

CHAPTER FIVE

Back at the office on Monday, I was actually humming as I worked on my cases.

“What’s your problem?” Mandy asked, suspicious.

“Can’t a black man be happy at his job?”

“In this place? No.”

Mandy started walking back toward her desk when she suddenly stopped in her tracks.

“Wait a minute! The last time you were this chipper at work was when you and Juanita first hooked up.” Mandy stepped back over to me.

“Who is she?”

“Who is she?” I echoed.

“Don’t play games with me, Javier. You know what I’m talking about.”

“I’m afraid I don’t, dear.”

Mandy frowned. She stepped away from my desk in a huff. I actually felt a little bad about not filling her in on the details since we were cool. But then, on the other hand, the grapevine in my office was a motherfucker. If I were to tell Mandy anything about my personal life, I would do just as well to stand on the top of my desk and shout it out to the entire office myself because everyone would eventually find out.

I took an early lunch that Monday so that I could dine with Keisha. We met at Junior’s, Brooklyn’s famous Flatbush Avenue restaurant.

“So, how’s your day going so far?” Keisha asked before digging into her chicken salad.

“Not bad,” I replied. “I only got cursed out three times today so far.” We both laughed.

“You’ve got issues.”

“I think I’ll take that as a compliment,” I replied before biting into my cheeseburger.

“You know what?” Keisha asked.

“What?” I inquired in a seductive voice.

“You sure do talk funny.”

I was immediately offended. Ever since I’d migrated up North I had been trying my best to suppress my Southern accent. Even when I interviewed clients at my job, most of them would inquire as to where I was from originally, since I did not sound like a native New Yorker. Keisha saw the resentment in my facial expression.

“You’re not mad at me, are you?”

“Naw,” I lied.

“Actually, I think it’s kind of cute, Javier.”

“You do?”

“Yeah,” Keisha smiled. “I bet you sound real sexy late at night, don’t you?”

The intonation in her voice automatically required a positive response.

“I reckon so,” I answered, sounding just like a Georgia hick.

Keisha began to playfully rub her foot up and down my left leg underneath the table.

“So, Javier, what cha doing today after work?”

“Well,” I hesitated, “I’m supposed to go help a friend do some painting.”

“Painting?”

“Yeah, that’s my hustle on the side.”

“Oh yeah, you did tell me that,” Keisha recalled.

I read what looked to me like disappointment on her face.

“What’s the matter, Keisha?”

“I was going to invite you over for dinner.”

“Dinner?” I asked, slightly surprised.

“Yeah, my sister is taking her girls out to Jersey, so I’m going to be all alone this evening.”

“Is that right?”

“Yes. I was going to let you sample some of my gourmet cooking tonight.”

“Gourmet cooking? From you?”

“No. From KFC. Who the hell do you think from?”

We both fell out laughing. Keisha playfully kicked me on my shin.

“Believe it or not, Mr. Collins, I can throw down in the kitchen.”

“I’m sorry I doubted you, Sister.”

“So, what do you say, Javier?”

Now, I really enjoyed being in the company of a sister with a good sense of humor, and Keisha definitely had one. However, there was no way in hell that I was going over to eat dinner at this girl’s house. Not yet anyway. Daddy always told me since I was a little pup, “Do not trust any woman’s cooking but your mama’s, and then keep an eye on her too, especially if she’s pissed at you.”

Now you folks can call me old-fashioned, country, backwards, whatever the case may be, but I don’t take chances on stuff like that.

“I’m afraid I’m going to have to decline your invitation, Miss Dixon. I really need to go make some loot. You understand, don’t you?”

I knew that I had her then. There wasn’t a sister alive in Brooklyn who didn’t understand about money, and the need to get more of it.

“I understand.”

When Keisha started rubbing her foot up and down my leg again, I started to debate whether or not to let Daddy’s advice take a back seat. The girl was really aggressive.

“Uh, you gonna eat those onions there?” I asked Keisha, trying to take my mind off the bulge that was straining to break through my pants.

“No. You can have them.”

Never one to let some good food that I paid for go to waste, I piled Keisha’s unappreciated onions onto my plate and began dining on them.

Looking across the table, I saw that Keisha was studying me. I began to panic. *Oh no*, I thought to myself, *not another psycho sister*. Almost as if on cue, Keisha began to grin again.

“Can I be frank with you?”

Here it comes. I took a deep sigh before answering.

“Of course you can.” Keisha eyed me closely.

“You sure?”

“Absolutely,” I responded. “What’s up?”

She hesitated for a moment.

“Well uh, ever since that day you walked into the bank and gave me that bag with your lunch in it...”

Keisha floundered again.

“Go on, Miss Dixon.”

“It’s just that uh, ever since the first time I saw you in the bank and what not, I told myself that I wouldn’t mind screwing you. That thought still lingers in my head.”

My food slipped down the wrong pipe and I began choking. I knocked my plate onto the floor while reaching to grab my glass of water.

