

LOVE AND BASKETBALL

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LOVE AND BASKETBALL

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Abstract of *Love and Basketball*

Madison Butler

Growing up with a famous NBA dad has its privileges, but when your mom is one of the most sought after celebrity publicist it can get complicated. Join me, Madison Butler, as I navigate my way through my last year in high school. I'm forced to deal with an ugly and public break-up with a certain All-American teen hoopster, Blane Iverson, the son and heir of the deceased NBA Baller Denim Iverson. Did I mention my evil twin sister, Madsion, who swears she's better than me. Welcome to our world, filled with flashing lights, basketball, and more drama than your favorite reality show! Brace yourself for the scandalous lies, dirty little secrets, and murder. All is fair in *Love and Basketball*.

Channing L. Butler

I'm back! After surviving a near death experience at the NBA's most notorious bad boy's funeral, Denim Iverson, my life is still filled with chaos and drama. I'm still married to Alonzo butler, but he's no longer playing in the NBA. He's the head coach of the Milwaukee Mavericks. Join me as I stiletto step through my fabulous life as a mom, celebrity publicist, and scorned wife. Nothing is fair in *Love and Basketball*.

Myanna Priestly

What's up? It's your girl, Mimi, and they just let me out of prison for shooting Channing. This time I will make sure I kill her and everyone she loves. I had a lot of time to come up with the perfect master plan. All is fair in *Love and Basketball*. And revenge!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It's always difficult deciding whether or not to do acknowledgements! However, I decided to keep them short and sweet.

I would like to thank God for trusting me with such an awesome gift. I write therefore I am.

I would like to thank my family, friends, and the beautiful women of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated for all of your love and support.

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I would like to thank my classmates for writing such fabulous stories and essays, allowing me to assist in their story arcs, and helping me define my work. Workshopping is never easy, but it makes us better at our craft and challenges us to push those boundaries! I wish you continued success in all that you do.

Lastly, I write because I have to. I must! Writing is a way of life for me. It's my best friend. My diary. My coffee. My vacation. And my retail therapy, but with words. The best decision I could have made for myself was to apply to this program and learn how to write correctly and read great literature. I learned how to follow the rules and I learned how to push and bend them as well. I grew as a writer and I grew as a human being that cares and understands that Life is but a dream. And in order to live a great life we must be prepared to go through it. Not around it. Be blessed. And be great!

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Chapter 1

Madison Butler

Tip Off

I read the letter twice. I was confused. Maybe I wasn't confused. Rejection seemed to be a family curse, but not for all. I blamed her. All my life all I ever wanted was to be like my mother. She was beautiful and loving. Good, bad or indifferent she would be okay. She was strong like that. They would all be okay, but I wouldn't. I read the letter again and started to cry. The music played in the background as the light from the candle swayed in my oversized bedroom. I picked up the knife. I didn't want to cut myself, but I would. I moved the blade back and forth against my petite wrist, alternating between the right then left then right. I wasn't really producing the amount of blood I desired. I took the knife and decided to try something different, the tip. I raised the knife over my left wrist. I jabbed the tip in. I twisted it. My blood oozed. It hurt, but that was the goal. The pain I was inflicting made me high. I felt in charge, for once.

"I hate you! You should be prettier and you should be thinner like McKenzie. You weren't good enough to get into Howard University like Blane," I said as blood seeped down my wrist then trickled onto my white jumpsuit.

I walked over to the mirror and stared at myself. I wondered why I hated myself. I was supposed to be happy. People would expect me to be happy. I wasn't. My family was rich and famous. I had a twin sister who I hated plus an older brother, away at college. My dad was a NBA basketball coach and my mommy was a celebrity publicist. If you were to look at my life on paper you would think I had it made. But I was crazy. I suffered from low self-esteem and depression. I had been fine a few months ago before

my boyfriend, Blane, broke up with me. I couldn't forget that day. I sat still and stared at the blood. Our last visit began to play in my head like a VH1 reality show.

Blane had walked in. I had tried to kiss him. I tried to hug him. I could sense he was upset. We walked together to the family room. I sat. He stood.

"As much as I love you, Maddie, I can't do this," Blane said as he put his hands in his pockets.

"Do what?" I asked while changing the channel on the TV to distract myself from the fear of the unknown.

"Madison, you slept with one of my friends. Everyone is looking at me and whispering about poor Blane. My mom knows too."

"I said I was sorry. I made a mistake. Why can't you forgive me? I was drunk."

"Not this time, Madison! I need to focus on basketball. I want to concentrate on finishing high school and leaving for college.

"So it's over?" I asked as a tear rolled down my face.

"Yep, I think it's best that we go our separate ways."

"No, Blane! I love you. I'm not going to let you leave me." More tears rolled down my face as I stood and tried to kiss him.

"It's over! There is no way in hell we'll be together. I wanted to marry you, but not anymore," he said before trying to walk away from me.

"I'm pregnant!" I said without thinking.

"Okay, good luck with that."

"I'm three months, Blane. It's your baby. My parents will make you marry me!"

He laughed in my face.

“Your parents can do a lot of things, Madison, but making me marry you is not one,” he said as he turned around then walked toward the door.

“What about the baby?” I asked following behind him.

“Have an abortion. Do whatever. If you keep it, I’ll pay child support. Hell I will cut you a check right now!” Blane said before opening the door.

I tried to stop him, but he pushed me aside.

“Don’t do this, Blane, I love you. I need you.”

“Don’t do this? Are you serious? Wanna-Be-Barbie, you don’t care about nothing or nobody. You are just like your mother, a whore!” Blane said before slamming the door in my face.

I hadn’t heard from him since. So the pregnancy and the letter bounced around my mind like an out-of-bounds basketball.

I jumped up on the dresser to get as close to the mirror as I could. I took the knife and licked it a little. Finally, in one swift motion I took the bloody knife and shattered the fancy mirror. Big and tiny pieces of glass floated through the air like snow.

“I hate you! You shouldn’t have slept with his best friend. Why did you think he would still be your boyfriend?” I asked myself.

I slumped down to the floor and crisscrossed my legs Indian style. I still had the knife, but for some reason I wanted to see more blood. I wanted to die. I was tired. I was pregnant at 17 plus I hadn’t gotten into the university I wanted to get into so why live? I wouldn’t. I didn’t have to and no one could make me. I rocked back and forth. I wondered if Blane thought about me and our unborn child. I questioned if he would be sorry for breaking up with me. I wondered if he would come to my funeral. I had wanted

to go to Howard University because Blane was going there. I felt if I could attend Howard he wouldn't be able to forget me. But now that wasn't possible. I dropped the knife. I crawled over to my bed and reached up and grabbed the letter. Blood was getting everywhere. I read it again.

February 14, 2014

*Miss. Madison Butler
4319 W. Brookfield Road
Brookfield, WI 53045*

Dear Miss. Butler:

Thank you for having expressed an interest in Howard University. The Admissions Committee has given careful consideration to your application.

The Admission Committee regrets to inform you that we are unable to offer you a place in our freshman class. Although, you are a competitive scholar there were many equally competitive applicants who applied for admissions. Many desirable candidates have been denied.

Thank you for applying to Howard University and we wish you success in your educational quest.

Sincerely,

Twiggy Iverson

Admissions Chair

I sat there and continued to cry while rocking back and forth. I glanced around me in search of the knife; however, it was hiding. I picked up a broken piece of glass from the shattered mirror. It reminded me of my life. I was broken. Yes, I had other acceptance letters, but I wanted that one. I wanted to be with Blane. We had been together for two years. I made a mistake. I got caught up. I was drinking and smoking, which is something I should have avoided. We argued and he left. So his friend took me

home. And things happened. He kissed me and I kissed him back. He touched me and I touched him back. But I had a boyfriend!

I started cutting myself again by going back and forth with the glass. The dry blood began to disappear as new blood began to flow. The blood was flowing from my wrist as I cut while salty tears continued to cascade from my eyes. I stopped and I rocked. I rocked and I cut. I cut then I stopped and stared. I rubbed my wrists together for no apparent reason. Blood continued to drip faster and faster. I wanted it to flow because I wanted it to match the tears in my eyes and the pain in my heart. I was having a baby and Blane didn't give a damn. Nobody cared. Everybody was busy, busy, and so busy with their glamorous lives! I continued to sit and rock like the girl from that one old movie, *Valley of the Dolls*, she was crazy like me.

"Oh... Madison, what have you done? My God! My God. Shit. Madison, can you hear me?" my mother asked while applying pressure to both of my wrists five minutes later.

"Channing, what in the hell has she done? Should I call 911? Baby Girl, why would you do this to yourself?" My daddy asked while alternating between looking at me and my mom.

"Alonzo, calm down. I need you to go look in the medicine cabinet and bring me the first aid kit. And call the team's doctor in case she needs stitches," my mom said as tears fell from her pretty face.

"Madison, I love you more than I love life! Why, Maddie? I thought we would never revisit this," Mom said.

“I’m sorry, Mommy. I’m tired. I didn’t get into Howard and I’m three months pregnant,” I said while rocking in her loving arms.

“So, Madison, you would cut yourself because you didn’t get into Howard? What the fuck are you talking about? I can build a university for you to attend,” Daddy said while shaking his head in disbelief.

“Howard is the least of your worries, Maddie. Did you say you were pregnant? God, no!” Mom said.

“Pregnant? By Blane? Madison, what did you say?” Daddy asked as he kneeled down close to her.

“Alonzo, now is really not the time. Can’t you see our daughter is in pain? She’s hurting and we have to help her,” Mom said as she bandaged up my wrist to stop the bleeding. She held me in her arms for five or ten minutes. Dad sat and rubbed my hair until the doorbell rang.

“I want to be with Blane. I want to get married and have my baby,” I said as the doctor walked in with a black medical bag.

“Madison, are you feeling light headed?” The doctor asked while checking my vitals.

“Ummm...no,” I said while watching my parents pace around the room. This was the second time my father’s co-worker had to come in six months.

No more cutting. Next time will be the last time. Pills should do it. My parents didn’t understand me. Dad thought he could buy me whatever and mom has been through so much. I hated to leave them here in this awful world, but it has to be better in heaven. I hoped.

The doctor patched me up in record time. I received eleven stitches that time. He was in and out in twenty minutes, but not before leaving a card of some quack doctor he thought could help me with my depression.

Mom cleaned me up and helped me get into a pair of pajamas. She walked me to the guest room then tucked me in, and excused herself to clean up my room.

Dad stayed to watch me. “Madison, I love you. I’m not sure if you realize how much this family has overcome within the last twelve years.”

“I know, Daddy. I was upset about the pregnancy and rejection letter. I miss Blane. I know it was dumb of me.”

“Let me explain a few things to you, Baby Girl. Regardless of how much money and power you acquire, you can’t always have your way. Plus you don’t have any money, Maddie,” he said while kissing my forehead.

I said, “Daddy, I really am sorry. I didn’t mean to embarrass you and mommy.”

“Maddie, we are not embarrassed or ashamed! When you were five or six your mom and I went through a rocky season. Very nasty and public custody battle and divorce,” he said while taking a seat on the side of the bed.

“But you guys remarried and it all worked out right?” I asked wanting to hear more.

“It worked out, but it took years. When Blane’s dad, Denim, was killed his funeral turned into pandemonium and your mother was shot. Do you remember that?” Daddy asked.

