

CHAPTER

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Keesha and Chris spent the rest of the week shopping and visiting places they would never have thought to go alone. Somehow, the company of each other made life worth living to the fullest. *I really do love him*, Keesha thought. They spent hours dining at the French coffee shop located in Upper Westchester. They went on for hours discussing their feelings.

“Good evening!” Chris greeted her as he walked in from a long day at work. After planting an affectionate kiss on Keesha's cheek, he continued into the kitchen to see what smelled so good. When he opened the lid of the first pot, the aroma caused his stomach to churn with hunger.

Keesha laughed, watching Chris massaging his belly. She tortured him by naming the items on the menu. “Chicken in mushroom sauce, surrounded by yellow and red peppers with broccoli,” Keesha said in a proud, cheerful voice. Her pride in her cooking was obvious from her expression when she talked about it. Chris admired her cooking. In fact, he loved everything about her.

“Umm, sounds delicious. Let's eat.”

Chris helped set the table then held the chair for Keesha before seating himself. He listened to her rambling on and on about her day and what she did before he finally interrupted her.

“Keesha, I really do love you, and I am so glad that you are giving me this opportunity to shower you with the best of me.” Chris wanted to pour out his innermost feelings to Keesha and show her how sincere he was but he felt that maybe he sounded ambivalent.

“Well, Chris, I find you extremely attractive, ambitious

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and sexy. There is nothing that I could ever want more than to spend my life with you. I would never do anything to hurt you, and I do want us to be happy, but what about your mother? Have you told her about us yet?"

"No. Didn't you tell me to give you time to adjust to the situation? I would have mentioned it to her a long time ago."

"I don't think your mother would be too happy about this."

"Well, it's something she would just have to get used to. It's my life, and I've chosen to spend it with you if you'll have me. Will you have me?"

"Oh Chris, of course, but how do you think it would make me feel if your mother resents our being together? It's not just a matter of Christine disapproving, but it's also a matter of our friendship. Can you understand that?"

Chris took her hands into his and kissed them, "Yes, sweetheart, I do understand where you're coming from, and whatever you decide, I will respect your feelings. However, I must make one request."

"What's that, sweetheart?"

"Please don't string me along. I want you to be absolutely sure of what you want, whichever way you decide. That way I will always respect you, because you have respected me and my feelings."

"Hold that thought. The doorbell is ringing."

Keesha rushed to the door. *Now who could that be?* she wondered. She opened the door.

"Christine, how are you? What a surprise!"

"Girl, why don't you come by to see me anymore? What have you been up to?"

"I was just about to lay down. I haven't been feeling well these past few days, and I've been working like a dog."

Christine totally ignored Keesha's hint for her to leave, walked in and found herself a seat in the living room.

"So what's for dinner? Something sure smells good in here."

"Oh, just chicken. Something I threw together. You

know how I am. Christine, can I get back with you maybe tomorrow? I'll stop by your house tomorrow evening. Would that be all right? I really hate to dismiss you like this, but I'm really feeling sick right about now."

"Oh, I understand," Christine exclaimed. "Besides I stopped in unexpectedly anyway. Feel better, and I'll see you tomorrow if you're up to it."

Keesha escorted her to the door and hugged her and told her farewell.

"Who is it, honey?" Chris shouted from the kitchen. Christine, hearing her son's voice spun around in amazement.

"Chris, is that you?"

Recognizing his mother's voice, Chris stepped into the foyer to greet her. If ever there was a better time to give her the good news, now was the time. Chris was smiling excitedly, not noticing Keesha's uneasiness. Christine, uncertain of the situation, began to question them, looking from one to the other.

"What's going on here?"

Keesha's mouth became dry and tight. At least a thousand explanations came to mind as she examined possibilities to deceive her friend.

"Christine, I can explain," she stammered. "Chris stopped by to visit, and I suggested he stay for dinner."

Christine, known for her perceptibility, made Keesha's task all the more difficult. Expecting the worst, Keesha anticipated Christine's next response.

