

Chapter 1

Jayden

After only getting two hours of sleep, I went back into my suite, showered, changed and headed to Mason's, a restaurant on campus, to meet up with the fam before going to my sociology class. I knew I should squeeze in some time with them since I'll be going back to full practice mode soon. Since the season started, the team has been in beast mode, winning 15 in a row; but unfortunately, we recently lost to our rival, Clarkson University, which had Coach Bell completely on edge. If we're going to the championship, we have to defeat teams like Clarkson to advance, so I know the extra practices we're about to endure will be tough, but much needed.

I knew some of my teammates would be upset about the extra practices, especially since we all just finished our rounds of late-night practices for the Clarkson game; but I didn't mind. Basketball is my life, and I would love to go pro once I'm done with college. If given the chance, I probably would have just gone straight to the NBA after high school, but I knew my mom would have disapproved of the notion. That's why I tried my hardest to get into a college on a full ride scholarship, which I did at Shaw. Now that my first year is almost over, I'm thinking that getting a degree in political science may not be so bad. I'd taken one class so far in my major, and I'm already learning a lot from it.

I walked into the restaurant, seeing Riana, my cousin, Cheryl Thompson, and Shawn and Marcus Walker sitting at a booth near the window. Even though I would have preferred to meet up at the student lounge since it was closer to the sociology building, I knew that was impossible since Marcus was banned from there for fighting; so of course, we had to meet elsewhere.

"What's up?" I asked everyone, sitting beside Riana.

"Nothing; just discussing some details for the wedding," Cheryl piped up, giving a bright smile as Marcus put an arm around her. I still can't believe those two are engaged. Considering their pasts, I wouldn't have thought they would even be in a relationship, but I guess love can change a person's way of thinking. I wouldn't know because I've never been in love.

"Isn't it a little soon to be thinking about the wedding? You two just got engaged," I asked.

"We're not getting married right now, but we can still talk about it," Cheryl said.

"You know me, I would have married your cousin as soon as she said yes, but we're waiting until Cheryl finishes her degree," Marcus added.

"Even though I'll be starting medical school, too, but I don't want him to wait any longer," she said, giving him a kiss. I watched them as Marcus kissed her neck. He whispered in her ear, and Cheryl bit her lip, trying not to moan. With the way they were acting, I wondered if they realized they were in a public place.

"And you always say we're the ones who need the room," Riana teased with a smile.

"Oh hush," Cheryl replied.

"Leave them alone; besides..." Shawn said, then whispered into Riana's ear. Whatever he said

actually caused her to moan, then she trailed her hand down his chest.

“You four are really starting to annoy me,” I told them.

“Come on, we can’t help it; besides, once you and Britney finally admit your feelings to each other, you two will be doing the same thing,” Shawn said.

I looked toward the door and saw Britney Lewis walk in. I became nervous, realizing that maybe Shawn was right. She and I had been tip-toeing around our feelings since we met in high school. While I tried to hide mine by dating other girls, Britney was more obvious with hers, trying to find any chance to be around me. Although I would love for us to date and even have a relationship, I knew we couldn’t, not with my schedule. Between school and basketball, I wouldn’t have time to be with her, which sucked because I really want to every single day.

She looked beautiful, wearing a floral baby doll dress; her hair was hung loosely around her gorgeous face, while her grayish brown eyes stared directly into mine. I couldn’t help but smile as she gave me one in return.

“Hey,” she greeted.

“Hey.”

We continued to gaze at each other when Marcus sarcastically cleared his throat.

“Are you two going to continue staring at each other or finally admit there’s something there?”

Britney blushed, and I sighed. I really wanted to, but with how my life is, including the guilt I’ve been consumed with for years, I knew I couldn’t. Not now, not ever.

Chapter 2

Britney

Jayden Robertson. Even his name is sexy. The way he was looking at me, a bit of nervousness with a hint of sexiness, made my heart flutter. He had a look of innocence to him, but I knew he wasn't. With his dating history, he probably had been with more girls than I could count on my hands, but I didn't care. He is the perfect man for me, with his caramel-colored skin, deep brown eyes like his sister's, and his lips. Just staring at them now made me wet. I have dreamt about those lips kissing all over me, and the thought immediately made me fan myself with my hand.

"Is everything okay?" Riana asked, giving me a look that read "calm down girl."

"Yeah, everything's cool," I told her, sitting down beside him.

"Now, as I was saying, are you two going to finally admit something is there?" Marcus asked.

"There is, but we're friends, that's all," Jayden answered.

"We said that before too," Cheryl said, looking at Marcus.

"Yeah, but we really are," I replied.

Jayden looked at me with a tiny smile.

We both knew we were more than just friends, but I understood Jayden's position. We'd talked about pursuing a relationship before, but with the way his life is right now, there's no way we can. I understood and respected it, but I wish he would break that rule of his and just be with me.

"Well, I would love to stay and talk some more, but I have to get to class. Are you coming, babe?" Shawn asked Riana while getting up from the booth.

"No, I'm going to stay here for a bit. Coming to my place later?"

"You know it," he agreed, then bent down and kissed her.