“I kinda remember it, but not really. Is that the time mom was in a coma for a few days then she woke up. And when she got better we moved to Paris for a while,” I asked

not real sure if I had all the facts straight plus I was getting tired from the sedative the doctor gave me.

“Yes, that was it. Maddie, I put Channing through a lot from cheating to unnecessary court battles; however after a while she needed to step away from the drama and work on her, which forced me to grow.”

“I know Mom and Uncle Chase overcame a lot, Dad. She always shares her journey with me, McKenzie, and Alonzo Jr., but if you look at her life today you would never know of her challenges.”

“That’s my point, Maddie! A problem is only a problem until someone presents an answer that works. I promise you that everything will work out.”

“Daddy, I feel like the black sheep of the family. McKenzie is going to Spelman College and Alonzo Jr. has been at Duke playing basketball for a year. It’s like I am my mother’s child,” I said before I had a tug-a-war with my blanket as the medicine took effect.

I regretted those words as soon as they escaped my lips. My mom had walked in and I know she heard those foul words. I hadn’t meant them in a negative way though. She sat on the other side of me and kissed my cheek.

I closed my eyes and pretended to be asleep, which was something I’d been doing since I was five or six years old. That’s how I knew so much— because I listened when I should’ve been sleep.

Mommy reached toward the nightstand and turned on the soft jazz music. She lit a candle then waited until she assumed I was sleep.

“Channing, what are you going to do? You are her mother,” Daddy said.

“You know what, Alonzo, whatever. What the fuck are you going to do because you are her father,” Mom said.

“Perhaps she needs more counseling, Channing. You’ve been traveling quite a bit over the last six months. Maybe you can cut back and spend more time with her.”

“That isn’t a problem. I would do anything for my children, which I have. But Madison and McKenzie will graduate in a few months then they’re off to college summer camps.”

“Baby, Madison may not be ready to go away to college plus what if she wants to keep the baby? Perhaps in a year or two, but sending her away in June may be devastating,” Daddy said.

“Madison was accepted into Spelman College like McKenzie was four months ago. McKenzie will make sure Maddie is okay. I think her going to Atlanta, which will be far away from Blane may help.”

“It may. I guess we have to take it day by day. The basketball season is almost over, then I won’t be traveling as much,” Daddy said.

“Babe, can you stay with her while I go and take a shower and call McKenzie to see what time she’ll be home?”

“Yeah, that’s cool. Take your time I’ll catch up on *Sports Center* on ESPN. Are you staying in here tonight?” Daddy asked.

“Yes, I think we both should,” Mom said before kissing him on the lips and walking out.

I tossed a bit and decided to stop fighting the sedative.

Chapter 2

Channing L. Golden-Butler

First Quarter

I sat atop my luxury bed and cried. I cried for my daughter. I cried for me and then I cried for us. I'd gone through so much over the last decade; I needed an immediate explanation from God. I'd heard Madison when she told Alonzo, "I am my mother's child." That she was. She was turning out to be a carbon copy. She was chasing love as I had years ago and like I found it so did she. But she was in high school and her heart had been broken. Smashed. Crushed to pieces.

My children were my life. After I woke up from the coma twelve years ago I promised myself and God that I'd move in a different direction. Step back from the fame game for a season and work on me, Channing. The kids and I commuted back and forth to Paris for five years before moving back to the states. The children had been doing so well until Blane and Madison broke-up. Madison was wrong for sleeping with his friend, but she was 17 and had to let go of it and forgive herself. She went to counseling the first time she cut herself and I thought she was getting better. But I was wrong or I hadn't paid attention.

I glanced around the master suite at the hardwood floors, Persian rugs, king-sized round bed, and beautiful, turquoise and white pillows and linen. Then I stood up and walked into my oversized walk-in closet and sat in front of the cheetah trimmed mirror and rocked back and forth. I was confused and disappointed in myself. I had failed my child. It hurt me to the core to find my baby in such a broken state. My mother had been a mess, I was a mess, and now one of my daughters was having issues. I thought the cycle

was broken since I was adopted; however that was the beginning my charades. I became a master because of the poker faces and smoke and mirrors illusion I presented to the world, which hid the brokenness of me. At 41 I had more work to do. I stood and stared at all of my material things, Hermes purses, Christian Louboutin pumps, and red carpet dresses, which frowned back at me like the tears of a clown.

I stepped onto the balcony. I ran my hands over the snow-filled rails. The coldness I felt at that moment took me back decades to a life I had suppressed. I had been an impressionable sweet 16 year-old and hot as a fire-cracker. I was looking for love in the wrong places. I was lost in the rapture of the NBA. I may have possessed the body and face of an exotic woman the NBA players fancied, but I was a child. I was confused. I craved the attention. It made me feel special. A special I hadn't felt in forever, since my father had left my mother. Then she left me and my brother. We were spilt up and taken into foster care. I hated her. She never loved me or she didn't know how to show it! She thought material things were love, but they weren't. Things were only temporary smiles for a while. Things were not love. At least not the love that a parent gives a child so, I settled for the only love that was given, and her name was lust.

I started dating professional athletes when I was still in high school. I didn't know it then, but I do now. I learned years later this was legally considered rape. Maybe? They lusted after me and I wanted to be with them. It made me feel better. I felt beautiful. Hell I was beautiful. Walking out of the friends and family section of arenas after basketball games, hugged up, and holding hands with the star of the team was mind blowing. It's a high hard to imagine, a mental high that was, and still is like no other! The way they looked at me made me feel irreplaceable. But I wasn't. I was another toy that

they'd play with until another Barbie doll came along. It took years to learn to love myself after that. And even today I still had doubts.

I began to shiver from the cold as a few tears painted my face. I took a deep breath and walked back into my bedroom. I had a long way to go in dealing with my own self-esteem and depression. But this wasn't about me. God blessed me with three wonderful children and I would make sure their lives didn't mirror mine.

The phone rang.

"Hello," I said, happy to be distracted from my pity party.

"Mommy, I'm on my way home from the varsity game! We won," McKenzie said.

"That's great, McKenzie, how long before you make it home?"

"Ten minutes. What's for dinner?"

"Shrimp Scampi. I'll see you soon Uncle Chase is clicking in," I said before switching over.

"Hello," I said into the phone relieved to hear from my twin brother and best friend.

"What's wrong, Channing? I can hear the sadness in your voice." Chased asked.

"Madison had another cutting episode about an hour ago. She confessed to being three months pregnant plus she received a rejection letter from Howard University."

"Damn. I'm sorry to hear that, Channing. How is she doing?"

"She's sleeping and Alonzo is with her," I said while grabbing a pair of pajamas.

"I'll be in town tomorrow so let's do lunch," Chase said.

“Sounds like a plan, however I’ll need to make sure Alonzo will be around to keep an eye on Madison. See you soon,” I said while walking into the bathroom to shower.

The water calmed me in a way nothing else could. Between the scent of Philosophy’s Cinnamon Bun shower gel, steam, and feel of the water playing jump rope against my paper-bag colored skin I found refuge in a hot shower.

I prayed and knew God was listening, “God, I love you and I adore you. I ask that you heal my daughter from any mental illnesses and heartbreak. I went through it all so my children wouldn’t have...”

“Mommy, where is everybody? Where is Maddie?” McKenzie asked from the other side of the bathroom door.

“Hold on, McKenzie, give me a few minutes.” I exited the shower and dried off before I put on my pajamas. McKenzie had disappeared from outside the bathroom door.

I walked into the kitchen and there she was standing at the microwave still dressed in her Rufus King cheerleading uniform. I knew she would be disappointed and hurt because they were close, but I had to tell her that her twin sister had another cutting episode. Then I’d call my son, Alonzo Jr.

“McKenzie, Madison cut herself a few hours ago.”

“Where is she, Mom? How bad was it this time?”

“She’s in one of the spare guest rooms. Your dad is with her now. Eleven stitches this time.”

I grabbed a glass of wine and headed back upstairs a few steps behind McKenzie, so Alonzo could go and take a shower.

McKenzie was staring at Madison. She wasn't saying much, which scared me. I don't know if we were getting a little too use to this or what.

Alonzo kissed McKenzie on the forehead and walked out of the room with tears in his eyes.

McKenzie began to cry.

I pointed for her to leave the room. I needed Madison to sleep for a-while because I needed to sleep, so I would be at my best for our necessary conversation.

I woke the next morning to see McKenzie off to school. Madison stayed home and had an emergency intervention with a counselor. Once McKenzie left I sat in the family room and enjoyed the quietness and beauty of my surroundings. I walked towards the opulent picture window then peered out at the woods behind the estate. I witnessed nature and the freedom of those who resided there experienced. Birds were flying about chirping passionate love songs, squirrels were sprinting, and a deer was running further and further away. They had great freedom. I might had been jealous, which I knew was silly. They were charged with looking for food and staying safe from the other animals in the woods, which was nothing like my life. If I stepped outside of my house, I had to have on Gucci or Prada. My make-up was expected to be Barbie doll fabulous. And, if I fucked up, it would be on all the media across the country at the same time. Although I'd grown a considerable amount over the last decade, I'd be the first to admit I had internal challenges to overcome.

“Excuse me, Mrs. Butler, the counselor is here and I think your brother is pulling up as well,” my assistant said.

“Thank you. You can show the counselor upstairs to my office and let Madison know she’s here. I’ll let Chase in.”

“Hey, Chase, you’re four hours ahead of schedule,” I said while standing in the foyer and extending my arms for a warm hug.”

He was my rock as well as the wonderful voice of reason in my life. After he retired from the NFL, he took a year off, then became a special teams’ coach, and our relationship flourished.

“Hello, Beautiful. What can I say except please forgive me? My flight was on time and my first meeting was cancelled.”

“I’m happy to see you, Chase. You’re welcome here anytime. Let’s go into the family room.”

He put an arm around me as we walked. “Channing, I’m sorry to hear about Madison. Can I see her before I leave?”

“Yes. That would be great. I’m sure she will be surprised to see her Uncle Chase.”

“I know you have a lot going on with this Madison situation, but I came with more bad news.”

“What’s going on?” I asked while uncrossing my legs and leaning towards him.

“Myanna Prestly is going in front of the parole board tomorrow. Don’t worry you don’t have to go, but I’m going with our lawyers. I have your victim impact statement from last time and changed the date.”

“That crazy bitch tried to kill me! I hope they keep her ass locked up for the rest of her life.” I stood and started pacing the floor.

Chapter 3

Myanna Priestly

Technical Foul

I sat on the edge of my prison bunk bed as my roommate helped me to take down the French braids in my hair. I wanted to wear a nice, sophisticated bun. I didn't want to resemble the criminal I'd been when I entered prison. It was my third attempt in five years to try to get out of this joint. The other two times were horrible, but it was my fault. I'd never shown remorse.

When asked if I was remorseful, I avoided a response. As a result, I wasn't granted parole. I've spent over a decade behind bars for trying to kill Channing and her friends at Denim Iverson's funeral. I was wrong, but it felt right. However, this time it would be different. I'd been working with another counselor who helped me to understand the errors of my ways plus take ownership of my negative choices.

"Ma'am, stand and state your name for the record," a committee member said as her five peers stared at me and shuffled paperwork.

"My name is Myanna Priestly."

"Do you have a statement prepared to read, Priestly?"

"Yes, thank you." I glanced down at my statement on the table before me and read.

