

CHAPTER 7

Simone

January 8th (Sunday)

The headaches that were plaguing me were becoming almost unbearable. My head constantly pounded and I needed at least three aspirin to make them go away. Ever since the night I spent with Q and Lae in the hotel, I had butterflies in my stomach almost as often as I had migraines.

It'd been a week since the New Year's argument and it was still uneasy in the house. I didn't give Mike any sex and he didn't ask. We walked around the house, rarely speaking, barely coexisting. I continued to fulfill my wifely obligations by taking care of the house, while he usually went out 'bowling' immediately after coming home from work and wouldn't come back until late in the night. When he wasn't around, and after I put MJ to sleep, I'd sit on my bed and cry. I never thought that in such a short time we'd be more like roommates than soul mates.

The only time we actually spent together was during church, but we drove separate cars and today wasn't any different. During service, I sat right next to Mike with MJ on my lap, but I felt no warmth towards him or from him. The preacher spoke of miracles, but I was in such a daze that I only caught the sermon in spurts.

After benediction, I began to greet everyone I knew-- even some that I didn't care too much about-- all while donning my phony smile. It was a welcome release to finally have interpersonal contact again, but when I looked around for Michael, he'd already left. During my exit, some of the ushers began to ask where he was. I lied and told them that he had to go to

work. I felt awful for having lied, but I didn't want to share the details of my life, especially not with church folks.

On the drive home, I considered calling Laela, but I didn't feel like hearing her chastisement, so I rode home in silence, with MJ in his car seat, sleeping. Not hearing him cry all day was a blessing in itself. I guess it's true that children do sense when something's wrong.

When I returned to the house, it was exactly as we left it, quiet. I put MJ in his crib and felt the migraine working its way to the front of my skull. I took three more aspirin and after I let my brain relax, I was in a significantly better place to begin cooking Sunday dinner.

My aunt always said that no matter how mad you are at your husband, it's a wife's duty to keep food in his belly. I hated how traditional she was, but even though I was mad as hell, I was still a wife-- his wife.

I couldn't understand him. *How could he do that to me--to us? All he had to do was be there for our first New Year together.* The more I thought about it, the more my brow furrowed and the more my head began to ache again.

Okay Simone, stay cool. There's no reason to undo the affects of the aspirin.

As I began making Sunday dinner, I noticed how eerily silent the house was. I felt the tears coming, but decided that I'd rather be listening to Laela's verbal abuse rather than not have anyone to talk to. I called Lae, but instead, Q picked up.

"Hello?"

"Hey Q, is Laela there?"

"No, Monie, she just left. Niya picked her up and they're gone."

"That figures. If I didn't know any better, I'd swear she liked the Raven more than me. Is that her new best friend? Have I been replaced?"

He laughed. It was good to hear especially when there wasn't any laughter in this house. "Teniyah has special needs --like she needs to be away from Franklin and I think Lae is her only escape. I don't think you have too much to be worried about, but have you tried calling her on her cell?"

"No." I paused before speaking again. "Quinton, I want to ask you some questions and I'd appreciate the truth."

This time he was silent for a few seconds before speaking. "What's going on, Monie?"

"Is Mike cheating on me?"

I could hear the sounds of him exhaling before he spoke. "I'm sorry, Monie..."

“Quinton,” I interrupted, “please don’t lie to me. I get enough of that from him. Perhaps I can have one friend around me who can be honest.”

“Look Monie, I’m not going to be the cause of a riff between you and Mike. I think this is something that y’all need to talk about.”

“So you know who she is, but you won’t tell me? You know, Quinton, I figured you to be the type of man to respect a marriage, but I’m beginning to see you’re just like all men. You know the thing that hurts the most, is that I really liked you.”

I hung up the phone and was ready to throw it across the room when it rang. It was Quinton.

“Hello.”

“Look, Monie, we all have our allegiances and my allegiance is to Mike. But simply because I can’t tell you something I don’t know anything about doesn’t diminish the love I have for you. If you want the truth about Mike’s infidelity, the maybe you should talk to him.”

“Let me ask *you*, Quinton. If Lae were cheating on you and I knew about it, would you want me to tell you?”

“Sometimes ignorance is bliss.”

“I’ll remember that.”

I had been exercising for about any hour before Michael came home. I hadn’t planned on working out, but the prospect of being single again gave me the motivation to get off my ass.

Mike walked into the bedroom and without even a greeting asked, “How long has he been sleep?”

