

Phillip sat down quickly, fearing his knees would give in. The judge was quiet as she made her notations.

"Mr. Drake, do you have any issues with letting the Cleveland's see their grandson at their leisure? Letting the boy stay with them for weekends, holidays, and vacations if they so choose? All of these terms will be laid out in writing if the child remains with you."

"No, ma'am. I don't have a problem with that at all. I want them to have a place in Tyrell's life. I just don't think he has to live with them to learn from them."

A small smile touched the judge's lips and quickly disappeared. "Do you have anything else you would like to add to your statement, Mr. Drake?"

Phil sent a look to the Cleveland's, then turned back to the judge.

"No, ma'am."

"Very well then. Thank you, Mr. Drake, Mr., and Mrs. Cleveland. I have your testimonies and all the necessary paperwork to render my decision. This court is adjourned until next Monday morning at eight-thirty."

She gathered her paper and folder and walked through the small door without another word.

Chapter Five

Phil slumped on the couch channel-surfing until a knock at the door took his attention away from the flashing screen.

"Hi, Phil," Janet said when he swung open the door.

Phil's jaw dropped. He felt his cock jump to attention inside of his pajamas at the sight of her. Janet's brown eyes were sparkling at him as they stood staring at each other.

"Can I come in?"

Phil blinked a few times before his voice came back to him. "Yes, yes, of course. Sorry, I didn't mean to leave you—"

Janet held his hand up. "Don't worry about it."

Closing the door behind her, Phil leaned against it. He took a few breaths to calm his beating heart, but it didn't seem to help. Janet walked inside and then turned to face him. She looked incredible in the dark blue pants suit. The light pink collar of her blouse made her jawline look soft and feminine.

"I know I should have called first, but I have been calling you every day since Monday and haven't been getting a reply. I saw your car outside on my way home from work, so I thought I'd just come by to ask you why you were you ducking me "

Phil cringed. He had seen Janet's name on his screen during the week and intentionally let it go to voicemail.

"So, why *are* you ducking me, Dusty?"

"I'm sorry, Janet. I just—" Phil signed unable to find the right words.

"Don't you think it's about time that we talked about whatever this thing is that's stopping us from being together?" she asked taking a seat.

Phil pushed himself off the door to stand in front of her.

"It's a very complicated situation, Janet."

Janet grabbed his hand and pulled Phil down to sit beside her. Erotic shivers danced along his skin as Janet ran his fingers across the thick stubble on his cheek.

"I can see that something is going on with you, Phil. I want to help you, but I can't unless you tell me what it is." Bringing his face closer, Janet brushed her lips over his. "Let me help you."

Phil felt the tingle of their connection all over his body. Looking into Janet's eyes, Phil saw so many things: trust... longing... lust... and love.

Janet still loves me.

The realization hit him like a punch in the gut. After everything that had happened, Janet still wanted to be with him.

Can I really have Janet and Tyrell?

Phil's breathing quickened, and his heart banged against his ribs as the questions and possibilities ran through his mind. Janet's sensual lips were right in front of him, so soft, sexy, and inviting. Leaning closer, he hovered just in front of Janet's face, slowly rocking back and forth.

"Why, Dusty? Why do you hesitate?" she said in an urgent whisper. "I can see that you've been hurt. Let me help take the pain away. Together, we can do anything," she added.

"Janet, I—"

Phil's voice cracked with emotion and ended his sentence. Janet's fingers slowly slid from his face to the back of his neck. The sensation wreaked havoc on his senses. She increased the pressure to the base of his head closing the gap between them. Phil could hold back no longer. Moaning his desire into Janet's mouth, Phil pushed her backward onto the sofa landing on top of her.

Janet gripped his head in a crushing one-arm embrace and squeezed his ass with the other hand. The thin material of Phil's pajama pants was no barrier as he ground his erection between Janet's legs. He gasped when Janet pulled her lips away and buried her face in his neck. Each one of Janet's kisses seared his soul as she pressed them against his neck.

"Dusty, I want you so bad," she panted between kisses.

Janet's raspy voice filled with her lust and need sent shivers down Phil's spine.

"Dusty... baby, please," she hissed against his throat.

Phil nodded vigorously. He moved backward and pulled Janet down the hall with renewed vigor. Pushing Janet into his room, he locked the door behind them. Janet turned to face him and smiled.