"Over a decade ago I was involved with several NBA players. I would see their wives at various functions and taunt them and humiliate them in front of family, friends, and the media. Because of my actions, I was beaten by several of the players' wives and

friends, which resulted in me being hospitalized for several weeks. I left the hospital on the day of Denim Iverson's funeral to seek revenge," I said as I pressed my palms into my thighs with hopes of appearing calm.

"Inmate Priestly, you describe your criminal actions like a day of shopping. No remorse just another day in your privileged and pampered life and that's not acceptable. We have several video clips from CNN and WISN reporting on the ambush in addition to your journal entry," the committee member in the purple shirt said before pressing play on the remote.

"We have breaking news coming in live from Denim Iverson's funeral. There is a female with a high powered rifle in the church on 86th and Good Hope Road. From the information we are getting the woman may be Myanna Priestly, but we are not 100% sure because the woman's face is bandaged. Stay tuned," the news reporter said as the video continued to play.

I had to hold it together. I was forced to look at a younger version of me. I was out of control and a danger in the video. I was shocked because they had never played videos of the crime in my past parole hearings. I'm sure that bitch, Channing, and her twin brother, Chase, had set this all up. But I was one up on their asses this time. I would win this time. I was sure. Chase sat there with what appeared to be a few lawyers. Chase was handsome— GQ magazine, man-of- the-year handsome. He still wasn't married according to gossip. He was dating this one and that one. Chase loved him some R&B singers.

Channing was absent. I wondered where she was. I'd kept up with her life via the tabloids as best I could, but I had expected to see her here. I needed to see that bitch, to give me a reason to fight for my freedom.

“Also, I want to take a few minutes to have you read a page from your journal entry on the day of the massacre to establish your state of mind,” the committee member in the purple shirt said. So I read the words that appeared on the flat screen to my right.

I woke excited and ready for combat even though I was lying in a hospital bed. I looked forward to a few minutes of revenge because those bitches left me for dead! I didn't know how my plan would work itself out, but I was willing to take a risk. Sheila, Channing, and DeShema should have made sure I was dead, but they didn't, which was their ultimate mistake. The three NBA divas had been seen on TV every hour, crying and mourning for their beloved Denim. But they left me for dead behind the ambush, so I couldn't think of anything but payback. I hadn't bothered to look in the mirror; however I knew my face would never be the same. The doctors kept reassuring me that my face could be fixed.

After reading the journal entry I took my seat without being instructed to. Then I waited. The committee members wore their poker faces well, and I was trying to be reserved and not stare, which was proving to be difficult. Seconds turned into minutes before the hearing continued.

“We have an FBI agent here who is going to answer a couple questions that the committee has concerning Myanna Preistly's shooting spree,” a committee member said as the agent walked up towards the microphone.

“My name is Agent Natalia Nouvel. I was at the scene of the crime wherein

Myanna Priestly shot Channing L. Golden-Butler and wounded a few innocent bystanders.”

“Let me ask you a question, Agent. Were you fearful for your life?” The purple shirt wearing heffa asked as if she was trying a case on *Law and Order*. The more she spoke the more I despised her. I knew if it was up to her I’d rot in Taycheedah Correctional Institution.

“No, I wasn’t fearful. I was worried about the thousands of innocent bystanders and children that could potentially become victims of Myanna Priestly’s selfish mayhem as she sought revenge.”

“How has this impacted your life, Agent?”

“I was actually pregnant at the time by the deceased, Denim Iverson. But I’m an agent first and protecting the innocent comes with the job. I’ve had nightmares and I almost lost my child,” Agent Nouvel said.

“Noted. Please continue.”

“Every night when I close my eyes I can hear Myanna Priestly screaming in my ear. ‘Ya’ll might as well make room ‘cause somebody’s going in the casket with Denim,’ before she aimed her gun towards Channing and her friends.”

“Agent Novel, what happened next?”

“She pointed. We shot her. She shot Channing. And wounded several others,” the agent said before taking her seat.

Her acting was damn terrible. She had been watching Halle Berry too much. Denim was not thinking about her before he died because he was in love with Channing. Channing. Channing. Channing. Agent Novel ignored the truth that Denim died because

he went to Channing's house with a gun trying to shoot Alonzo for having an affair with his wife, Scotty. Denim was crazy as hell, but sexy. He was a hood boy who played professional basketball. He didn't grow up in private schools with wealthy parents, so he didn't fit in.

See back then Channing had a powerhouse roster of clients because she was a great celebrity publicist. I guess being around all those handsome athletes made her some kind of way. And she was Alonzo's trophy mistress. She married him. He cheated on her. She cheated. Our life was a soap opera back then; however, it seems like a lot has changed. I guess change could be good. Sometimes I wanted to change. And sometimes I didn't.

"Ma'am are you okay?" A committee member asked Agent Nouvel.

"Yes, thank you," she said as she wiped a few tears.

The FBI agent hadn't aged much in a decade, her beauty always preceded her. One would never be able to guess she was an FBI agent. Her beauty served as the perfect cover, which is probably why Denim was sexing her when Channing couldn't get away. I heard the agent was dating some big shot politician as of late.

The parole panel began speaking in hushed tones. A few minutes elapsed before everyone's attention was drawn to the in-house courtroom's double doors.

The doors squeaked, but in my head, it sounded like I heard trumpets and horns playing as if announcing royalty. Channing sashayed in still sporting her invisible halo. And we all stared.

Chapter 4

McKenzie Butler

Cutting and Faking

Two days after my twin sister, Madison, cut herself the chef made us breakfast—strawberry crepes, turkey bacon, and freshly squeezed pineapple orange juice. Madison stood and ate while looking over her homework. I sat and scrolled through my Facebook page on my iPad. She seemed normal to me. Maybe the counseling session yesterday had worked. I hoped it worked. I was still hoping for the best. Hell I prayed for the best. Two months ago our lives had been so different. After, Blane broke up with Madison, her world had turned upside down. I blamed myself most of the time for telling Blane she had cheated, but she would have to get over him! And the sooner the better.

“How are you feeling this morning?” I asked.

“I would be feeling much better if I had your life, McKenzie.”

I almost choked on my juice. I wiped my mouth with the cheetah printed napkin before I responded.

“Must you be sarcastic all the damn time, Madison?”

“Why do you think I’m being sarcastic? I mean I am dead ass serious. Who wouldn’t want to be you?”

“You know what, Madison, you need to take your happy pills. Don’t blame me for your issues. I’ve been your biggest cheerleader, so rah rah!” I said while throwing my invisible pom-poms in the air and shaking them.

“What if that’s the problem? Just maybe I’m tired of it. I’m tired of you trying to always be a step ahead of me. From fashion to friends you make everything out to be a competition.”

“Honestly, Madison, you’re exaggerating. Take your medicine! Take your medicine, Boo.”

“You don’t have to keep saying that. And for the record I did take my medicine. Thank you very much,” she said while shoving her homework into her Gucci book bag.

“I’m not convinced.”

“I don’t have to convince you, or anyone else, of anything. You’re jealous of me and want me to fail. You want to be Mom’s favorite, but that’ll never happen,” Madison said as she rolled her eyes.

I looked at Madison and shook my head. I actually felt sorry for her.

“Really? Like for real? You’ve got to be kidding me. Please stop reading those fairytales. They aren’t good for you.”

“Kidding you? I’m serious. How far are you willing to go to punish me for being mom’s favorite?” she asked while standing with her arms crossed against her new boobies, a present from mom for our sweet sixteen birthday last year.

“You’re delusional. You wish you were her favorite, but you aren’t and it’s killing you inside,” I said before putting my headphones on to drown her out.

Madison lunged across the granite countertop and slapped me like I’d stolen something. I understood because I had stolen a few things from her. Some she knew about and others she had yet to learn of. I often stole her fiction from her. I had to because everyone else was afraid to. She thought she was everyone’s favorite, but she

wasn't, which was behind her depression and cutting episodes. She wanted to be the center of attention no matter what. If we walked into Saks 5th Avenue she wanted the salesclerks and personal shoppers to approach her first. If we walked into the prom she wanted our mutual friends to air kiss her first and me last, but the tides had turned our first year in high school.

Madison couldn't handle that I'd surpassed her on the social and academic climb. She often threw out jabs concerning being Mom's favorite, but I failed to see it. I think Mom treated all of us fair and Madison sometimes lived in a pretend world wherein she was Cinderella or Barbie. Only she wasn't.

After she slapped me, I pushed her so hard she fell to the floor. I raised my foot to kick her in the face and decided against it. Instead I took my right hand and swept our breakfast dishes to the floor. *Crash!* Plates, beautiful goblets, and barely eaten food were all over the kitchen. The chef stood in the doorway, speechless and perplexed, as she looked at the heap of broken dishes then at me and then at Madison.

"What in the world is going on in here?" Mom walked in dressed in black with a full face of make-up resembling a super model.

"Madison? McKenzie?" she asked again.

I packed up my books and iPad for school, then I stepped over the mess on the floor to grab my lunch off the counter.

Madison stood up and disappeared as well.

She drove her car to school and I drove mine, which was odd because in the past we drove to school together.

I stopped at Starbucks, so I wouldn't bump into Madison in the halls. Madison and I attended Scotch Kiss Prep as did many of our friends. As I walked through the immaculate halls and glass encased classrooms and offices I saw Madison in Advanced Creative Writing taking notes. Our eyes met, then I turned away, and continued toward my locker.

At noon classes were dismissed for lunch and I scrambled to my car and blasted Kanye West one of my favorite rappers. Seven minutes later, I sat at Bravo's at Bayshore Towncenter sipping lemon flavored ice-water.

"Hey, Beautiful, what's up?" Blane said before he kissed me on the cheek.

"I had a rough morning, but the day is shaping up."

"What happened?" he asked before taking his seat opposite mine.

"Madison and I had some words, she slapped me, and I pushed her."

"Damn. Again?" he asked while thumbing through the menu before shutting it.

"I know this is only the beginning of what's to come, but sometimes you have to live for you. I'm done living my life for everyone else. Perfect McKenzie is dead!" I said before being interrupted by the waitress and placing my order for lunch. We continued to talk.

"Graduation, college, then more college, and life begins. You have a bright future ahead of you and once you leave for Spelman College I think you'll be fine."

Ten minutes later our drinks and food arrived. I took a bite of the shrimp and grits appetizer.

“It sounds easy. I think the next few months will prove to be the most challenging for us both. And, if my parents force Madison to come with me to Spelman our plan will be ruined,” I said and stuffed a few truffle fries and a piece of filet mignon in my mouth.

“I think she’ll stay in Milwaukee and go to school her first year due to her mental state. Don’t you?” he asked wiping his mouth.

“It’s pretty much up to Madison and Mom at this point. I know Mom wants her to go to Spelman and Daddy wants her to stay here for a year. Mom will get her way, but we can hope and pray,” I said in between more bites of food. “What do you think your family will say about us dating? Do you think your mom will be disappointed?”

“My mom is not Mother Theresa! This we know for certain,” he said and dropped his head down a bit in shame.

“Don’t feel embarrassed. Your dad loved her until death did them apart. We can’t pick our families, but we can make a promise to each other to try to do better. And avoid the drama.” We laughed and gave each other a high five across the table and people glanced.

“Do you have any regrets about our decision?”

“Funny that you ask. I should, but I don’t. You can’t help who you fall in love with,” I said before he paid the check.

“I agree,” he said.