"Girl, I'm not worried about that." Christine answered with a chuckle. Keesha was relieved to see that Christine wasn't concerned about her son being at her home. "Did my Chris tell you about his engagement? My baby's getting married! I haven't met the girl yet, but I raised my son well, and I'm sure that he picked a lovely woman to wed. He told me that he wasn't sure that she'd marry him. I told him a woman would be crazy to deny him her life." Christine babbled on and on about her excitement in meeting the mystery woman who won her son's hand in marriage.

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Keesha interjected, "So, you're not even the slightest bit worried about who he's marrying?"

"Why, no. It's his life, and my son is very careful. If he says she's successful, beautiful and there's no other for him, I know I don't need to worry."

Christine spoke very well of her son and was confident in his ability to make the right decision. Never did he bring home anyone that she disapproved of, so she had no reason to feel insecure now.

"In fact, my son said he wouldn't settle for anyone else. Could you imagine he said he'd die if she refused him? Between you and me, I know she must be special," she whispered to Keesha and gave her a nudge with her elbow.

Chris was fully out of the kitchen now and his mother was halfway out of the door.

"Mom, I would like you to meet my wife-to-be."

"Oh, darling, is she here, too? How could you introduce her to Keesha before you introduce her to me? Keesha, you know Chris always had a crush on you, but I told him that you were too mature for him. Isn't that funny? Kids!"

Keesha could feel herself shrinking faster and faster as they talked around her as though she wasn't there.

"Ma, I asked Keesha to marry me. I love her, and I hope that you'll understand that I can't live without her."

While Chris continued to express his feelings for Keesha, Keesha felt herself shrinking and sinking lower and lower as Christine's eyes flared at her.

"This is a joke, right?" Christine bellowed. "This is all a plot by the two of you to get me all worked up over nothing. You both saw me coming and decided to play a trick on me, right?"

Chris could see right away that his mother was not taking the news lightly and was definitely not pleased. Regretting his words, he wondered how to fix it. He could see that Keesha was not comfortable either.

Keesha's mouth was now completely dry, and she refused to take part in the confusion. Just then, a ray of light reflected off the engagement ring Chris had given

Keesha and Christine caught sight of it. She turned her attention to the ring on Keesha's finger. Christine examined the ring with scrutiny then realized that it was the same ring that her son showed her the other day, and this fiasco was not a sick joke.

"Chris, we talked about this," she said in a high tone, almost yelling.

"Mom, please control yourself. It's not as if you didn't know how I felt about Keesha. Now I love her, and you said that you would be behind me no matter whom I chose, so let's not make a mountain out of a molehill. Right now I need your support and your blessing."

While Chris pleaded for his mother's understanding, Keesha could see the fire flaring in Christine's eyes.

"Keesha, what's going on here? You and I are friends. How could you do this? How long has this fiasco been going on? Tell me, how long have you been stabbing me in the back. I trusted you."

"Christine, I don't know what to say. I didn't plan this, it just happened."

"I asked you a question. How long?" Christine asked, raising her voice just a pitch higher, causing a shrieking crackle in her voice.

"A little more than a month." Keesha searched her mind for the right words to express to her dear friend. She knew from the start that Chris was forbidden fruit. She should have left him alone. Instead, she allowed a night of romance to build into something greater than any words could describe and now she had to face his mother, her friend and mentor. She loved Chris with everything in her, but she could not let this impossible relationship ruin the friendship that she built with Christine. She could see from Christine's response that there was no understanding to be found in her heart and that she could either continue this relationship with Chris or lose a good friend.

Christine attempted to be calm, but the words 'a little more than a month' repeated in her head, tormenting her.

"What interest do you have in my son? He's too young

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for you! What would you do with him other than break his heart and make him useless to anyone else? You've crossed the line, Keesha. You've crossed the line."

Christine felt anger and rage welling inside her, along with an urge to kill Keesha. *How dare she seduce my son, how dare she*, Christine repeated with her eyes sharply focused on Keesha, challenging her.

Keesha stepped back a few paces fearing the blow she felt coming. Chris must have felt the same tension because he stepped between them and put his arm around her.

