

Chapter 1

Shiquanna

Like a deck of cards Shiquanna spread the crisp bills between her fingers, forming a fan. She arranged them from the highest to lowest denomination, licked the tip of her thumb and began to count. The bills snapped as she whisked through, stacking them one on top of the other. “Twenty, forty, sixty, eighty...one hundred.”

All clients had to agree with the terms of her cash-only, no-refund policy. The conditions were irrefutable. Every hour was two-hundred and fifty dollars. The fees were due immediately upon her arrival and paid using bills no larger than a twenty. “Five hundred,” she confirmed, speaking underneath her breath, then unconsciously repeated the process again. *It’s all here. Now that was music to my ears,* she thought, made a tight roll then lifted her right leg onto the marble top vanity. “Shit,” she spat almost breaking an acrylic nail as she opened the secret compartment on her wedge high heel shoe.

She secured the payment inside then lowered her leg to the floor. She unzipped her large black purse that still hung on her shoulder and peeped at her cell phone display. “Time is money.” She hung the purse on one of three gold plated door hooks, then unbuttoned her blue jean mini shirt dress just enough to ease it off of her shoulders and step out of it.

She looked in the ornate oval mirror above the sink, checked her heavily applied black mascara and eyeliner, then traced the outline of her lips with her index finger. Shiquanna was the epitome of beautiful and for the first time was held captive by her own reflection. In times past the haunting voice of her mother Renita hindered her true physical perception. She took a step back, placed a hand on one hip then leaned her head to one side. *Hmm...from this angle I look*

like Gabrielle Union in Two Can Play That Game. Some people get all of the lucky breaks. I'd trade places with her on the big screen any day. My reality is hell. Going home most nights to wake up the next morning not always remembering how in the hell I made it there. I'm living alone existing only in the moment unsure who'll be used to get cash to pay my damn bills. Then if no one calls going to that sleazy strip club in the hood to make ends. If anyone thinks I like dancing in a smoky room filled by strange men salivating with hard ons they're a damn fool.

She smirked then ran her fingers through her wig. No feature about her went unnoticed when she entered a room. Even at twenty-nine her mocha skin tone was flawless, always giving her an ageless appearance. Many men were captivated and rendered speechless by her large brown eyes. Her natural hair which she covered with synthetic tresses was jet black and hung several inches past her shoulders. It was as though God descended from Heaven to adorn it with one of His finest angels.

A white finger towel with Waterford Hotel monogrammed in gold stitching hung neatly from a holder to her left. To remove the excess lipstick she rubbed it between her thumb and index finger. She looked at the small stain then rolled her eyes to the top of her head. For clients she always wore ruby red lipstick. Inconspicuous areas, particularly between the thighs would be kissed aggressively leaving lip impressions not so easily removed by soap and water. The purpose was two-fold; entice the client and leave irrefutable evidence for a wife, girlfriend or significant other. In a twisted sort of way it was her means of retribution for a lifestyle she was forced into as a teenager.

Proudly, she leaned forward and adjusted her leather bra top to reveal more cleavage. The D's she showcased were a gift from a loyal client for her nineteenth birthday. Even she loved what they'd done to enhance her twenty-six inch waist line and forty-inch hips. Making

sure her long wavy black wig was still secure she tugged one side then readjusted a few hairpins. Wanting a more tousled look she leaned her head forward, combed through it with her fingertips then looked into the mirror. Pleased with the picture-perfect image she blew a kiss at herself then turned around making sure the view looked just as well from behind.

“One for the road.” Before opening the bathroom door, she reached inside her purse and pulled out a shot-sized bottle of tequila. She unscrewed the top, put the bottle to her lips, then tossed her head back. “Ahh, liquid courage. A woman’s gotta do what a woman’s gotta do. There’s no way in hell I can look at that ugly asshole sober.” Feeling light headed, she threw the cap and bottle into the garbage can then prepared to make a grand entrance. Slowly she opened the door.

Her new client, Elton Anderson, was already undressed and sitting on the foot of the plush king sized bed that faced her direction. The married, presumably wealthy, real estate investor with three children, a dog and two cats came as a referral. Judging from the length of his legs, he stood over 6’3” and weighed no more than one hundred eighty pounds soaking wet. His skin was darker than midnight and made the white of his eyes seem translucent. He wore short dreads, had a mustache and a goatee. In no way did he appear kind on her eyes so she swallowed hard craving another shot of tequila.

Ready for the royal treatment he spread his legs and lusted, looking at her 5’9” frame from head to toe. ‘Hah,’ she chuckled inside as he leaned back on both elbows to emphasize what he considered an erection. *What in the hell am I going to do with that little thing? Is that an erection? I’ve seen raw hot dogs plumper than that,* she thought, careful not to speak or laugh aloud then started to stroll toward him.