We walked to my car holding hands. I glanced at the beautiful and vivid purses in the window of Vera Bradley. I marveled at the fifty or so people who seemed to be busy getting help and buying new electronic gadgets in the Apple store. We kissed and agreed

to go to the movies later that evening. After I put my key in the ignition I glanced in my rearview mirror. Then I turned around for a better view. “Couldn’t be,” I said to myself.

I made a U-turn and crept closer to the subjects. I was close enough to hear them both. I thought I could even smell her perfume— Angel— a classic scent. My Mom wore that scent too! I’d turned down my music because I didn’t want to miss a sigh or yawn. I’d parked a few steps away from them, but they never noticed me. Their backs were to me. My phone began to vibrate.

It was Mom.

I didn’t answer. I rolled down my window. I watched. I waited a few seconds. He kissed her on the mouth. She kissed him back. She giggled. She wore a dazzling printed baby blue dress. And whore-red lipstick. They began walking and talking I imagined after having lunch. She was a bold woman. But he was bolder for going down that road again. I yelled out the window.

“Daddy! Daddy!”

They both turned to search for the familiar voice.

Chapter 5

Channing L. Golden-Bulter

Woman-to-Woman Defense

If my morning was any indication of how my day would progress, anything could happen. At first, when Chase mentioned Myanna's parole hearing, I had become enraged. Then after a glass of wine and thinking about our plights within the NBA, I realized they weren't too different. Although Myanna was younger, she came from an NBA family, as did I. Her dad was a head coach while she was growing up and so was mine. So we grew up around that life. It became a part of who we were destined to become. She had slept around as soon as she could and so did I. The biggest difference between Myanna and I is I married an NBA player after being his mistress for a number of years and bearing his children because his then wife couldn't.

Yes, Alonzo and I had fallen in love, but the ring didn't mean a thing. My husband was the biggest whore. He wasn't discreet and did whatever his dick leads him to do.

Myanna slept with Alonzo, Denim, and my ex-boyfriend, Cartier. It appeared as though she was on a secret mission to have every man I ever cared about. Perhaps she was because it was the NBA family way. We all cheated, but Myanna took it too far when she tried to kill me. A decade later I no longer blamed her. I hated my thoughts at times. But I'd been faced with the reality of Myanna getting out of prison soon.

After a few friends and I had beat her ass and left her for dead, I dismissed her like the trash I thought she was.

After years of therapy and learning to understand my past behaviors, I understood hers. I still didn't like her, but I understood. She wanted to be loved as did I. She wanted to continue on that supreme high of basketball-ism. And being a player's wife, girlfriend, or mistress was that next fix something like dope for a fiend. It was an addiction. A beautiful nightmare of sorts.

I walked to the mirror and I winked and my image winked back. I was pretty, but my journey was ugly. I started talking to myself. "One can become addicted to sitting courtside in designer fashions and carrying designer purses that cost as much as luxury cars. Having your face professionally done with the flyest make-up on game day was like drinking water," I said to the mirror. I combed my hair and did a model twirl before completing the make believe interview with myself. I knew I was being silly, but it helped me to understand me.

"It was our normal. She knew it and so did I. I couldn't continue to hold that poor girl hostage to a jail cell. How dreadful was I? I'd been a pretty little monster floating through life with privilege and a dash of saddityness that even a queen would frown upon."

I put my head down in shame. I took out my journal of random thoughts and wrote a few sentences:

I'm done fighting the Myanna Priestly war. Whatever her fate, I'll continue to raise my children and love my husband. By deciding to attend the hearing I'm going to close a chapter of my life that should've been closed years ago. I don't have any more hate to give Myanna. She can't have any more of my spirit to toy with.

I walked into the hearing and heads turned, necks twisted, and eyes stared as if I were a ghost. There were a few cameras positioned throughout the room which zoomed in and trailed every step and breath I took. It was quiet and eerie.

Chase winked at me before standing up and motioning for me to squeeze in between him and our lawyers. I sat and I stared. I glanced past the parole committee in search of the guest of honor, Myanna. Our eyes met and my heart began to race like Danica Patrick around a track, fast.

Myanna wore a blank canvas, just as did I. She dropped her head in a shame-filled way. I continued to look at her while see-sawing through a flurry of emotions ranging from hate to empathy back to hate. I shifted in my seat.

Chase put his arm around me.

A woman in front of me turned around and offered a friendly smile. Chase then whispered in my ear, "That's Natalia Nouvel, the FBI agent who shot Denim. Did you know she has a baby by him?"

I nodded and thought of Denim. I missed his smile and his smell. Denim was unapologetic throughout his young life; however, my beloved. Our affair was brief, but a pleasurable disruption nonetheless.

I glanced at the parole panel and then at Myanna as she stared. I wanted her to stop. It made me uncomfortable. Her looking at me reminded me of why we were all there. Our life choices had flipped our worlds upside down then around and back again all in the name of a game, basketball. We're like basketballs in the way that we bounced in and out-of-bounds.

"Fascinating," I said, not meaning to, though.

“Thank you for being patient. We’re waiting on one person to show up and give a brief statement before we continue with the hearing. We are using this time to read several victim impact statements,” a man in a Greenbay Packers’ tie said as he stood up.

“Is there anyone else who would like to speak before we will be forced to proceed?” the woman in the purple asked.

All eyes were on me, but I didn’t have anything further to add. Chase had turned in my victim impact statement, so I wasn’t prepared to do much. I had come for my own selfish gains, which was to look Myanna in her face a decade later, forgive her, and move on with my life.

Before I knew it, I was standing. I pulled down my dress. I handed Chase my purse.

Chase stood and asked, “Channing, are you sure you wanna do this?”

“I’m sure,” I said before I walked to the podium. I adjusted the microphone. I glanced at the panel then back at Myanna.

She stared.

I stared. But the words I wanted to say weren’t being said. Tears escaped my eyes. I wiped them away one by one. I took a deep breath and began to speak.

“Good afternoon. My name is Channing L. Golden-Butler,” I said just as yelling began outside this make-shift courthouse inside of the prison.

“Either you tell her or I will,” the unknown voice of a girl said.

“You need to stay in a child’s place,” a man said.

“Stay in a child’s place? How about you be faithful to your wife and family?”

“Sweetie, you shouldn’t speak to your dad in such a tone,” a female said.

“Bitch, you should close your legs to married men,” the girl’s voice said.

The doors opened and in walked Scottly Iverson— Denim’s widow—my husband, and my daughter, McKenzie.

I was confused by the exchange even though voices were no longer unfamiliar. My mind raced. My heart began to hurt. I dropped my head in shame. Alonzo didn’t have to tell me. I had known he was cheating again. I just didn’t want to believe it. I didn’t want my children to know and get caught up in the grown-up games some played. I walked towards McKenzie as I grabbed my purse from Chase. I threw my arm around McKenzie as we exited the courtroom with my husband a few steps behind.

Chapter 6

McKenzie Butler

Time-Out

Mom and I walked toward the elevator in complete silence. I didn't know what to say. Perhaps I should've stayed in a child's place. But I'm not a child. I'm a teenager a few months shy of graduating from high school. I'll be shipped off to some prestigious college or university with my American Express black card in hand— something I never leave home without. I stared at the elevator and watched the numbers light up floor by floor. I glanced at mom just as dad approached her. I could see it in her Chinese— like eyes; she was on the verge of tears, but she was a soldier and would hold it all together as she always did because she never knew who was watching.

“Channing, it's not what you think,” Dad whispered in her ear.

“Alonzo, not here. Not in public. Not in front of McKenzie,” Mom said.

“Why not here? McKenzie was grown enough to run and tell it, so let's just deal with it right now!”

“Daddy, don't get mad at me cause you got caught cheating! Haven't you learned your lesson yet?”

“How dare you drag our daughter into your whorish shenanigans!” Mom said as she walked closer to me and away from Daddy.

“McKenzie and Madison both need to stay in a child's place and concentrate on graduating and go to great schools. I'm a grown ass man and if my teenage daughters happen to see me having lunch they should come speak and not run and tell a half truth.”

The elevator finally arrived and the three of us stepped inside. I pushed the ground floor button and stood in one corner. We were on the tenth floor so I braced myself for the fireworks. I popped my ear buds into my iPhone and pretended to be listening to Jay-Z, but I wasn't. I glanced at Mom just as she was taking a deep breath and the championship fight started.

“Alonzo, as soon as you get home pack your shit and get the fuck out!”

“Channing, how are you just gonna put me out of my damn house? I bought that house for us. I'm not getting ready to do this back and forth shit with you because of what somebody think they saw.”

“It wasn't just somebody it was our daughter. McKenzie, what in the hell happened? What exactly did you see?”

“What sane grown ass woman would ask her teenage daughter such a question? This shit is unreal. Maybe I will pack my shit and go. The love has fizzled out of our marriage years ago.”

“Funny how that wasn't the case last night and every other night since we met. Of all women why her, Alonzo?” Mom asked as she stepped in Dad's face and pointed her finger.

The elevator stopped. We tried to walk off, but couldn't. We could barely move as paparazzi invaded our personal space. Mom and Dad held hands and as far as the public could tell we were one big happy family. Lies. So many orchestrated lies. We were all great actresses and actors. It was us. Our lives had two sides, public and private. And now, it was show time! My ear buds popped out. My left shoe almost got stuck in the

elevator, and Mom went into publicist mode. But we could barely get off the elevator because the paparazzi had us barricaded inside.

Then Mom snapped. “Excuse you all! It’s illegal to block our entrance out of an elevator. Can you imagine the lawsuit you could face?” Mom said as flashing lights made me dizzy.

Finally, a path was made kinda like the way Moses parted the red sea.

I’d totally forgotten how big this case was! Everyone wanted to know if Myanna was going to be released from prison. Hell, so did I. Dad grabbed Mom by the waist and I was on the other side of mom holding her hand. I hated the paparazzi and I wasn’t even famous, but my parents were comfortable with the bright lights, microphones, and cameras being shoved in their faces. Not me; I wasn’t a media darling like, Madison and Mom.

“Channing, so how do you feel about Myanna possibly getting released on parole?” a woman reporter asked.

“Channing, if Myanna gets released will you hire a security team?” a reporter in a green jacket asked as he snapped countless pictures.

An unknown reporter shoved the microphone towards Daddy.

“Alonzo, do you have any comments concerning your former mistress, Myanna Priestly?”

The three of us walked as fast as we could to Daddy’s car. We were trying our very best not to stop and let them get to us or “rattle us,” as Mommy would say. I remember being trained by mommy years ago when Denim Iverson died. It was me,

Madison, and Alonzo Jr. sitting in the family room. She taught us the “no comment” game and we’ve been playing it ever since. Everyone except Madison.

Daddy unlocked his car from a half a block away, so we could just hop in. This was our life, but I had never become comfortable with it. The beautiful sunny day, belied the great turmoil of our personal lives. We were five footsteps from the car when a CNN SUV pulled up curbside. Many of the paparazzi had started walking back towards the facility in case other very important people came out— like my uncle Chase. The media loved him too. The presence of the CNN SUV caused another frenzy. The paparazzi who were leaving made a U-turn. Everyone knew that if CNN showed up some type of interview or comment would be next.

Mr. Silver Fox, Anderson Cooper, and his crew gracefully opened their doors so cool and sly you’d have sworn that President Barack Obama was the star passenger.

“Channing, can I have a few minutes of your time?” Anderson asked as he invaded her personal space.

They did the Hollywood cheek to cheek. He giggled.

She giggled.

Dad hopped into the car and so did I. Before I could roll down my window to listen to mom and Anderson Cooper, Dad started tripping. Go figure.