"I've seen that look in your eyes before, Dusty. Tell me what you want me to do?" she teased.

"As good as you look in that pants suit, I really want you to take it off," he told her, breathing hard.

Janet gave him a slight nod and started to quickly unbutton her jacket, but Phillip held his hand up to stop him.

"Wait. Please, go slow."

Janet giggled and gave him a nod. Tossing his jacket to the chair near Tyrell's playpen, she started on her blouse next. Phil felt his breath catch as each piece of clothing fell away from Janet's body. He ran his tongue across lips that suddenly went dry and swallowed loudly. Finally, Janet stood before him in just her sexy blue bra and panties. Phil let his breath out.

"You are even more beautiful than the last time I saw you," he breathed out.

Janet smiled and then spun around for him. Phil's cock swelled as he looked upon the physical perfection of her caramel-brown body.

Damn!

"Are you going to join me?" Janet asked after a while.

Janet's question pulled Phil from his daze. To answer her question, he snatched off his pajamas and moved quickly into Janet's arms. Phil kissed her all over her face.

"I missed you so much, Janet. I'm so sorry I—" he panted between kisses.

"Shh. Later."

Phil nodded and reached behind her to unclasp her bra. Her breasts came free and he gasped. Lifting one at a time, he kissed the left then the right, then tossed the garment near his pants. Janet shimmied out of her underwear and together they sat on the bed.

Janet rolled Phil over to his back and kissed his lips soundly before moving across his body. Each kiss scorched his skin leaving him wanting to be burned fully by her touch. Janet's tongue played leisurely along his chest and moved lower to the thin hair around his belly button.

"I remember your scent like I was with you just yesterday," Janet muttered as she buried his face in the tight curls surrounding Phil's cock. "I have missed it so much."

A shudder-like moan left Phil's throat as he squirmed under Janet's touch. His cock stood at full attention begging to be touched. To feel Janet's face breathing so close to his genitalia was almost unbearable.

"And I definitely missed the taste of you," Janet confessed before she swallowed Phil's cock down to the base.

Phil moaned as his back arched from the bed. Janet pulled and sucked on Phil's cock moaning loudly, clearly enjoying the act she performed. Long, languid licks across his balls were added along with the sucking. Phil's screams of ecstasy filled the room.

"If you keep that up, I'm positive I won't last long."

Janet chuckled. "Well, I guess we'll have to do it again so you can have the chance to make it up to me."

Janet moved her kisses to Phil's chest, teasing and licking his left nipple and then the right until they were sensitive pebbles. She positioned herself on top of him engulfing his cock deep inside her core.

"Yesss," Phil hissed.

Janet started a slow rhythm that sent ripples of delight throughout his body. She bounced, rolled, and ground on top of him. Each movement brought him closer to completion. Goosebumps rose on his skin. He gripped her hips, giving in to his need to touch her.

"Oh God, Janet, don't stop!" Phil cried.

"*Stop?* Oh, no, baby. I've just begun," Janet assured him.

"Janet! I'm-I'm...."

"I know, baby. Go ahead and cum for me," Janet said, quickening her pace.

Every muscle in his body locked in place, as an uninhibited cry of joy came from deep inside him leaving him drained and exhausted. He fell back against the bed, wheezing for air, as Janet lovingly lay on top of him holding him close. When his spent cock slipped from her body, she took her place beside him. He held her close allowing sleep to take him.

Chapter Six

Phil felt his pillow moving at a slow, relaxed pace. A sense of peace he had not felt in a long time engulfed him. When his eyes opened and adjusted to the darkness of the room, he chuckled. He was not on the bed, but on Janet's beautiful full breast. With her arm still around him, he stretched leisurely pulling her arm closer.

"How do you feel, Dusty?"

The question rumbled beneath his face making him smile. Scooting up, he lay on the pillow beside her.

"I don't have the words to express how good I feel right now."

Janet put a kiss on top of his forehead. "Good." Reaching for his hand, she intertwined their fingers. "That's all I ever wanted, Dusty. I just want us to be happy together."

Phil was silenced by a blanket of guilt.

"So much has happened, Janet. I don't even know where to start."

Janet caressed his cheek. "When my students say things like that, I tell them, the beginning is always the best place to start."

Phil nodded. *Even if Janet decided not to stay, she did deserve an explanation.*

"Janet, I've wanted to tell you so many times what was going on with me, but—"

"I'm here for you, Dusty."