“Not so fast, baby doll.” To stop her he held up one hand then rubbed himself with the

other. “Stand there and let me look at you.”

Time ticked in her head as she stopped then placed one foot slightly in front of the other to pose. In her peripheral vision, she saw an armless chair to her left that could be used as a prop. Her movements seemed choreographed as she stepped to the side, placed one foot on the chair then stood making sure he could see the golden prize between her legs. Like a lollipop with the bubblegum inside she licked two fingers then allowed them to disappear between her thighs. His eyes bugged. Using her right hand she spun the chair around then placed a leg on each side to straddle it. With both hands she grabbed the back, sat down slowly then leaned backwards until her head almost touched the floor.

“Damn, girl.”

Using her stomach muscles she rolled one vertebra at a time to sit erect, then stood while lifting the chair moving it to one side. His breathing became shallow as she walked toward him then with one hand pushed hard making him fall backwards on to the bed.

“That’s what the hell I’m talking about. I love a woman who knows how to take control,” he said then let his arms fall limp to each side.

She stood between his legs, tenderly rubbed her breasts to tease him then got down on to her knees. The routine seemed rehearsed as she wrapped her fingers around the tiny projection and started to stroke it up and down. Lightly she blew.

“Oh, baby, that feels so good,” he moaned, emphasizing every syllable. She tightened her grasp then lowered her head covering his ‘shame’ with her mouth. Her tongue became the bow as his hardened manhood likened to the strings of a violin. “Mmm...,” he hummed as she maneuvered her tongue up and down then side to side.

“Yeess...yeess,” he squirmed gripping the sheets with his fingertips giving her the cue to

end the oral massage. She pulled a condom out of her bra, ripped it open and slid it on him. Like a cowgirl she mounted him then used her fingertips to position his manhood inside of her. Feeling nothing but the warmth from her own fingertips she frowned. Beneath her he'd already started to gyrate. Like a limp pasta noodle his manhood withered then slipped. She reached to reposition him but his gyrations never stopped. *Ain't this some shit? He didn't even feel it slip out.* Shiquanna looked down then chuckled at the Grammy Award nominee as he closed his eyes then moved his head from side to side. *Hell, I can do this. Easy money. It's just easy money.* Not interrupting his fantasy she leaned her body forward eventually pressing her hands against his chest for support. A slow grind soon became an aggressive thrust up and down.

“Ride Roscoe like a cowgirl.” His movements were out of sync as he gyrated beneath her then slapped the bed with his hand. “You’re making Roscoe feel so good.” His eyebrows met when he grabbed her by the waist then pulled her closer.

Roscoe? He had the nerves to name that little thing. Hell, I'm grinding against his pelvic bone. She thought laughing inside at his antics then rolled her eyes to the top of her head. Moving back and forward she thrust then used the back of her hand to wipe sweat from her forehead.

“Look into my eyes while you ride Roscoe.” He attempted to make eye contact but she looked away. He placed his index finger on her chin then turned her head toward him. Eye contact reminded her of a bleak adolescence so she turned to look in the opposite direction.

“Baby, please look at Big Daddy. Nothing turns me on more than to look into a woman’s eyes when she’s on top of me.” Still maintaining a rhythmic thrust Shiquanna closed her eyes wanting to repress negative images of Renita. In silence she rode thrusting harder and harder to force his orgasm.

“Oh, baby, this is it. I’m about to explode.” He jerked uncontrollably then fell limp beneath her.

“Time is up, cowboy.” She confirmed after looking at the clock on the nightstand. It had been exactly two hours. With the same tenacity she dismounted him then got out of the bed.

“Can we cuddle for a few minutes?” he murmured reaching out for her.

“Hell, no,” she spat. “I came to make ends not friends. It’s all about finance not romance. This is business, not pleasure meaning body contact after sex is a no-no,” she said affirmatively, snapped her neck then moved her index finger from side to side.

“Bitch you’re paid for.” Unable to move his body he lifted his head to speak as she switched across the floor and into the bathroom.

“Your time is up.” She slammed the door, then locked it just incase he had any ideas. Shiquanna reached for her dress then leaned back against the vanity. She closed her eyes then lowered her head.

Shiquanna didn’t wake up one morning and decide to become a stripper or escort. It wasn’t her ideal career but a lifestyle she was forced into. She grew up alone with Renita, her teenaged mother in a condemned housing project. Renita’s own lack of parental guidance by a mother or father led to pregnancy by fourteen. She was a lock key child living in the projects surrounded by little boys turned teenagers whose hormones raged out of control. Then one game too many with a neighbor of ‘just let me feel it’ led to pregnancy.