"Ma, I love Keesha. Please don't make me unhappy. All my life I worked hard to please you. I maintained an A average, attended the best of schools and now I am successful in my job. I was the best son that any mother could ever want, and now I'm asking you to give us your blessing and not take my dreams away."

Chris gave his final plea for Christine's motherly blessings. She turned from Keesha for a moment and looked at her son.

"Chris, I pushed you to work hard so that you wouldn't have to struggle all of your life. I will not benefit from it one way or the other. Sweetheart, trust me on this, I know that you are making a mistake, and right now you're in love with a woman that has experienced many things and is by far, more advanced than you. This is a mistake, and you will get hurt in the end. I'm sure that the sex may be wonderful, something that no young girl could ever give you but has it ever occurred to you that she must have learned that through years of experience?"

"Ma, please stop. This is not about sex. I really love Keesha and have felt this way for a very long time. We deserve each other. Don't make this difficult for me!" His tone became calm and weak. His eyes moistened with tears and his heart became sick. He kissed Keesha's hands and walked over to his mother.

"Mom, listen to me. I love Keesha and I want to marry her. She is special to me and I'm happy with her. If you mess this up for me, I will never forgive you."

His eyes pleaded with Christine for understanding. She turned from them and walked out the door. Chris, exasperated, kissed Keesha on the lips and went outside behind his mother. Keesha felt sick. She stood with her back to the door, wondering how she had gotten herself into this mess. Maybe she should just go on with life and leave Chris alone. *How could something that feels so right be so wrong?* she thought to herself.

After a few moments, Chris returned and wrapped his arms around Keesha. She could feel the acid building in her stomach and a foul taste came to her mouth as she searched for words.

"Nothing will come between us," Chris vowed in a very low voice, imploring her understanding. She watched his eyes and could tell that he had been crying because they were swollen and red. The windows of his heart seemed gloomy and bare. He stood there with his hands hung at his sides, wishing that she would say something that would make him feel that all wasn't lost.

"What did your mother say?" Keesha hoped that there was an understanding when Chris attempted to talk with his mother. Keesha knew that he loved his mother more than anything in the world. He would never do anything to hurt her. The question now was how deeply did he feel about her. Keesha knew that without Christine's blessing, whatever decision she made would be wrong.

"I told her that I had to follow my heart and that with or without her approval I will not let you go, and if she came between us I would never forgive her." The sound of those words rung in Chris' mind as he remembered how hard his mother worked to provide him with the funds to reach the financial position in life that he now held. She worked two jobs days, nights and weekends, to make ends do more than meet. He attended the best private schools, got the best grades, because she made certain that there was someone to teach him the things that she did not know. Of course, she didn't finish school because she had him, and when his father died, there was just enough money from the life

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insurance policy to pay for his burial and to put them five years ahead on the mortgage. Chris knew that he owed his life to his mother. She helped him achieve the fancy home that he lived in, the job he held, the car he drove, his entire life, and now he was letting a woman, come between them. This thought tortured him. He never thought he would betray his mother. She came first in everything, but now he felt that there was something missing in his life, and that something was Keesha.

His voice was calm and calculated. He didn't seem to be hysterical or in denial.

Uneasiness came over her. Keesha realized that her friend was upset with her over her only son. Keesha knew that it was nothing personal that Christine had against her. She just wanted the best for her son and for him to make the right choice for the right reasons. Keesha felt like a villain.

"Chris, please give me some time, okay?" She stood there with her hand tight around the doorknob with the door slightly ajar.

"Keesha, are you putting me out?"

"No, Chris. I'm just asking you to understand that this is difficult for me. Can you understand that?"

"Yes, I'll give you all the time you need. Just keep in mind I don't want to go on without you being part of my life."

He bent down, kissed her gingerly on the lips and walked out of the door.

"See you tomorrow?" he asked as she started to close the door.

"No, but I'll call you."

"Good enough," he said, leaving.

Keesha closed the door and tears began to fall. She was in love with her friend's son who was too young for her, and now that friendship was in jeopardy. She went upstairs, wondering if she had done the right thing dismissing Chris. *Why is this happening to me?* she thought.