Phil sighed. "It's a long story, Janet."

She kissed his forehead. "I'm not going anywhere."

JANET ENTERED THE ROOM and offered him a plate.

"Are you saying they slipped you a *roofie*?"

Phil nodded and took a bite of the sandwich she offered.

Janet shook her head and sat beside him. "Wow. Those are some really nice fraternity brothers you got, Dusty."

"Well, it wasn't *all* their fault, you know," Phil said with a shrug. "A lot of stupid ideas sound good when you drink too much. Instead of losing money we didn't have, we played blackjack and took shots when we lost. Sucking

down a case of beer in an hour while watching a basketball game didn't turn out to be such a good idea either. I would add slipping your friend a roofie so he can get laid to that list, also."

"Wow, I see your point. So, Tyrell is the result of that drunken night of partying?"

"Yes," he answered with a nod.

"All that happened right before that last Christmas you came home?"

"Monica came back in the summer, and Tyrell was born in September. Did you see him at the party?"

"Uh-huh, but only from a distance. There were so many people reaching for him, wanting to see him."

Phil turned over and reached for his phone on his nightstand. He sifted through his photos and showed her one.

"He's a nice-looking boy, Dusty," she mentioned, sliding through the pictures. "I'm guessing this white girl in the picture with you and Tyrell his mother," she added turning the phone back to him.

Phil nodded. "Yeah. Monica said she had no intentions of telling me she was pregnant at first, but as a dancer, being pregnant stopped money from coming in. Her other part-time job wasn't enough to pay her bills while she was in school. She needed help."

"So, she found you and told you about the baby."

Phil nodded again and finished his food.

"Not to sound insensitive, but if she was hooking up with guys from time to time, and she was a dancer, why wouldn't she use protection?"

"I don't know. Maybe she was drunk, too."

"Couldn't she have just gone to her family instead of you?"

Phil shook his head. "They had disowned her when they found out she was a dancer."

Janet turned a raised brow to him. "Dusty, are you *sure* Tyrell is yours? I mean, you did say there were other guys at the party."

Phil shook his head and looked at Janet. "No, no, I understand. I thought the same thing. Although Monica said I was the only one she was with at the party I wanted to be sure. She suggested we do the DNA test for my own peace of mind as soon as Tyrell was born."

"Okay, so why did she leave you with him? Do you think she will change her mind and come back for him, or is this a temporary situation?"

Phil shook his head again and slid the plate onto the nightstand. "No," he answered with a sigh. "It's not temporary. Monica died in a car crash two weeks ago, Janet."

Janet sat up next to him. "I'm sorry, Dusty. I didn't know that part."

"I know. It's okay."

"But there's something else is, isn't it?"

Phil nodded. "It's her parents. They want custody of Tyrell," he added sadly.

"Can they do that?"

"It would seem so."

"Have you been to court?"

"Several times. I was trying to get the whole thing dismissed, but they continue to contest for custody."

"When do you have to go back?"

"We were scheduled for this coming Monday. The Cleveland's have a lot of pull out in Kentucky, and I'm afraid they're doing something dirty to get Tyrell."

"This is really stressing you out, huh?"

"Of course, it is, Janet. I could lose my son. When I look at him, I see *me*. My name and bloodline. After I'm gone, he will remain. The love I have for that little boy comes from deep in my soul. The thought of losing him is devastating," he added softly touching his chest.

Janet turned to him. "I understand that kind of love."

"Janet, I'm so sorry. The kind of love I had and still have for you is different but no less real to me. The only reason I didn't come back or *think* I could come, was I felt like I had to choose between having you or Tyrell."

"I would have never put you in such a position."

"I know that. All of this is on me. I should have come home and trusted you and my family to help me get through this."

"Yes, you should have," Janet agreed. "Look, I'm not going to say I wasn't angry, confused, hurt, and downright heartbroken when you fell off the radar. I was all of that. We had something special, and it felt like you threw it all away without so much as a word. What kept my sanity was your family didn't have a clue where you were either. We all had so many questions. So, I decided to wait just like your family did to see what happened."

"But they're my family. I knew when I was ready to contact them, they would be there for me."

Janet caressed his face and smiled. "You should have thought the same thing about me. You should have had faith in that. I love you, Dusty. I will always be there for you, and now I will be there for Tyrell too."