Renita’s mother who worked two full-time jobs to survive kicked her out leaving her to deal with her own rebellion. Eight months later with no prenatal care Shiquanna was born in the emergency room of the city hospital. With no where to call home Renita dropped out of school

then sought the government for assistance. Disgusted with life and all it didn't offer she turned to drugs by sixteen. It started with painkillers given after childbirth that created a desire for stronger narcotics and marijuana.

Like any impressionable single teenage mother Renita met an older man on the streets who seemed to have it all. He had a home outside of the ghetto, several nice cars and wore the latest fashions. He bought her a few nice outfits, took her out to dinner and on one occasion paid her subsidized rent. Next Renita was packing their clothes and moving in with him. Like a puppy on a leash he led Renita into a world that she never escaped from. All in the name of love he became her drug supplier and pimp.

His moderately sized three bedroom two bathroom home was party central. Every night it was filled with strange people, alcohol and layers of smoke. Like a sleazy motel his bedroom was decorated in red velvet. Mood lights and a wet bar made his den look like a night club. For years Shiquanna's place was the back bedroom until she developed the body of woman. Then she was only fourteen.

Without knocking Renita opened Shiquanna's bedroom door and leaned to one side. It was after school and she was sitting in the middle of her bed studying for a test the next morning. For the most part she did well in her classes and maintained a B average. She vowed never to be like her mother and saw an education as her only way out of the jungle she lived in.

"We're going to the mall for some new clothes." Renita put the small white cigarette to her lips, inhaled then blew the smoke to one side. Like yesterday Shiquanna remembered her blank facial expression and glazed eyes.

"Thanks. I still have outfits with the tags on them hanging in the closet." Shiquanna's suspicion peaked. Her mother never took her shopping. Mysteriously clothes in the latest

styles always appeared on the bed. Shiquanna didn't question Renita even though the tags never matched the store imprinted on the outside of the bags.

"I said we're going to the mall for some new clothes." Her mother snapped, walked to the bed then snatched her by the arm.

"Let go of me. You're high and I'm not going anywhere with you." Shiquanna pulled away, threw her books to one side and moved against the wall.

"You will do as I say." With one hand Renita grabbed her chin and pointed into her face with the other. Shiquanna moved her head from side to side then stopped when Renita's nails dug into her skin.

"You're hurting me."

"No, you're hurting me." Finally she let go, stormed out of the room and slammed her door. "I'll be back in fifteen minutes." She yelled then hit the door with her fist. Unnerved by the unspoken implication of Renita's shopping request Shiquanna's hands trembled as she rubbed her face.

Shiquanna's dreamlike state was interrupted when an old Brian McKnight tune blasted from her client's cell phone.

"Hey babe," he answered calmly before a long pause.

Assuming it was his wife Shiquanna moved closer to the door.

"Baby, please calm down. Your yelling is making it impossible for me to understand a word you're saying." There was another pause. "Didn't Jessica call you? Joseph called a last minute financial meeting. I asked her to call you as soon as I found out. They sent her from a temporary service. You'd think she'd be capable of following simple instructions. I'll consult with her first thing in the morning I promise."

Financial meeting? Shiquanna thought then folded her arms across her chest. *That lying bastard.*

“Please accept my apology. It wasn’t my fault this time. Our meeting lasted longer than I anticipated. We’re hashing out the final details on that multi-million dollar land deal I talked to you about last month. I swear I’ll make it up to you. Just think about the commission from that deal baby,” he said then paused again. “Yeah baby I hear you. I can imagine how many hours you spent in the kitchen preparing my favorite meal. I know it’s not often that we have a babysitter. Sweetie, I’m very sorry I missed your special dinner. By the way I’m starving. Listening to Joseph ramble for the past two hours I’ve worked up an appetite.”

“Hah, like hell you did.” Shiquanna blurted.

“Just give me a few more minutes to make some important phone calls and wrap a few things up. In the mean time go into the wine cellar and get that bottle of Merlot I was saving for our anniversary. I want you to open it and pour yourself a glass. You really need to calm down. I don’t want you upset when I get home. Remember we still have the rest of the night to spend together alone.”

Now that’s why I’ll never trust a man He’s in the bed naked with my sweat still all over him. Sorry bastard. I need another drink. She thought ready to reach into her purse for another Tequila shot. *Hell,that’s right it’s girl’s night out. I guess I can wait another hour.* Shiquanna slipped into her dress, grabbed her purse then opened the bathroom door. His back was against the headboard and the sheet was across his legs. He winked at her then tossed the sheet to one side. His nudeness and pathetic grin repulsed her. “Hell no.” Not giving a damn if his wife heard she strutted by the bed and slammed the door.