I shook my head, knowing what that meant. After what happened with Marcus and our former friend, Monica Taylor, Riana and I stopped talking to her, which meant I no longer had a place to go to if Riana and Shawn wanted to be alone. Now, I had to listen to those two have sex throughout the night. There were times when I had to go out to my car to sleep. Yeah, it was that bad.

"Especially now that Cheryl practically lives at my place," he said with a knowing glance. "Why can't you two go to the bed-and-breakfast sometimes?"

Cheryl rolled her eyes at Shawn, while Marcus laughed.

"Don't even start with me. Remember the times when I had to leave *my* place because of the two of you? Brit, I don't even know how you are able to sleep with those two around each other." Cheryl said.

"I don't," I told her.

Jayden looked at Riana and Shawn with a disgusted expression.

"Have you forgotten? Mom and Dad are doing renovations, so the house is off limits for now,"

Marcus said to Shawn.

Jayden looked at me with a sincere smile.

“Well, I would say you could come by my place, but honestly, it’s not any better.”

“It’s okay. Besides, I thought you couldn’t have visitors after hours?”

“We can’t, but for Zach and Damien, it doesn’t matter.”

“Oh. Since we’re both in similar situations, why don’t we just hang out together? It’s not like we’ll be asleep anyway.”

Jayden looked uneasy.

“I don’t know. I try to stay close by in case Coach unexpectedly decides to show up.”

I gave him an understanding look.

“It’s cool. I’ll just use some heavy duty ear plugs or something.”

“That doesn’t work,” Cheryl said.

“Seriously, you all act like we’re loud and inconsiderate,” Riana argued.

“You two are when it comes to that.”

“Please, don’t make me discuss you and Marcus getting busy while my mom was at the apartment.”

“We didn’t even know she was there!”

“Okay, you two, stop. I think we’ve heard enough.” Jayden said while getting up from the booth.

“I have to get to class, too. I’ll see you all later.” “Wait up, we’ll leave with you. Besides, I have an interview that I have to get ready for,” Marcus called after Jayden.

“I thought you were pursuing your business venture,” Jayden said.

“I still am, but I need money to finance it. I have a loan already, but it’s not enough to cover everything. And I have to pay my parents back the bail money they put up.”

After the incident Marcus had with Cheryl’s ex-boyfriend, not only was he kicked out of Shaw, but was also fired from his job at Preston & Co. but it didn’t really bother him, considering he was going into business with Shawn. From what Cheryl told me, even though he’s on probation for what happened, it shouldn’t keep him from getting a job since his lawyer did some legal magic to conceal his files during his probation.

“I said I would help you with that,” Cheryl reminded him.

“And I told you no. What happened was my fault.”

“But I caused it,” Cheryl disagreed.

“Baby, it’s cool,” Marcus said.

I looked at them and realized that love really can change a person. Now, those two are completely in sync with each other.

“Who is the company?” I asked.

“It’s the corporate office of a healthcare facility.”

“Well, good luck,” I said.

Marcus smiled, then kissed Cheryl. “See you later, baby.”

“Bye,” she replied softly, pulling his shirt to bring him closer to her. She kissed him again,

sliding her tongue in his mouth. I looked at Jayden, who rolled his eyes at them. I felt a little jealous of them, wishing Jayden and I were like that. But it would probably never happen.

“Let’s go,” Shawn interrupted them, pulling Marcus away from Cheryl, and the three walked out of the door.

She watched as Marcus walked away, giving a huge sigh. “I definitely need a cold shower right now.”

“I don’t know who’s worse: you and Marcus or Riana and Shawn,” I said.

They both smirked at me.

“That’s what happens when you’re in love. You can’t stay away from the person, and they’re on your mind 24/7,” Riana answered.

“I wouldn’t know about that,” I replied.

“From what I witnessed earlier, you really want my brother, in more ways than one,” Riana hinted with a grin.

“I won’t deny it, I do; but I know it wouldn’t work between us.”

“Why not? I can tell Jayden really likes you; so why not pursue something?” Cheryl asked.

“Because we can’t. With basketball, there’s no way he has time for anything else, let alone for me.”

“I think you two could if you tried,” Riana tried to convince me.

“I’m willing to; it’s your brother who isn’t.”

She sighed. “I know it may seem like he doesn’t want to, but I think it’s much deeper than that. I think it has a lot to do with our dad. You know the anniversary of his death is coming up.”

I became teary-eyed, knowing that was part of the reason why Jayden wasn’t acting like himself. During one of our talks, he mentioned his dad and how he died. I knew he was sort of blaming himself for what happened, and I pointed out that it wasn’t his fault; but I knew he was still holding on to that thought.

“Are you planning to go back to Houston that weekend?” Cheryl asked Riana.

“I’m not sure about Jayden, but I am. I want to visit Dad. Also, I don’t want Mom to be alone.”

“I’ll come, too. I want to visit Uncle Carter as well,” she said, putting her hand on top of Riana’s.

Riana smiled and wiped the tear that had spilled down her cheek. “With Jay, give him some time. He has a lot going on that he needs to resolve with himself.”

I nodded, knowing that she was right. I just hope it won’t be too late for him to let someone in.