Phil looked at Janet with newfound love. He caressed her face and pressed his lips to hers in hopes that she could feel the overwhelming love he felt for her. With a gentle push, he laid her back against the pillows. Janet moaned into his mouth and ran her fingers through Phil's hair. Phil rolled over on top of Janet and the kiss deepened, becoming wild and almost violent with passion. Janet reacted to the change with just as much vigor. Janet suddenly broke the connection and then chuckled. She reached up and pinched his chin.

"You didn't have this when I last saw you."

Phil smiled. "Well, I figured since I was a dad, I would try to look the part. Do you like it?"

"Yeah, I do. It looks sexy on you. I think it might tickle."

"Oh yeah?"

Phil shimmied down her body and pushed Janet's legs into the air.

"Dusty! What—"

"Well, I figure we should put that theory to the test and find out if it does tickle," he explained with a grin.

Before Janet could say another word, Phil dropped his face between her legs. It didn't take many passes of his tongue over her delicate folds before Janet's cries of pleasure reached his ears. He could feel her orgasm building inside as Janet rode his tongue feverishly.

"Dusty, oh! I'm almost there," she warned breathlessly gripping his hair.

"Mmm, hmm."

Phil gripped her bottom holding her to him as she thrashed to and fro. He continued licking and sucking her clit until she released her juices to him.

"Oh yes!" Janet screamed. "Fuck me, Dusty, now. I can't stand it any longer!"

Phil immediately complied. Resting Janet's legs on his shoulders, he guided his cock into her drenched core. Together, they moaned in delight each time he drove into her. Each thrust sent another wave of euphoria crashing over him and Janet's moans increased that pleasure immensely.

"Faster, Dusty. I want to feel you," she panted.

Phil groaned and shook his head. "Janet.... Honey, if I go any faster, I will not be able to last long. I'm struggling already, baby."

Janet chuckled and reached for his face. "I'm okay with quality versus quantity this go around. This will not be our last time together."

Phil leaned down and kissed her. "You're amazing. I love you so much."

"I know. I love you, too. Now make me cum."

Chapter Seven

Phil felt as if someone had pushed him into the deep end of the pool and he was struggling to stay above water. He fixed his tie and reminisced about the wonderful weekend he had. Tyrell and Janet took to each other almost instantly, to Phil's utter joy. He left the bathroom on his way to the courtroom literally shaking in his shoes. Knowing he was moments away from losing everything that was important to him made his stomach turn with each step he took. Handing over his son to the courts this morning was the hardest thing he ever had to do. After having a glimpse of heaven, the thought of having it ripped away made each step closer more terrifying than the next. He walked into the courtroom deliberately keeping his eyes forward to focus on the empty bench.

"It is not too late to reconsider, Phillip."

The voice came from beside him, but he didn't bother to turn.

"There is nothing to consider, Mrs. Cleveland. Either Tyrell stays with me and I make us a family back home in Indiana or I stay in Kentucky to be near my son."

"Just so you know, when we get custody, we're going to move far away, someplace you wouldn't consider looking. By the time you find him, he will be a grown man."

The statement was low and close to his ear. The panic that rose within him was instant. Phil turned her way, but Mrs. Cleveland had taken her seat beside her husband. Before he could address her, the judge came through the door.

"All parties are here so I will get right to it. This court received new evidence last week that needed to be weighed with the statements that were given," the judge began as she sifted through the folder. "Documentation from a child psychologist was introduced. The affidavit states that a child this young needs to build attachments to create a security blanket of love," she read from the paper. "They attach to figures that resemble themselves so they can establish behavior patterns in their minds."

Phillip stared at the judge. His heart hammered in his chest as his mouth dropped open. He looked into the smug face of Mrs. Cleveland. As she nodded slowly, and his heart broke. Though he felt dizzy, Phil was on his feet before he could stop himself.

"Your Honor, this is ludicrous. My son has that kind of bond with me. I am his father. I have been there his whole short life. I—"

"Mr. Drake, I understand your feelings, but this court cannot dispute what a reputable psychologist says on the growth and development of young children. According to this Dr. Robinson, the child needs to be able to identify with his own family unit to—"

"This is crazy! I am his own kind! I'm a man. A boy needs a father around to teach him to be a man. I can do that."

"This psychologist feels that children need male and female roles in their lives to grow up as well-adjusted adults."