“McKenzie, why would you worry your mom with such foolishness? Don’t you have her thinking I’m cheating on her when I’m not!”

“Whatever, Dude! I know what I saw. You and Scottly were standing outside that restaurant kissing. Tongue kissing. And if my memory is correct weren’t you cheating

with her when her husband Denim died? Didn't he try to shoot you before and that's how he died?"

"Where are you getting this from, McKenzie? Did your mother tell you that?"

"Mom didn't have to tell me. I Googled it! I know all your little dirty secrets. You're a great provider, an okay dad, but one lousy ass husband."

To avoid being questioned any further I decided I'd rather hang out and watch Mom and Anderson Cooper. I opened the door, threw on my Gucci shades and sat on the hood of the car. Dad was fuming, but I didn't care. He was a womanizer. He's taken my mom through hell. Quite frankly I was fed up with his cheating ways and I was just his daughter. But I can never forget that my mom was once my dad's mistress, so if that saying is true, the same way you get him you will lose him, probably applies here.

My phone rang and my uncle Chase's name flashed across the screen. Uncle Chase was still inside the hearing with Myanna Priestly. I hoped he had good news; they would keep that psycho locked up. Every time Myanna's name was mentioned my mom would disappear and go onto the balcony in her room and smoke a cigarette. Myanna was the only person or thing that made her so nervous. Not my dad cheating, not Madison cutting herself, not her famous clients getting pulled over with drugs in their Bentleys in Beverly Hills and such. But Myanna Priestly would cause her to smoke a cigarette or two, even though she didn't smoke. If Uncle Chase was calling my phone, so I could tell my mother that Myanna was getting her "get out of jail free card," Lord have mercy on us all.

Chapter 7

Madison Butler

Technical Foul

I walked in the house after school. The chef and the maid were in the family room watching CNN on TV. Mom was on live with Anderson Cooper.

“Channing, what are your thoughts on Myanna Priestly getting out early?”

Anderson asked.

“At this point I’m numb, Anderson. I think I’ve healed and did pretty well with my life and the lives of my clients. I’ll just have to trust our great criminal justice system on this one. Everyone deserves a second chance. I know I’ve been given plenty.”

I stood as if in a trance. I stared at mom on CNN. She was awesome at being a publicist. She was so in her element when confronted by the media. I loved her more right now because of her grit.

“How will you protect your family? Do you think a restraining order will be enough to keep her from contacting you, your husband, and your children?”

“I hope so, Anderson. I hope so. I can’t spend all my waking hours worried about what Myanna Priestly is, or is not, going to do. All I can do is live my life by being a great mom, wife, and publicist to my clients. I believe in God and I think everything will work out for the best. It’s always good to see you. Take Care.”

Mom was such a diva when it came to handling chaos. I could only hope to be half as graceful as she. Seeing as everyone was so focused on Myanna, this was the perfect opportunity to ramble through McKenzie’s room. She’d been acting extra odd as of late and that fight we had this morning made me wonder what was really good with

this new attitude. She'd been going out a lot and really getting all dolled up, but I wondered for who or why. I had about ten or fifteen minutes before everyone came home, so that was the perfect opportunity to find McKenzie's beloved diary! I stopped by the kitchen to grab a cold drink and sandwich from the afternoon snack platter. I tried to rush up the back stairs.

"Madison, wait a second. Come back here. Did you take your medicine this afternoon?" the chef asked.

"No, but I'll take it later."

"No, you need to take it now. What's the rush to go upstairs?"

"I misplaced my homework and I'm going to my room to see if I left it on my desk."

"Take your medicine then go upstairs. You know you have to take your medicine as soon as you get home. Why must we go through this daily? Sheesh."

"I'm not taking no damn medicine! And you can't make me. I'm going upstairs."

"Really? Should I call your mom or dad?"

"Call God! Call Beyoncé. Call Obama. Call Barbie and Ken. I'm not taking no damn medicine right now."

"You better watch your mouth little fast tail girl. I've been around here putting up with your smart ass mouth for far too long. You will take your medicine and right damn now otherwise I'm calling your mother!"

"Well, call her then. I'll take it when she gets home. What's the big deal it's just medicine. Every time I take it it makes me sleepy. I need to find my homework first."

“Go ahead, Madison, find the homework and come right back down and take your medicine before your parents come home.”

I ran up the back staircase two at a time to McKenzie’s plush room, which was decked out in art deco designs and collectable Barbie Dolls. I sat on her bed and bounced up and down for a minute or two because she was such a neat freak, so this would cause her to have a fit. Then I looked under her monogrammed pillow cases. No diary. How odd. I started lifting up her mattress and still no diary. I thought I heard a car pull up, but it couldn’t be Mom and Dad that quick. Mom had just been on CNN. I stopped and I listened.

Nothing.

Great. I proceeded to the lighted curio that took up an entire wall and opened one door at a time. Open. Close. Open. Close. Still no diary. I got mad and started talking to all the Barbie Dolls. Maybe I should’ve taken my medicine. I wished I was a Barbie. At least she had Ken. Blane had broken up with me, which made me so sad.

“Hey, Barbie! How are you today? Where is Ken? Did he leave you, too? Where is McKenzie’s diary?”

The dolls wouldn’t answer me. They were soooooo stuck up! Bourgeois.

I continued to open every door to the magical curio. But it wasn’t until I opened up the last door did I see the infamous diary. “Bingo,” I said louder than I had meant to. I grabbed a handful of the collectible Barbies for shits and giggles and sat with them Indian style in front of the curio. McKenzie adored her dolls and had been collecting them forever. Her and Mom. I turned to the last page and began to read.

I'd read for five minutes. Only two pages though. I'd seen a figure similar to my own out of the corner of my eye walking towards me. Her fist was balled up. She'd caught me!

"Madison, what the hell are you doing reading my diary? And you took my Barbie's out of the curio? You are crazy! Give me my diary before I fuck you up!" McKenzie said.

I got up off the floor and punted the Barbies like an NFL kicker would. I ran as fast as I could with the paisley, Vera Bradley diary in my right hand. After pumping and faking a few times I managed to end up a few steps away from the grand library and study. But before I could dip off and close the door I ran straight into the chef.

"Shit! You scared me!"

"What on earth is going on? Did you take your medicine yet?"

McKenzie crept up behind me like a trained killer and tackled me to the carpet!

"What the what?" the chef said as she tried to pull us apart.

"Get off me, McKenzie!"

"Give me my diary otherwise I will make you bleed! If you think you hurt yourself by cutting I will put you in the hospital! Try me."

"I kicked your Barbies! I kicked your Barbies!"

"You are sick! Give me my diary," she said before we started a game of tug a war.

"I read your diary, and I'm telling everyone your dirty little secrets. You whore!"

"Give me my diary, Madison! You ain't that damn crazy! I promise you if you don't give me my diary I'm going to mop this house with you. I mean that!" She tried to

snatch it, but I held it tighter and kicked my legs for dear life. McKenzie was pissed, so she started swinging on me, one blow to my face then another to my gut.

“Ouch!” I said.

She punched me again and again.

My nose started to bleed. Blood. I loved the feel of it against my skin. It made me feel alive. Thick and sticky. Dark red. I tried to get up, but she kicked me back down.

She threw another punch like Floyd Mayweather would throw, but this time to the side of my face. *Pow!*

My ear. I heard ringing. Singing. Barbie. Elmo. Beyoncé. Jay-Z. Charlie Brown and Lucy. Dorothy and Toto. Then I blacked out.

Chapter 8

Myanna Priestly

In-Bound Pass

Today was the day that I'd taste it! Freedom, I would dance a graceful waltz or a mean jitterbug once my designer heels touched the pavement. But right now my most urgent task was packing a few belongings. And getting the hell out of this depressing prison cell. I stood under the drab lightning as I glared in the shatterproof mirror that was permanently attached to the cement prison walls of my cell at Taycheedah Correctional Institution. Talking about non-attractive décor. I wouldn't miss the darkness that I'd been surrounded by for years. I stood close to the mirror and winked at myself. "Damn, you still got it, Boo!"

I leaned to my right then pressed play on the cheap radio. I danced in the mirror and imagined myself as the star of a MTV or BET music video. I looked pretty. My hair was bouncing and behaving just like one of the hair commercials they showed on TV during the daytime. My lip gloss was popping and yes, I was going home just like Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz*.

My roommate, Angel, walked in and I continued my video girl dance moves. She stopped for a moment then rolled her green eyes. Angel walked away.

I paid her absolutely no mind though because she was supposed to be jealous. Hell, who wouldn't be? I was Myanna Priestly. She was filled with envy and hate because I was going home, back to a life filled with NBA players, designer clothes, mansions, courtside seats, red carpets, and Channing.

"I see you're in the mirror fantasizing again," Angel said.

“I’m not sure fantasizing would be the correct word choice.”

“Myanna, please don’t believe I have a reason to actually hate on you, my sister.”

“Jealous much?” I asked as I leaned closer to the mirror and kissed myself,

“Muah!”

Angel walked past me as if I’d stolen something from her.

I giggled while dipping it low— stripper dance moves, in the mirror— as I practiced for the latest and greatest NBA baller to fall prey to the fabulousness that was I!

“Let’s keep it all the way real, Boo. Just because you were born with a sterling silver Tiffany’s spoon in your mouth, which forced you to have diamond studded braces by ten, doesn’t make you better than anyone else.”

“Girl, stop playing, and selling Disneyland Dreams to yourself. We’ve been roommates for years and I’ve treated you something like a sister. We all know your family disowned you after you robbed those banks.”

“Yes, they did, Myanna. My family isn’t well off or wealthy like yours, but they’re descent folk.”

“Just how great are they by leaving you here to rot in this miserable prison?”

“What kind of parents can you brag about? You grew up rich, learning how to drink out of a sippy cup from NBA courtside seats, you are Ivy League educated, cultured, and truly a trust fund kid. But dig this, you shot one of the most famous publicists in the world because you were jealous?” Angel asked with a smirk on her face while sitting on the bottom bunk.

“But guess who’s going home, my dear friend? Not you, but me! I can’t help it my daddy has money and clout. I’m not apologizing for being a have and not a have not.

I'll still look out for you, but only if you play nice," I added while she unbraided my signature jail French braids.

"Play nice? Girl, get your life. I can't believe they're going to let you out to do the same thing you did before. You know what though? I'm glad you get a second chance," Angel said while organizing the books and trinkets I left her.

"Why thank you, Boo. I was supposed to have another parole board hearing, but money talks and bullshit walks."

I turned off the music before I unplugged the radio then threw it on her bunk.

"I won't be needing this radio nor any of my books. You can thank me later for the parting gifts."

"Oh...how kind of you. I hope you take your Monopoly 'get out of jail free card' and do something great and not illegal or shady," she said as she flipped through my favorite book, *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi.

"Me getting out is favor to the world. I'm the spice of many lives. And revenge will be mine! Channing has no idea what's in store for her and her family."

"Everyone is special to somebody. You can't let revenge dictate your life though. You shot that woman in a church, Myanna! Please own your role in all this," Angel said while trying to alphabetize her new treasures, hundreds of books and magazines.

"I shot that bitch because I had no choice after her and her stuck up friends disfigured my face! But thank God for plastic surgery. I'm back and looking flawless."

"But you're still obsessed with Channing after all these years. I would like to suggest to you that you get a life outside of NBA basketball."