“You okay?” Keisha asked with genuine concern as I struggled to gulp down my water. Our waiter rushed over to our table.

“Are you alright, Sir?”

“Does he look alright?” Keisha yelled. “He’s damn choking!”

The waiter gave me two sharp blows to my back. Onion remains immediately spilled onto the table in front of me.

“Thank you!” I gasped.

“No problem,” he responded with his Asian accent. “This happens all the time around here.” The waiter then leaned over into my ear.

“She wanna go fucky-fucky now?”

The look of shock on my face confirmed his answer and he smiled as he walked away.

After finishing my lunch and tipping our waiter generously, I returned to work. This, I had to admit was a bit difficult to do considering every time I thought about Keisha, a bulge (rather huge I might add) immediately appeared on my person. This meant that I had to stay at my desk, which meant that I really didn't get much done for the rest of the day. However, I did manage to call my friend and tell him that I couldn't help him paint because I had something real important to go do.

That evening I rushed home from the job and hopped into the shower. I then changed into some leisure gear for my foray to Harlem. I figured that a pair of shorts and a T-shirt would suffice for the event. As I saw it, there was no need to get too dressed up to *maybe* eat dinner at Keisha's. And based on the deep confession that girlfriend told me earlier in the day at lunch, dinner wasn't the only thing that was going to get served.

I told Keisha that I would probably make it there around eight. That would allow time for me sitting in bumper-to-bumper traffic on the FDR Drive when I headed northwards along Manhattan's East Side.

Sure enough, I sat in Jada for almost an hour, creeping uptown to the 96th Street exit. It was a good thing that I had one of my Miles Davis CDs along with me for the ride. The soothing tones of his trumpet helped keep my frustration to a minimum. After finally finding a legit parking space, I strolled over into Keisha's building, where I was greeted by her doorman.

“Yes Sir, may I help you?” the elderly gentleman inquired.

“I'm here to see Keisha Dixon. Twelve C.”

“One moment, Sir.” The doorman reached over in his seat, picked up the phone receiver and buzzed Keisha's apartment.

“Yes?” an enticing voice answered.

“I have a...” the doorman looked over at me to help him out.

“Mr. Collins...”

“I have a Mr. Collins here to see you.”

“Send him up, please,” Keisha's sexy voice replied.

After signing my name on the visitors' registry, I slid into an elevator and rode up to meet with destiny.

Getting off on the twelfth floor, I was greeted by the latest hip-hop anthem that was being blasted from an apartment down the hall. How inconsiderate. I was quite sure that not everyone on that floor, myself included, wanted to hear that crap.

I rang Keisha's doorbell. There was a serious aroma wafting from under the steel door and into the hallway.

When the door swung open, there stood Miss Dixon dressed in a New York Giants football jersey that was way too big for her. The pair of black, spandex biker shorts that she wore under it seemed to be one size too small from the way they gripped her thighs. She held a glass of stout out to me.

“Welcome.”

“Now this is what I call service,” I joked as I took the glass from her and entered the apartment.

I took in the nice décor, while sipping my beer. Keisha's sister had a blue pastel thing going on in her home. Her carpeting, couches, and wallpaper were all some soft hue of

blue. She even had blue pastel bulbs in the recessed lighting above us.

"This is nice."

"Thanks. My sister spent a lot of time hooking this place up."

"So I see."

I sipped on my brew and then strolled over to the entertainment center located at the far end of the room. I scouted out the CD collection, which was a diverse assortment of music. Hip-hop, funk, gospel, rhythm and blues, and even some jazz. I was elated that there were a couple of Miles Davis CDs in there also.

"I see you folks have good taste in music."

Keisha stepped up beside me smiling.

"We have good taste in everything."

"Modesty, now I like that in a woman."

"I made your favorite for dinner this evening," Keisha responded, choosing to ignore my little sarcastic remark.

"Gee, I wonder what that could be?"

On cue, Keisha grabbed me by the hand and led me into the kitchen area, where she had a small table laid out.

"Surprise!" Keisha sang as she revealed her meal of collard greens, corn muffins, and of course, some barnyard pimp.

"Chicken," I laughed. "How unexpected."

"The bathroom's straight down the hall to your right. Go ahead and wash your hands while I fix your plate."

I made my way down the hall wondering to myself if I was doing the right thing. I was always one for heeding Daddy's advice, but girlfriend looked so damn good in those biker's shorts. Also, the last thing that I wanted to do was to insult Keisha in her own house.

I glanced at myself in the mirror and smiled as I washed my hands in the sink. I thought to myself, *Here I am with a fine sister who took the time to prepare for me a home-cooked meal and I'm having second thoughts about eating it? Shit, you don't find too many sisters doing that these days anymore. Anyway, I'm sure that Daddy would probably break his own maxim if he saw how beautiful Keisha is.*

A rather large cockroach crawled across the mirror, interrupting my thoughts. I wasn't too alarmed by it, though. Lots of people mean lots of food and lots of roaches. Harlem was jam-packed with bodies. I mashed the bug, once it cleared the glass, with a piece of toilet paper. Sometimes it doesn't pay to be too bold.