"So—so what are you saying? My son—My son won't grow up *well-rounded* because I'm single? What kind of shit is that! There are tons of single mothers that have raised *well-rounded* men and women! They're supposed to be better suited to raise my son because they're *a couple*. How about the fact that they're an *old* couple? By the time my son gets to high school, they will be too old to do anything with him!"

The judge sighed. "Please sit down, Mr. Drake."

Phil forced his lips together then lowered himself into his chair before his knees could buckle.

"I understand that you are upset, but please maintain your respect for this court. These psychologists feel as though the grandparents are unified and a clear unit to help the child grow. Unless you have—"

"Do they have to be *blood* grandparents?"

Phil looked to the back of the court with everyone else.

"Who are you, ma'am?" the judge asked.

"I am Eloise Harris, and this is my husband, Robert. Tyrell will be just as much our grandson as the Cleveland's and Mrs. Drake's," she said moving closer to Phil.

"How so, ma'am?"

"I am Janet's mother. Janet and Phillip have a relationship of love, mutual respect, and caring." She sent a hard look to Mrs. Cleveland. "We will be there every step of the way to help raise the boy along with Mrs. Drake. We will show him love and nurture him the same way we did our own children and will give everything grandparents are allowed to give."

The doors to the court opened again.

"Who are you, ma'am?"

"I am Janet Harris. I am here to lend my support to Phillip Drake in any way that I can. Whatever he needs I intend to give it to him and Tyrell freely."

Janet and her parents walked together and stood on one side of Phil as his mother took her place on his other side.

"As you can see, Your Honor, my son has more than enough help to raise this child. It takes a village to do so and we are his village," his mother said and took his hand.

The judge nodded and wrote on her pad. "The court is satisfied with your statements."

Mrs. Cleveland sprang to her feet. "What? This is an outrage!" she screamed.

"Mrs. Cleveland, you brought forth evidence from a board-certified child psychologist stating that the child was in need of family relationships to help him grow into a well-rounded adult. Mrs. Drake along with the Harris's and their daughter have stated in a court of law that they would be there to help Mr. Drake raise his son. Surely, that will satisfy yours and any other psychologist."

Mrs. Cleveland was so flustered she could not speak. Though her burning gaze shot from Phil to Mrs. Harris, then Janet, and back to the judge, she could not dispute what was said.

"Yes, well, taking this information into consideration, I find that there is no evidence to prove Mr. Drake is an unfit parent. I see sufficient reason to remove the boy from his custody. Tyrell Drake will remain in the care of his father."

Janet and Mrs. Drake hugged Phil and laughed with joy.

"Thank you so much, Judge Dickerson," Phil said when they released him.

"No thanks needed, Mr. Drake. Good luck. The child will be returned to you shortly."

"Well, congratulations, Phillip. I would like to set up a time to see our grandson," Mrs. Cleveland said, coming over to his table.

Mrs. Drake and Janet moved to flank Phil as he addressed her.

"I think in light of your last statement to me, Mrs. Cleveland, I'm going to need some time to think that over. I need to consider the safety of my son. So, let's just say I will call you when I've decided."

Mrs. Cleveland looked at Mrs. Drake and then to Janet and took a deep breath.

"Very well, Phillip, but I will not hold my breath," she said with an edge to her voice and walked away with her husband in tow.

"Do you think she really wants to see Tyrell?" Mrs. Harris asked.

Phil shook his head. "No. Now that they cannot get their hands on his insurance money, I'm sure we have gone back to *he's my son and my responsibility*," he said, doing quotations in the air.

"No matter. Her loss is my gain," Mrs. Drake said pleasantly.

"Thank you so much, Mom and Mr. and Mrs. Harris. I don't know how to thank you."

"Janet is our only child, Phillip. We thought we would never have grandchildren, but now because of you, we do." She kissed his cheek. "Maybe in a few years we'll get a few more," she added with a wink. She turned to her daughter and kissed her too. "We will see you at home, Janet."

"I'm riding with them, Phillip. See you back home," his mother said leaving him with a hug.

Janet and Phillip stood in the courtroom alone, and Janet took her hands.

"I don't know what to say," Phillip said softly. "You have given me my son. How can I ever repay you for that?"

"I'm not asking for repayment, Dusty. I told you, I just want to make you happy. I meant what I said to the judge. I'm here for you and Tyrell. That boy stole my heart the minute I held him in my arms... just like his father did. I love you both. You guys are stuck with me."