“Why--the hell--do you care?” I snapped, barely able to breathe due to the fatigue. “You weren’t around--to help put his ass-- to sleep! Dinner is in the kitchen.”

“It smells more like it’s on the pot.” He smiled. I’d fallen asleep after talking to Quinton, accidentally burning dinner, but his attempt at humor didn’t crack the stone face I was giving him. “Look, I’m sorry I’m home so late. I had to take care of some things.”

“Was it just *something or someone*, Mike?” He looked at me like a deer caught in headlights. “You know what Michael? Could you at least be honest for once in your life?”

“So you think I’m cheating? Is that what it is?” He walked up to me and stood so closely that I swore he was ready to hit me. “I just need to get out of this fucking house sometimes! I need to get away from all the crying and goddamn complaining!”

“Everybody knows but me, Mike! Everyone fucking knows! You don’t spend New Years’ with me, you’re always either bowling or fixing cars and for the last week, you’ve never even touched me! Then you want to try and blame your son for you leaving? At least be a man and come clean! If you don’t want to be with me, then say it and stop dragging us along, damnit!”

He looked up at the ceiling, then back to the floor, his usual lie pose. “You want the truth? The truth is that I’ve found someone else, Monie. We haven’t done anything, but I’ve been so tempted. All I ever hear around here and from your friends is what I can’t do and what I don’t do. I’m sick of hearing that shit! You knew how I was when you married me and yet you can’t stick up for me when your friends are clownin’ me? You know how that makes me feel? You let Lae talk about me like a dog—a goddamn dog Simone and all you can say is that he’s my husband and I love him? Do you want to know why I went looking for someone else? It’s because the woman I got doesn’t respect me!” He stormed out of the room.

“You want my respect?” I shouted and ran after him, catching up to him in the kitchen. “Well, prove to me that you want to change. Prove to me that you want to be a husband and not just be here because you fucked up and had a son with me! I look like a fool to everyone I know for staying with you this long because I do love you. I want us to make it, but not at the expense of my sanity.”

“I want us to work, but not at the expense of my pride,” he said quietly. We both sat down at the kitchen table and he grabbed my hand. “I was raised to believe that women should take care of the house and men should take care of the bills. Maybe if I had some college like Quinton or Dre, we could be better off and you wouldn’t have to work, but I can’t be them. I wish the both of us didn’t have to work, but we do. If you want me to be a better husband, talk to me instead of nagging me.” He paused and for a few seconds, not a sound could be heard anywhere in the house. “What could I do better?”

Sex! My brain screamed. Sex! Sex! Sex! SEX! Tell him about the lousy sex! But the thoughts never congealed into words and the words never made it to my mouth. “No. Nothing I can think of. Just keep the vows you made.”

He came over and kissed me on the lips, the same lips I imagined him kissing the other woman with. A shudder ran through me knowing that his

mouth had been on another woman, but the truth is, had he known what went down on New Years', I'd be the one kissing his ass. "I really am sorry and I'd like to make it up to you." He thought hard about what he was going to say next.

"How about we go out to eat?"

"MJ's still sleeping."

"Okay, then. How about we take the baby to your aunt's, and I take care of you?"

"You want make up sex?"

"No, how about I just take care of you."

Now we were getting somewhere. I couldn't even remember the last time he pampered me and I smiled while thinking about what he had in store.

It didn't take us long to call my aunt to make the arrangements and get the baby ready to go. Thinking about that night had my stomach in bunches and after a week hiatus, my body was as ready as it'd ever been.

For the first time in what seemed like forever, we shared the same car. On the way to my aunt's house, which was only a five minute drive, we talked about some of the things going on at our jobs, a rarity between us. It seemed as if he was really trying to turn over a new leaf and I desperately wanted him to.

After dropping off MJ, we rushed back home, tearing away at each other's off after we shut the front door.

"Let's take a bath together," he suggested.

We made it all the way to the bathroom before I spoke up. His hand was cupping my breast and his lips were working my neck when I asked.

"What's her name?"

"Aw, c'mon, Simone--why do we have to do this shit now? I told you I was sorry. I told you that it won't happen again. What the hell do you want from me?" When I didn't concede to his pouting, he continued.

"Okay, fine, goddammit. Her name is Starr."

"Is she pretty?"

His uneasiness showed on his face. "Not really. She was just someone to talk to."

I wanted to have sex so badly it hurt, but I needed to know the answers. "If she wasn't pretty, then why wouldn't you just talk to me about it? Why take a step down from what you already have? Why go somewhere else? Why kiss someone else?"