“A life?” You mean like a job or a hobby? I guess I could build a women’s transitional home, so when women like us get out of prison they could come there and transition back into society. I could help them find jobs and housing.”

“That would really help many women. It would be a great community service project for you and your family. You could even write a book about all of your experiences, from red carpet to prison cells,” she said before we both broke out in laughter.

“I’m going to miss you,” I said as I heard footsteps approaching.

“I’m going to miss you more,” she said.

The prison guard, Miss Lee, punched in her magic code and the steel door opened. I walked out, but not before looking back at my home for the last five years. Wow! I was really getting released. I couldn’t wait to see my Daddy, my twin sister, a basketball game, a mall, a credit card, and designer lipstick. I hated cheap shit. And in prison that’s all we were afforded and it didn’t matter how much money you had. Soon I’d be sitting pretty again. But perhaps I would miss Angel because she had become like a sister to me. I’d miss the structure too. When I didn’t have structure, I had learned I kinda spiraled out of control. Prison equaled structure on a platinum level.

“Come on, girl, it’s your day,” Miss Lee said as she stood and held the iron door. “Stop dragging your feet, Preistly. I hope I don’t see you back in here either. Make something out of your life. You’re a pretty girl and you educated. What did you do with all your books and magazines?”

“I left them all for my roommate. You know I taught her how to read a year ago. So they went to a great person. She’ll enjoy escaping this prison life by reading great works.”

“Well that was mighty kind of you, girl. I’m proud of you ‘cause lord knows you were a selfish something when you first came in here,” Miss Lee said.

“I know, Miss Lee, I know. But you really helped me find my way. Just glad to be leaving this hell hole though.”

We walked into the check-out section of the prison. I was escorted into a tiny room and given my clothes that my sister had dropped off for me to put on. I pulled out a beautiful hot pink and purple silk Hermes scarf. It was super soft. The room was nice and painted tan. There was a modest sink and a real mirror. I opened up the bag Miss Lee handed me and felt like a kid on Christmas day. I was excited. I was going home.

I dressed quickly throwing on a multi-colored red, white, and blue wrap dress. And the shoes, navy patent leather Christian Louboutin. The final accessories sealed the deal— pearl earrings and a necklace from Tiffany’s. I started to throw my old belongings in the oversize Vera Bradley duffle when I noticed an Hermes handbag in the bottom of the bag. Yes, God! I was back. I stared in the mirror and the transformation from prison clothes to luxury attire sparked an overwhelming flood of emotions.

I didn’t know what my life would become. I had so many mixed emotions about having shot Channing. For years I had wanted to seek revenge on her, but today I doubted that she was worth risking my freedom for. I guess all the medicine that they’d doped me up with was really working, but after today I wasn’t taking anymore of anybody’s

medicine. They couldn't make me. There was a tap on the door and I knew it was Miss Lee.

“Take care of yourself, Priestly! And stay out of trouble. Make us proud.”

“Alright, Miss Lee, thanks for everything. I's free at last. Free at last. Thank God I'm free at last,” I said as I walked pass the heavy prison gates then paused to listen to them lock as they closed behind me. I sashayed down the long path. I blew an intimate kiss towards the beautiful baby blue sky. I hopped into a white Lexus coupe that waited curbside for me. My boy toy smiled from the driver's side as he puffed a Cuban cigar.

An hour later Alonzo Butler and I was sexing and flexing at a five star hotel. My sister called the media. Alonzo had no idea of the storm he'd just walked into. Hell had no fury like a woman scorned.

Chapter 9

Channing L. Golden-Butler

Second Quarter

McKenzie, Madison, and I left our home excited to be headed to Mitchell Field airport. Planning to by-pass the normalities of regular folk flying commercial, we chartered a private jet. At the airport, a few paparazzi spotted us and followed us until we reached the tarmac; however, I was unbothered. Madison and I smiled and waved, but McKenzie pushed up her designer sunglasses and pretended not to see them. After all these years I just didn't understand how a child of mine would despise the infamous paparazzi. They were our friends on most days, but don't get it twisted, they could be a bit much if there was a breaking story.

McKenzie was just different.

Once settled on the plane the flight attendants served us a light lunch and we chatted.

"Okay, so what happened the other day with McKenzie's diary?" I asked before tasting a spoonful of my chicken chili prepared by the jet's award winning chef.

"Mom, really? As much as I wanted to go Las Vegas to see my brother play in this championship game, I wasn't looking forward to the 'mommy daughters' meaningful conversation time. Madison stole my diary and read it since you're asking," McKenzie said, sipping her strawberry lemonade in a Tiffany's goblet.

"Madison, is this true? Why on earth would you invade your sister's privacy in such a grand way? What's your deal?"

“What’s my deal? Do you really want to know? Because this will change the way you look at your own flesh and blood. She’s a traitor and a whore!” Madison said with so much bass in her voice, it startled the flight attendant and almost caused her to drop a bowl of tortilla soup.

“Madison, you read my diary because you’re jealous of me and you always have been. Ever since we started high school and I was more popular than you, you’ve been trying to sabotage my life! You are such a hater, my dear.”

“Hate on you for what though? Like for real though. You don’t have a boyfriend, so just how important are you? So what you got into Spelman College,” Madison said while lifting her petite arms as her charm bracelet jingled and jangled. She raised her invisible pom poms something like a Dallas Cowboy Cheerleader.

“Let’s lay everything out and look for a solution shall we? All this back and forth with sarcastic comments like a tennis match surely won’t move us along as a family,” I said, dabbing the corners of my mouth with the cheetah print, Kate Spade, cloth napkin.

“Madison, why did you find it important to search through my room for my diary then read it? And why in all of playland did you fuck with my Barbies? I think you really are crazy! I’m just saying.”

“You know damn well...”

“Watch your mouth, Madison. I didn’t raise you to use profanity at your leisure. I’ve spent nearly a quarter million dollars on yours and McKenzie’s college prep education. Please use your words gracefully.”

“Sorry, Mom. She was walking around like she was Queen Barbie by dressing differently and wearing more perfume and make-up than usual. So I followed her the day we argued when she left school for lunch.”

“And what did you see? Was this the day that McKenzie caught your dad kissing Scottly Iverson in broad daylight?”

McKenzie shifted in her seat, spilling her soup and strawberry lemonade everywhere. Madison giggled. She knew McKenzie was irritated and bothered. I pressed a button on the leather console to ring for the flight attendant. She sashayed over and wiped up the mess that McKenzie had created before she disappeared into the gallery.

“What did I see? Do you really want to know, Mommy Dearest?”

“Why would you refer to me as Mommy Dearest? Am I that bad?” I asked, clutching my Harry Winston pearls.

“No, I’m just playing. I’m using my royal words per your request. That is all.”

“Funny. Ha ha. Please go on with the story.”

“I saw your precious McKenzie having an intimate lunch with my ex-boyfriend, Blane Iverson.”

I leaned forward and asked, “What did you say? Who was she with? Oh...Lord help us!”

“Yep, little Miss Captain of the cheerleading squad and soon to be Spelman College student was all up in Blane’s face. I saw ya’ll kissing too!” Madison shouted. She stood up and threw her napkin at McKenzie then rushed into the lavatory.

“Oh...wow! How could you? How could you date your sister’s ex-boyfriend, McKenzie? That’s inexcusable and downright nasty, as well as desperate. She was pregnant by him. Who are you?”

“Who am I? Really? I am my mother’s child! That’s who I am. Point blank. And. Period.”

“So I’m to blame for your shameful actions? I think not, Babygirl. Don’t blame your inability to do right versus doing wrong on me. They were my mistakes though and I admitted that so you’d learn from them.”

I sat back in the comfortable leather seat that the private jet had offered and stared out the window at the beautifulness of friendlier skies. I wanted the peace to be still and take over, but I knew in my heart this conversation was just beginning. My life was a mess and my daughters were at odds with one another over Blane Iverson— Denim Iverson’s son. How could I tip their hands that I’d thought that Blane had used them both to hurt me because he blamed me and Alonzo for his dad’s untimely death? I rang the flight attendant again, but this time for a stronger beverage.

“Can you bring me a glass of sweet, white wine? What do you have?”

“Yes, Ma’am. We have an array of specialty champagnes and wines in most flavors. May I suggest Birthday Cake Wine in cheesecake flavor?”

“Yes, that would be most lovely, thank you,” I said, glancing at Madison as she slid back into her seat. I caressed her hand ever so gently letting her know that this too would pass.

“Mom, you act as though I’m some sort of slut.”

“Well if the shoes fit you might as well dance in them,” Madison said before throwing both of her arms high in the air. She imitated an amazing video girl’s dance moves. Something like Rihanna in the *Straight off the Runway* video. Something like Beyoncé in the *Drunk in Love* video.

This may sound weird, but sometimes Blane seems as though he has some type of, ummm..., hatred towards our family. I may be wrong in feeling this way; however, his motives are suspect at best. I mean, Madison, I’m not really feeling Blane the way that you or mom may think I am. How gross would that be though?” McKenzie confessed.

“So are you like playing a peeping game? Trying to stay close to him to try and figure out what his true motives are? I guess you could be right because what guy do you know that would date one sister then date the other one? How shady is that?” Madison said. She appeared in deep thought as she twirled her Gucci ring around and around her finger.

“We can never forget how much Denim Iverson meant to his family, friends, and the NBA community. Yes, his death was untimely and unfortunate, but we must never forget that he tried to kill your father,” I said.

“Why did he try to kill Daddy?” McKenzie quizzed, then nicely began putting Madison’s hair in a ballerina bun, something she hadn’t done for her sister in months.

“Denim was my client. He was averaging a triple double in basketball every night. Then endorsements started to come in faster than we could keep up. We started spending more and more time together and one thing lead to another.”

“And Daddy was sexing and flexing Denim’s wife and he got mad? Oh...wow! How hypocritical of Denim,” Madison said in a sing song sort of way while staring into her Swarovski crystal, compact mirror and glossing her lips in doll house, pink lip lacquer by Chanel.

“I was never Blane’s biggest fan. I tolerated him out of love for his dad not because he was likable and had a charming personality. He always acted as though he was entitled. I mean he was, but he just took it to another level,” I said.

“This is all so crazy,” McKenzie added before the pilot boomed over the Bose speakers announcing the weather in Las Vegas, sunny and 93 degrees.

“Please buckle your seatbelts and prepare for landing. I hope you’ve enjoyed riding with us. Enjoy your stay in Las Vegas. And remember what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas!”

We buckled up then packed up our electronic devices. However, I noticed on my iPhone that I had an email, which read:

Hi Mom, I’m sending you this email because I know you and my sisters are on the jet on your way to see me. The police are at my condo! I think I might be going to jail because two girls I was seeing both ended up over here at the same damn time. They started fighting and I tried to break it up. But see Gisele, who you met last time you were here, was so mad that she told the police I hit her. Mom, she lied. I swear on everything I ain’t hit that girl. I know better. As soon as ya’ll land call my cell phone. But yo, Mom, if I don’t answer please call Coach Jace. I’m sorry, Mom. I do know better. I do.

Your son,

Alonzo Jr. #19

I took a deep breath and turned my phone off as to not interfere with the plane's signals during landing. I prepared for the worst mentally, but I was silently praying for the best. I hadn't planned on flying to Vegas to do public relations work, especially on behalf of my son just before one of the biggest games of his college career. I prayed that my son wasn't in jail for any bullshit. Please God. Not my son. Not for allegedly hitting a woman, which could ruin his chances of getting drafted in June. I prayed that the Lord above would have mercy on us. I put my head down and continued to pray. Something I had been doing more and more as of late.