"I've been such a fool. How could I ever think I could be without you?"

Janet chuckled and kissed him. "I'm sure I'll give you plenty of reasons to question that statement over our lifetime together."

Phil laughed. "Yeah, I'm sure. I have no doubt that you and Tyrell will be a handful, but I look forward to every minute of it."

The courtroom doors swung open. Phil and Janet turned.

"Daddy!"

Phil crouched down as Tyrell waddled across the floor into his open arms. He carried his son and took Janet's hand to lead the way out of the courtroom eager to start their new life.

THE END

Epilogue

“Nana!” Tyrell shouted when he opened the door.

“Hello, sweetheart,” Mrs. Harris said, kneeling to hug him.

“Mommy! Daddy! Nana is here!”

Mrs. Harris pushed the door closed as the boy pulled her into the living room. Janet rushed from the kitchen into her mother’s arms.

“Hi, Mom. We’ve missed you.”

“You know I would have come months ago, but the weather is so crazy I couldn’t take the chance on the roads.”

“I know. Thank God for facetime, huh?”

“Mama Drake didn’t come with you?”

“No, she will be here tomorrow. I’m fine with having a day to myself with them.”

Janet giggled. “Here comes Phil.”

Mrs. Harris turned then smiled as Phil came down the stairs. He closed the distance between them and kissed her cheek.

“Thanks so much for coming. We really wanted to go on this trip for our anniversary, but of course, we couldn’t back then,” Phil said with a laugh.

“It’s fine Phillip. Young people need time away together especially when they have children.”

“And speaking of, here she is. I officially introduce you to Destiny Marie Drake,” he said, handing her the sleeping infant in his arms.

“Nana, I asked Mommy and Daddy for a boy baby, but they came back with Denny.”

Mrs. Harris turned a raised brow to her daughter.

Janet smiled. “He can’t really say Destiny yet, so he calls her Denny.”

“Honey, we should go if we’re going to catch our flight,” Phillip said, taking Janet’s hand.

“Yes, you two go ahead and leave. We’ll be fine.”

Janet nodded and turned to Tyrell. “You be good for Nana and Grandma while we’re gone, Ty, okay?”

“Okay.”

Phillip and Janet kneeled to hug their son together then stood.

“Love you, little man,” Phillip said and pulled Janet away.

“We are going to be just fine. Come on Tyrell, let’s get you and your sister some breakfast.

“Nana, did you know Denny was a girl baby?”

“Yes, sweetheart, I know.”

“Can we take her back to the hospital and get a boy baby?”

Mrs. Harris chuckled. “I’m afraid not, sweetheart. We have to keep the baby we were given.”

She sat the infant in her seat on top of the table. Tyrell climbed into a chair and looked down at his sister.

“Why did Mommy and Daddy pick this baby? I don’t want a girl baby.”

“Tyrell, you have a very important job now. You are a big brother. Do you know what that means?”

“No, Nana.”

“That means Denny is very special. She is your baby sister. She is all yours. You will never have to share her with anyone else. She will depend on you to teach her so many things.”

Tyrell gasped. “She will?”

Mrs. Harris sat down at the table beside him. “She sure will. You are four years old. You have four years of life things to show her.”

Tyrell’s eyes widened. “Nana, how do I do that? I only four.”

“No need to worry, sweetheart. Nana will be here to help you.”

Tyrell hugged her tight. “Thank you, Nana. If I am a good big brother, will I get more baby sisters?”

“Oh sweetheart, if we are lucky, you will have more baby sisters *and* baby brothers.”

Also by Dana Littlejohn

4 Queens

The Queen of Spades

Standalone

Power of the Bayou

Aphrodite's Day Off

Wolf Blood Moon

Ivy's Hot Shots

Christmas Goddess

A Package Deal

Watch for more at <https://www.danalittlejohn.com/>.



About the Author

Where sensual erotic romance is always waiting for you.

I am Dana Littlejohn, author of sensual erotic romance. You will find that I write contemporary romances with just a hint of another genre to take it away from the ordinary. My stories will touch your heart and your soul and make your body feel like it's being touched, too.

Imagination will take you places your money can not. I invite you into my world with open arms to see my imagination run wild...

Come along for the ride as I go on an imaginary trip into my world. You'll enjoy every minute of this wild ride.

Read more at <https://www.danalittlejohn.com/>.