“Simone, I don’t know. Sometimes when you feel alone, it helps to have someone to talk to that’s not the same sex. You think Pookie or Quinton would understand what I’m feeling? The only other woman I know is Laela, and since she doesn’t like me that much anyway, talking to her wouldn’t be a very good idea. I just had all this shit inside me that was eating me up and it felt good to not think about it.”

I grabbed his chin and made him look me in the eyes. “We are married, Michael. Shouldn’t I have been the first person you came to? Aren’t we the ones who are married? Is there something wrong with me?”

“It’s me. I don’t know how many times I can tell you that. I just don’t know how to think about other people’s feeling. Yes, we’re married and, yes, I shoulda come to you, but it’s easier to say that in hindsight. If you remember, you weren’t saying much to me either. How do you speak to someone who you know doesn’t want to speak back? I’m sorry, Mo. If I could do it all again and do it right, I would. But we have to deal with what’s happened and not what should have happened. Can we move on from here, please? I don’t feel like doing this shit tonight. All I know is that I want to make this work. You are the one I married and I want to try to make things right.”

“You didn’t answer my last question. Is there something wrong with me?” I didn’t want to hear that there was, but deep inside I knew it was me. *Why else would he go somewhere else if it wasn’t me?*

“Yes. There is something wrong with you.”

Hearing him actually admit it was more than I could bear. I sat down on the edge of the bathtub and stared at the tile on the opposite wall. My mouth quickly dried up and at the same time my eyes began to well up with tears. I could see my husband’s mouth moving, but I was vaguely listening.

“There’s something wrong with the both of us,” he continued, “but I should’ve trusted that we could work through it. I love you because of all the good things you’re about. I love you because of all the bad things I see. I love you as a whole and not as a part.”

“What?” I asked, slowly returning to reality from my daze.

“I said I love you, Mo. Were you listening?”

When I didn’t immediately answer, he spoke up. “Well, aren’t you going to say something?”

“I love you, too.” I managed to say and then let out a short chuckle. Then, the tears began to flow uncontrollably. He leaned over, tenderly kissed me on my lips and picked each rogue tear away from my face with another kiss.

“Let’s get in the tub,” he suggested.

I finished getting undressed and listened to my husband. Though it wasn’t as romantic as I would’ve liked it to be-- no music, candles, or even bubbles, I wasn’t alone. Even if what we had only lasted for tonight, I looked into his dark brown eyes and saw the love I’d always wanted.

I relaxed in between his legs, feeling Dingo repeatedly tap me on the back as if he were trying to pass me a message in Morse code. We sat silently in the hot water, letting the water drain us of any energy we had left and watching the steam disappear as it rose from the water.

We held each other for a while as we reminisced about the times before we were married. Laughing was so natural then and even though I enjoyed Mike’s company now, there was a long way before we made it back to those days. Still, it felt good to be married again.

Not long after the steam left, the heat followed suit. Michael stood up, went to the linen closet and grabbed two towels for us to dry off in. Instead of me toweling myself, he wrapped it around me like a blanket and carried me to our room.

He laid me down on the bed, grabbed the baby oil from our dresser, opened up my towel and began massaging my shoulders. With his rough hands, it felt more like he was tenderizing me than massaging me, but I learned long time ago to never look a gift horse in the mouth. I winced occasionally, but never long enough for him to see anything but pleasure.

He worked his calloused hands from my shoulders down to my calves, never missing a spot, before flipping me over. Then he did something he hadn’t done since our wedding night, he parted my thighs and tasted me. I was caught so off-guard that I gasped and accidentally clasped my thighs around his head. He looked up at me, smiled and guided my legs towards his shoulders. Once my legs were rested on his back, he returned his full attention to the only thing on the menu--me.

He still had a lot to learn about eating, but he was still my husband, and I loved him for trying. I laid my head on the pillow, relaxed, focused on what he was doing. The orgasm came quicker than I had anticipated.

Wiping me from his lips and ready for his orgasm, he mounted me. After what he’d done for me, I was ready for him to have one. I was still shivering from excitement as he penetrated me. Still sensitive and damp from the oral sex, my body received him without hesitation or pain. And as I climaxed again a few minutes later, this time we came together.

We lay breathless on the bed, no words spoken during the entire ordeal. Our escapade had only taken twenty minutes, but it seemed much

longer. My body felt as light as a cloud as I lay still shuddering from the best sex I'd had from him in a while.

"I love you," he said.