Chapter 10

Madison Butler

Boxing-Out

I'm not sure what's going on, but whatever it was, it involved my brother, Alonzo Jr. While walking through the airport, Mom had been on the phone with Coach Jace, the District Attorney in Las Vegas, and some girl named Gisele that claimed my brother hit her. This was all so bizarre. My brother was super sweet and would never hit a girl! He knew better.

Mom was like super pissed. We jumped in a waiting SUV and zoomed to the University of Las Vegas Nevada to meet Coach Jace. As soon we pulled up to the arena our friends, the paparazzi, greeted us with flashing lights and microphones.

"Channing, is it true that your son is in the Las Vegas County Jail on domestic abuse charges against his pregnant girlfriend, Gisele Grant? THE Gisele Grant as in Mayoral candidate Giavonni Grant's daughter?" A reporter asked nearly tripping mom. Coach Jace grabbed her arm before pushing the rude reporter out of her personal space.

McKenzie and I followed behind Mom listening to her every word. Without saying anything to the many roaming reporters we jumped back into the waiting SUV and headed to the jail.

"Mom, look over there," I yelled as Mom, Coach Jace, and McKenzie whipped their necks to the far right, in the direction in which I was pointing.

"Driver, if you don't mind please pull up across the street where the small crowd of reporters and photographers are gathered," Mom said.

We walked up to the bootleg press conference and to our surprise there was Alonzo Jr.'s little girlfriend, Giselle, with her political, Vegas show dad. I'm not sure why on earth they would be standing in front of the Las Vegas County Jail giving a press conference. Who were these people on the grand scale of life again? Nobody.

We jumped out of the SUV and hurried over to the podium, which caused a frenzy when the paparazzi noticed Mom.

"Channing, is it true? Is your son in jail for slapping his pregnant girlfriend because he got caught cheating with a stripper? Is he going to miss the game tomorrow, which will surely determine his number in the NBA draft next month?" a Malibu Barbie look alike reporter asked.

"What was your name again, Ma'am?" Mom asked while sliding Gisele and her dad out of the way. It was quite obvious they were trying to milk their five minutes of fame for twenty-four hours to help sway voters. But not on our watch. And not at my brother's expense.

I walked toward Gisele Grant with McKenzie on my heels the same way we used to do when we were little. While Mom was handling the media I took it upon myself to have a few words with Miss Opportunist, Gisele Grant.

"Hi, Gisele, do you have a few minutes? I'm Madison, this is McKenzie and we're Alonzo Jr.'s sisters," I said proudly, before extending my well-manicured hand toward Gisele.

"Hello to you both. I've heard so much about the two of you. My gosh, Alonzo Jr. simply adores you two Barbies to death," Gisele said in between poses for the paparazzi.

I stepped closer to Gisele with McKenzie following my lead. “Gisele, cut the bullshit out, Boo! I know damn well my brother didn’t put his hands on you. I’m pretty sure, if any licks were exchanged, it was your abusive ass. He told us when he was home for Easter that you’re extremely aggressive and he even feared you because of that.”

“Excuse you! Feared me? Oh...no, Ma’am, if your brother feared me, he never would’ve gotten caught up with that stripper, but he did.”

“Okay, so you mad because he got caught with a stripper or he hit you? What really happened, Gisele? You might as well tell the truth now because if this comes out later as a lie or some sort of twisted political plot or scheme to help your dad, my mom will ruin his career just for fun.”

“Nobody’s scared of your mom, but you crazy, Madison. Yes, I heard all about you, Boo.”

“The only crazy person in our space today is you. So stay in your lane before I put you in your lane. Never forget who our parents are,” McKenzie said before taking off her sunglasses and smiling pretty for the flashing lights— odd because she hated the paparazzi, but we’re doing whatever it took to help our brother.

“Gisele, if you don’t tell these people right now that you lied because you were angry and jealous I guarantee you that you will never as long as I am alive grace another Victoria Secret’s fashion show or catalog. And most importantly, your dad’s campaign will be a bust. I’d hate to see him lose because your feelings were hurt,” I said with bass in my voice and malice in my heart toward this non-relevant sleeping beauty.

“Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, I wanted to take a moment and clear up any misconceptions concerning Alonzo Butler Jr. and I. He didn’t hit me nor did he cheat on

me. His family is here, and I am looking forward to his release, thank you,” Gisele said before doing her infamous hair flip.

“I’m here to comfort my beautiful daughter, Gisele, through this trying time. If she says that Alonzo didn’t hit her then I must believe her. However, domestic abuse is serious! And as your mayoral candidate I sympathize for women and men who are or have been abused in any way. Never be afraid to tell your story,” Giavonni Grant stated as if he were presenting a new policy or bill. But he appeared slightly nervous as he wiped the sweat from his forehead with a navy, monogrammed handkerchief. He was caught off guard by his daughter’s lie.

“Excuse me, Sir. I’m not sure what you and your opportunist daughter have in mind, but whatever it is I’m not going for it. How dare your daughter accuse my son and my client of domestic abuse, which is serious enough to ruin any one’s life then retract your original statement then try to forge ahead with a domestic abuse agenda. Is this some type of political game, Sir, to help garner a few more votes?” Channing said as she glanced down at a text message on her iPhone.

While this impromptu press conference at the Las Vegas County Jail continued to go back and forth like one of Floyd Mayweather’s press conferences before one of his HBO or Showtime fights, Alonzo Jr. was released and driven to a secret location to rest and prepare for what could be his final college game. Mom gave McKenzie and me that let’s *Rock N Roll* look. Before you knew it we’d found our way curbside, to the SUV.

Chapter 11

Alonzo Butler Jr.

Pump N Fake

I couldn't believe I'd almost ruined my chances of playing in the championship game! Absolutely ludicrous. I had to be careful of the women I allowed to infiltrate my circle or my personal space. Damn. Gisele Grant was my weakness, but my mom had been telling me not to let her or any woman ruin what I was groomed to be, an NBA All-Star, just like my dad. I was almost there. One month away from the NBA Draft.

I'd just stepped out of the shower when I heard the condo alarm beep. I could smell her perfume instantly, Back to Black by Kilian. I continued to dry off then lotion up with Luxe Oil, whipped Shea butter. I knew it was mom with Coach Jace and my sisters. Damn.

Facing my mom was like facing the *Wizard of Oz* kinda— or God. She was my everything and more. My greatest weakness and my hero. I adored her and my sisters. Ever since I'd been old enough to walk and talk and dribble an official NBA basketball I knew I wanted to be a professional basketball player. I grew up sitting courtside. I learned to walk in a pair of Jordan basketball sneakers. I took my first steps during half-time of a NBA All-Star game. Basketball pumped through my veins and made my heart beat. Basketball and my mother. My family and basketball. Hell basketball!

I walked into the living room and mom and Coach Jace were sitting comfortably across from one another. Mom acknowledged me by sashaying towards me and giving me a hug only a mother could. I melted in her arms even at nineteen years old. Tears welled in my eyes, but I blinked them back. I'd come so close to ruining so much. My

blueprint had been so simple, but I'd allowed a conniving floozy to come in and almost get me kicked out the game of basketball for life. Lesson well learned.

"Mom, I apologize."

"Babe, you have to be more careful. You have too much to lose. I'm not saying don't enjoy your life, but never forget who you are and where you are going."

"I know, Mom. I know. It won't happen again. I should know better. I don't want issues such as this to become more relevant than what I do on the court and in the community."

"Babe, I'm not mad at you or disappointed. I just want you to understand that if this situation had gone the other way and you were charged and labeled as a woman beater. One situation true or false can dictate your livelihood and longevity in the league. I know this will be a small issue to many, but all of the teams know and understand that you're a great young man and have been groomed for the NBA."

"Mom, I didn't touch Gisele though. She just lied. How could someone lie like that and almost ruin my life?"

"It happens every day and will continue to happen. You, my son, will have to be very careful with the women you choose to date or spend time with. Rule number one is to never date a woman who doesn't have just as much to lose as you do."

"Gisele was furious because I was spending time with another woman, but I really care about the other woman. Most importantly she doesn't have an agenda, but Gisele does. For six or seven months she had no clue I was a star college basketball player. And we just built a true and tried friendship."

"Are you telling me that you might be in love with a stripper?"

“Yes and no. She’s not a stripper. I mean she’s no longer a stripper. No matter what happens with us I told her I would pay for school as long as she needed.”

“Alonzo Jr, you’re not making my job easy, Sweetie!”

“Come on, Mom, you’re the biggest and most sought after celebrity publicist. I know you can spin this story especially if I kill it in the game tomorrow. Then what they gonna say? I deserve the number one or two spot in the NBA draft next month,” I said walking towards the door because someone was really giving the doorbell the business.

“Remember you’re only as great as your last game. So you’ll have to go into that championship game tomorrow like your life is on the line. Because it is. Your spot in the NBA draft is absolutely at risk,” my mother said.

“Gisele, why would you come here after what you did to me?” I asked, then I stepped aside to let my mother and sisters handle her for the last time.

Chapter 12

Channing L. Golden-Butler

Technical Foul

Alonzo Jr. was having an amazing game against Kentucky. My son was balling and working exceptionally hard to earn the best spot possible in the NBA Draft next month. I smiled from ear to ear as I sat behind NBA scouts that I'd known for years.

"Defense! Defense!" I cheered before Alonzo Jr. stole the ball and ran in the other direction for a sweet lay-up. The entire University of Las Vegas Nevada was standing on their feet cheering for my son.

"Channing, you must be so proud of your son! I had no idea this kid was the real deal," the Miami Heat scout said. "I'm only here because your brother, Chase, sent me. I'm sure he'll be going number one in the draft after the numbers that he put up this afternoon."

"He should go one or two easily. And I just say two because of the issues yesterday. I almost wanna say that charge from the girlfriend was a set-up of some sort, Channing. Look into it," the Lakers' scout added.

"I guess it couldn't hurt," I said to myself before I waved good-bye to the other players' families and friends.

We waited for Alonzo Jr. in the friends and family lounge along with a few NBA scouts who wanted to ask him some questions concerning yesterday's domestic abuse allegations.

"Great game, Alonzo Jr. How excited are you to be a part of the NBA Draft soon?" The Brooklyn Nets' scout asked him.

“I’m very excited to put yesterday’s fiction behind me and concentrate on what I’ve worked on my entire life. Once I get to attend the NBA Draft as Oprah would say, ‘You have finally met your moment in life.’ At least one of them.”

“Channing, I have a question for you. Alonzo Jr., I hope you don’t mind sharing the spotlight with your mum. But, Myanna Priestly is out of prison and obviously has picked up where she left off, according to the pictures of her and your husband leaving a hotel this afternoon. How do you stay focused on getting your son to the NBA Draft?” a sports reporter asked boldly.

“My concern as well as number one priority will remain getting Alonzo Jr. to the NBA Draft. Anything that doesn’t help us get closer to that goal is irrelevant and will be treated as such.”

Despite my calm response, I was shaken! What the what? My husband couldn’t keep his ding-a-ling in his trousers. I couldn’t believe he’d stoop so low as to risk all we had worked for to get with her. I was so done with him.

Alonzo Jr. rode to the airport with the girls and me. He knew I was hurting, but I was trying hard to not let my children see me weak and vulnerable. Sometimes they could surprise me with their level of maturity though.