I returned to the kitchen and stood before the plate that Keisha had lovingly prepared for me. The come-hither aroma from those steaming collard greens commenced my stomach to growling. The fried chicken wasn't smelling too bad either, and the muffins were all nice and fluffy-looking. *This girl really knows her stuff.*

"Damn, I forgot the napkins," Keisha remarked, as I was about to sit down at the table with her.

"I'll get them. Where are they?"

"In the cabinet above the sink. On the left-hand side."

I walked over to the sink and opened the cabinet. Two roaches dropped down into the sink below. *This don't look too good, kid.* I thought to myself as I retrieved several napkins from the opened pack that sat before me. I returned to the table and placed them between us.

"Thank you," Keisha said.

"You're quite welcome."

Then, I noticed another cockroach stealing along the edge of the table. I assumed that

Keisha must have noticed it as well, because she knocked it off the table as she reached over to get a napkin for herself. Wouldn't you know that as soon as she did, another one scurried down the side of the wall beside us? I gathered that it must have smelled those tempting collards. Keisha peeped it, too. She gave me a little awkward smile as she smashed the insect with the napkin she held. She then looked over at me.

"Well, dig in and tell me how you like it."

Needless to say that by this time I was second-guessing my rather rash decision to disregard Daddy's advice.

"Uh," I started, "shouldn't we uh, at least say grace first?"

"You're right. Sorry."

We both bowed our heads as Keisha mumbled a quick invocation to the Supreme Being on High and then looked over at me.

"Is that better?"

"Yes," I answered.

With much hesitation, I took my fork and began stirring the food around on my plate. As I did, I could hear Daddy's voice inside my head: "*You big dummy!*"

To make matters worse, I then had the misfortune to observe a dark object mixed amongst my collard greens. I didn't know if it was a piece of burnt food, a big flake of seasoning, or what. It was too damn close to call.

I had to think fast. I couldn't very well afford to embarrass Keisha, but I sure as hell wasn't going to eat any of her cooking either! During my glory days of quarterbacking at State, coach liked the fact that I could think fast in a jam. That was one of the reasons he picked me to start my second year on the team. I was used to getting rid of the ball whenever I was in a tight spot. Now I had to get rid of this damn food. I looked up to find Keisha smiling at me.

"What's the matter?" she inquired.

"Nothing," I lied as I eyed my now refilled glass of stout. "I'm just savoring this moment. How about a little toast?"

"Sure," Keisha said as she picked up her glass.

As I retrieved mine, I 'accidentally' spilled it into my lap. Jumping up quickly from my seat, my plate of food was somehow accidentally knocked from the table as well. It crashed onto the floor.

"Crap!" I exclaimed.

Keisha immediately rushed to my side.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah. Sorry about the dinnerware," I said as I bent down and began cleaning up my mess.

"I'll get that."

"No, Keisha. I made this mess; I'll clean it up."

"Okay, then. I'll go fix you another plate of food while you're doing that."

"No!" I exclaimed without thinking. Keisha looked over at me in confusion.

"What's the matter?"

Think fast boy!

"I need to go home and try to soak this stain out of my favorite T-shirt."

"Nonsense, Javier. I can wash it downstairs in the basement. You can wear one of my sweatshirts in the meantime. I have lots of extra-large stuff in my closet."

Crap!

"Keisha, darling," I started, "I think it's a little too early in our friendship for you to be washing any clothes for me. I appreciate the offer, though."

I stroked Keisha's hair playfully with one hand, as I dropped the broken plate pieces into the trashcan with the other. I then picked up the nearby dustpan and broom and began

sweeping up the scattered food.

“Do you really have to leave now?” Keisha asked dejectedly.

“I think I’d better,” I sighed, sounding disappointed myself. “I’ll tell you what, though, how about we go out this weekend? Anywhere you want to go to.” Keisha smiled slightly.

“Anywheres?”

“You name it.”

“Okay then, bet.”

I turned around to continue sweeping up when I felt my ass being pawed. I spun back around to see Keisha grinning at me wickedly.

“Can’t you at least have a little dessert before you go, baby?”

As if on cue, my manhood immediately jumped on hard. (I swear sometimes I think the thing has a mind of its own.) I, on the other hand, knew better. The last thing that I needed to feel on me was a roach crawling across my bare, black ass.

“I really need to run, baby. Just save whatever it is you had in mind until this weekend. I promise you, I’ll leave plenty of room for it.”

I felt a little guilty as I climbed into Jada and cranked her up. Keisha was no doubt upset that our date turned out the way it did. I promised myself to make it up to her. I placed the wrapped up plate that Keisha had prepared for me in the seat behind me and then reminded myself to throw that crap away when I got home.