“Mom, just know I love you to the moon and back. Just leave him. Enough already. How long are you going to keep dealing with the disrespect?” Alonzo Jr. asked, glancing at his Rolex.

“Yes, Mom, file for divorce. I mean he will always be our dad, but this is too damn ridiculous.” Madison said.

“This is it, Mom! How could he? Everyday it’s a new broad. At this point he just doesn’t give a shit. Excuse my language,” McKenzie said.

The plane ride back to Milwaukee was difficult for me. But I was happy that my daughters were with me and getting along for a change. I stared out the window into the blissfulness of the baby blue skies for answers. For anything. I felt as though I wanted to kick, scream, and holler. I wanted to lay out in the middle of the floor and let someone— just any one— come and pat my back, hold my hand, and tell me everything would be okay. But I knew nothing would be the same.

I wanted to fight Myanna, because she was up to her old promiscuous shenanigans. Myanna’s loyalty wasn’t important to me though, but my husband’s was. He’d made a promise to me in front of God and our family and friends that he’d broken time and time again. Time and time again. But so had I. Did that make me any better than my low down cheating husband?

I hadn’t cheated in nearly a decade, but I guess he wasn’t there yet. Hell he just wasn’t there yet. Some men were cowards. They were afraid of letting go of their past victories. Their history. Their yesterday. Their opportunities. Some men couldn’t refuse a woman. Men weren’t afraid of consequences because there were rarely any. As women we loved hard and forgave even more because we could lose everything if we didn’t change.

I was starting to realize my husband cheated on me because he didn’t respect me as his partner. He cheated on me because he could. He cheated on me because he had the opportunity to. He cheated on me because he wanted to.

I was a woman of a certain age and smart enough to know and understand that no matter how great I was as a woman or wife, a man would still cheat. I could be Halle Berry beautiful and Beyoncé fabulous, and he would still cheat because he wanted to. My partner wasn't trust-worthy. He wasn't loyal to us. Such as life. But I wasn't going for it anymore!

As my children said, "Enough already."

Sometimes it was easier to just let a man be a man, but minus you. That was me. I was filing for divorce and I was taking half of everything. No. Never mind. I just wanted my freedom. I had my own money. Fuck him!

He didn't appreciate me. He devalued me as a woman. His actions and efforts were insensitive. I continued to stare out the window, but my emotions were all over the place. I hadn't even noticed it, but I had tears cascading down my face. Pretty hurts.

Chapter 13

Alonzo Butler Sr.

Out-of-Bounds

“You could at least say something,” I said as Channing gave me one of those nasty as looks that she’s been giving me for decades.

“I can do what I want to do, Zo. The only reason I agreed to professional counseling is so that the divorce process would go faster. Trust and believe I’ve literally heard it all before. I don’t have any questions. I was sleeping with enemy. What’s there to want to know? The why’s? How does a woman come back from such betrayal? They move around.”

The therapist couldn’t help us. She interjected every now and again, but she spent her time taking notes, which was fine by me. As long as she didn’t try to write a book and profit off our short-comings.

“So has our son called you because he won’t answer my calls?”

“If I was your son and you had hurt my mother and family the way you did I wouldn’t answer your call either. I wouldn’t even claim your trifling ass to be honest, Mr. Community Dick. You’re nasty. And your integrity and loyalty is questionable at best.”

“I’m sorry, Channing. I made a mistake. An error in judgment.”

“You made the biggest mistake ever. No! I take that back. If you hadn’t been caught by the paparazzi it wouldn’t be a mistake. It’s only a mistake because you were caught. You were *my* biggest mistake.”

“There’s really nothing else I can say. I don’t have any more excuses, Channing. I just don’t want you to hate me after almost twenty years of marriage and three great children,” I said before standing up and walking towards my wife who then got up and walked to the other side of the room.

My wife tried to tune me out by focusing on two of her favorite magazines, *House Beautiful* and *Own*.

“It bothers me to see how they photo shopped Oprah down to something like a size four or six. Being thin is so overrated. Beauty was really in the eye of the beholder and it has taken me years and probably a zillion self-help books to realize that we ultimately hold the power over us and not anyone else,” Channing said as she stared at the cover of the magazine.

“Please continue,” the therapist insisted.

“It’s not a person’s wealth, marital status, career, or what neighborhood one is from that dictates a person’s true happiness. Happiness is a decision that we choose to become a part of despite what others did to us. Choosing happiness is accepting life’s imperfections and deciding to be happy, appreciative, and grateful no matter what comes our way.”

“Are you choosing happiness?” the therapist asked while scribbling more notes on her pink legal pad.

“Choosing to be happy is an elite lifestyle and few become so privileged or rich. Deciding to divorce you will give me my membership to Club Happy. I’m not bitter and I wish you well, Alonzo. You lost a great wife, your best friend, and your children,” Channing said. She glanced up from the magazine and gave me another nasty ass look.

“Excuse me, Channing, there’s someone here to see you in the receptionist area,”

Dr. Stanton said.

“I’ll go with you.”

“Zo, I don’t need you to go anywhere with me.”

I followed Channing out to the receptionist area and didn’t see anyone, so we both walked back into the counseling session.

“Zo, I don’t want us to be enemies. However, you will have to make peace with the kids yourself.”

“I really was hoping you would help me out with the kids. The draft is in a few weeks and so is Madison and McKenzie’s high school graduation.”

“You’re on your own as far as talking to Alonzo Jr., and making things better. And yes, he is very upset with you. Whenever you decide to reach out to him please be strategic.”

“What about the twins?” I asked

“Madison and McKenzie are doing fine. They’re actually getting along well and have stopped all communication with Blane Iverson. Things just seemed kind of off with him,” Channing said.

“I didn’t care for him when he was dating Madison although it was her fault they broke up. However, why would he then make it his mission in life to date McKenzie?”

“Let’s not excuse you from contributing to his madness as well by dating his mother. I don’t know what it is, but between Myanna and Blane, I don’t know who hates our family the most.”

“There will always be people who don’t like us. However, I don’t think our life is in jeopardy,” I said.

“I’ll see you too at the same time next week?” the therapist asked signaling the end of our first counseling session.

“Yes, we have two more required visits before we go back to court,” Channing said while walking towards Dr. Stanton and shaking her hand.

We walked out of the building on 39th and Capitol Drive. The darkness seemed unkind and aggravated. I walked to the passenger side of our two door midnight blue BMW. I opened the door to let Channing slide in. I closed her door then hurried around the car to the driver’s side. Before I could get in I felt the rain kiss my face and hands.

I glanced at Channing and felt as though my entire life would never be the same. I had wronged the very person that cared about me the most. I was selfish. I was a coward. And I didn’t feel as though I was truly worthy of her love. I felt that sooner or later even after twenty years someone greater than me, just a basketball player with no real education, would come along and she would leave me.

I always thought my beautiful wife would leave me, so unconsciously I tried to keep a rotation or starting line-up of beautiful women just in case she did. But I never thought she would leave because I cheated. I always knew she would leave me to be with someone more influential and wealthier, but she left me because I didn’t respect her enough. She wanted me to be her superman. She wanted me to be her sunshine. She wanted me to be her forever. I became her no more and never again ever. Instead of being the superman she required and thought of me I became the monster that she feared. I hated

myself, but it didn't matter because the love of my life, my soul mate, my sunshine, my superwoman, my forever was no more.

I turned on the music and pulled off. I turned the music up because I didn't want to hear her conversation with our son. They were both talking about the NBA Draft. I wondered what round and number he would go in.

Channing was giggling.

I loved to hear her laugh. I loved to watch her laugh. I loved her no matter what I did. I made a mistake. It started raining harder. My phone rang. I glanced down and saw who it was, but I wasn't interested anymore. The traffic light on Sherman and Capitol Drive was turning from yellow to red. But I thought I could make it.

I heard Channing's soft and sexy giggles become a horrific howl. I saw a semi-truck. I heard the tires screech. I tried to hit my brakes. I did. I did.

But I don't think they worked. I heard my son scream, "Mooooooooooooooooom!" He screamed over and over again like heavy metal music.

I saw that crazy bitch's face. Did she have anything to do with this?

I was dizzy. So dizzy. I could smell blood. But I thought I smelled my wife's favorite scent, Back to Black by Kilian. I heard ringing too, something like a cell phone. Then I heard music. Something like a symphony or orchestra. Trumpets? I saw beautiful bright lights. Flashing lights.

I saw my wife.

Where were we?

I heard sirens too. I was so confused. I think she reached for my hand. Then everything faded to black.

Chapter 14**Myanna Priestly****Fourth Quarter**

“Oh...my God! I gotta call 911,” I said to no one at all before pushing the numbers on my iPhone.

“911 what’s your emergency?”

“I’m on Capitol Drive and Sherman Blvd. and there’s been a terrible accident. It’s like three cars and a semi-truck.”

“Ma’am, what is your name?”

“What damn difference does my name make? I just called as a good Samaritan to report an accident. Instead of asking me twenty questions you might want to get the Fire Department here as soon as possible. I think those are flames I see. Oh...wow!”

“Ma’am, is there a fire? How close are you to the cars? Are there people inside the three cars and what about the semi-truck?”

“It’s just common sense that there are people in the crashed cars, Ma’am. I mean if someone wasn’t driving the cars how could this have happened? It must don’t take no damn degree to be a 911 operator huh?”

“Ma’am, I apologize if I’m asking you questions that seem as though they are useless, but every bit of information helps and may actually help us save a life.”

“Okay. I see the police department, Fire Department, and Paramedics. I’m out.”

“Excuse me, Ma’am, can I get your name please and your reason for being in the area?” One officer asked.

“I was just in the area and saw the accident.”

“Are you the one that called 911?”

“Ummm...no, Sir.”

“I just listened to the 911 call, Ma’am. What’s your name? Where’s your car and driver’s license?”

“Shouldn’t you be more concerned with the folk who crashed their vehicles and big truck than what my name and date of birth is and what size shoes I wear and what my favorite color is and what’s my favorite latte at Starbucks.”

“Ma’am, you are under arrest for hindering an investigation. We don’t have time to play games with you, Myanna Priestly. We know exactly who you are! And I’m just not convinced that this is pure coincidence that you were just driving by. And Channing and Alonzo Butler are two of the seven people that were involved in this fatal crash.”

“I didn’t do nothing, officer! I promise you I didn’t do it. Not this time. I ain’t damn saying I don’t know who did, but I swear on Barbie and Ken’s Dream House I didn’t have nothing to do with tampering with their brakes.”

“What did you just say? So who tampered with their brakes?”

“I would like an attorney?”

“And you will need one hell of a great one to get you out of this mess!” The officer said.

Chapter 15**Madison Butler****Overtime**

McKenzie and I graduated from high school a few weeks ago with honors. Since we graduated we'd been in New York hanging out with Alonzo Jr. It was the 2014 NBA Draft, so McKenzie and I were here to support our brother. There's so much going on and so much that has happened. I just want to get through today. I just pray he will be selected in the first round at least in the first 5 picks. He needed this.

"Welcome to the 2014 NBA Draft. The first pick of round one goes to the Milwaukee Mavericks," the NBA Commissioner said.

"We would like to select Alonzo Butler Jr.!"

McKenzie, Alonzo Jr., and I embraced one another rather tightly as tears of joy and pain warmed our eyes and painted our faces something like the tears of a clown.

McKenzie and I were super proud of him!

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Notes: