16 | SIXTEEN

Richard watched as she blossomed, her eyes lit with flames that set fire to the warm brown he was used to. God he wanted to reach over and slam her lips to his, but she'd made that a mission by placing the large stone counter between the two. She had a right to be pissed although he was more annoyed that Lance hadn't been able to keep his mouth shut. The man wasn't a fool, he knew she'd find out, he was just hoping it would be when she was just as infatuated with him as he was she.

"You're my wife." Richard concluded.

This clearly didn't sit well with Imani, he frowned when she braced the counter before her in a tight grip, "how many shares?" She said through her teeth, her tone a scary quiet.

Richard sat back in his chair and crossed his arms, "Imani the man wouldn't have accepted the model unless he thought it would benefit him." Instantly he regretted speaking, the warning bells sounded and the voice in his head told him to firmly shut the fuck up. She misunderstood his words, he did not mean the benefit of his partnership but more so the benefit of her business.

She laughed, it was amazing seeing her so worked up. Richard hated that he found it attractive, he knew he had to calm the situation but how the fuck could he do that when her chest practically pushed out of her shirt as she breathed to steady her voice. "How many fucking shares did you buy, Richard?"

"Hell Imani, forty percent! Happy? Could've bough four, it wouldn't have made a di erence, he'd have taken you on." Richard noted how well his father had disappeared, traitor, if his old man were there he knew Imani would calm down. At this point she looked close to hysteria.

Glaring daggers into his soul she pushed away from the counter, "you're ridiculous! Is this what marriage is to you, going behind my back, controlling my business. I'm not your little puppet, Richard." She slammed her hand down on the counter and turned away from him.

Richard stood up, annoyed that she'd broken their gaze. "Yes Imani this is a marriage, everything I own is yours, what does it matter if I help you with your business. Technically you too bought these shares." He pressed, trying to make her understand.

"It was mine, Richard. I already took your hand out and it has been sitting on my mind since day one." She grabbed hold of the pot and took it to the dinning room.

Richard remained in the kitchen knowing the storm had just begun. He heard Imani set William up for dinner and couldn't help but find his heart melting. Even when he'd drove the woman completely mad, she still showed that sweet warm side of her. "You're over-reacting." He muttered when she walked back in.

Her eyebrows raised and in almost shock she responded, "over re-acting, are you kidding me! How do you not see how fucked up this is. You steam trained me into marrying you, paid for the start up of my company, practically blackmailed Lance into partnering with me! The list is endless, you're controlling and overbearing and it's all too goddam much, Richard." She regretted it, the part about the marriage. Although it had started as just a contract, it was so much more now, she didn't know life outside of Richard.

"You need to calm the fuck down," he crossed the space between them and grabbed hold of her forearms, instantly she retaliated by pushing against his chest.

Imani felt out of control, she knew she was being hysterical and he made a good point but that didn't take away the feeling that he'd robbed her of a piece of her freedom. "Let me go!" She demanded, her mind unable to cope with his dominating, addictive touch on her.

He only held on tighter, " never" The word came out in almost a growl, so possessive, it had the sweet spot between her thighs clenching. "Calm down and we can discuss this when you're not this volatile." Richard held onto his sanity, everything in him wanted to turn into the beast he was and force her into submission, but he knew that'd ruin him completely. So instead he held her until her attempts at escaping ceased. When she went limp in his arms, he pulled her close, "I'm sorry, Imani."

He spoke so ly against the top of her head, she felt every nerve in his body stand to attention, his heart thudded furiously against his chest. "You can't control me, Richard, it's su ocating." She mumbled weakly against him, her arms gripping onto his shirt.

"When will you realise you control me, Imani. From the moment I saw you, everything I did was for you. You are everything, anything I have is yours, sweetheart." Richard felt something strange in his chest, almost like pain, he couldn't control his lungs as they begged for air. He realised he was scared, scared of losing the only person in his life that made it worth living. At the same time he didn't want her to feel caged, releasing his hold on her he stepped back and dropped his head, "I'll let you go if that's what you want, Imani..."

Imani felt frantic, the anger she'd felt moments ago dissipating into panic. She could physically feel Richard pulling away, shutting her out and guarding that heart he'd just poured out to her. An ache formed behind her breast and she took a step forward only for him to retreat, "Richard..." She reached out for him.

He recoiled. Richard had to get out of there, he could feel the fear consuming him and he knew he was moments away from completely shattering. So avoiding her gentle touch he turned away and walked out of the room. Making his way into his o ice, the brute grabbed a bottle of rum and drowned his turmoil until his eyes blurred and he felt that sweet slumber take over.

Imani stood stunned, watching the space he'd just occupied. Why hadn't she calmed herself before she erupted so viciously. Maybe it was a childish need in her that clung onto independence, she knew it was irrational but she wanted one thing that was hers. It was silly, Imani knew it was silly because he was right everything they had was shared, their marriage did not have a prenup and it was only then Imani realised just how much trust Richard had in her. He respected her, and that realisation slapped her across the face bitterly.

She'd said something she couldn't take back, but also words that were not completely true. Feeling the trickle of a tear roll down her cheek, Imani brushed it away. That had turned into complete and utter disaster. She slowly made her way into the dinning room where William picked at his food, not only had she broken the man she realised she was maddeningly in love with, but she'd also let down William.

"He loves you so damagingly, Imani." William looked up at her.

She crouched down beside him and placed her hand on his knee, "I said some really horrible things to your son, William." Her eyes glossed.

William smiled down at her warmly, "you're human, Imani. He will forgive you if you really have said something horrible, lord knows he forgave me for much worse-" The older man swallowed, she realised he was in pain, as if what he was about to tell her tore through his flesh.

"It's okay William, let's get you to bed." Imani cut him o , not wanting him hurting any more. She never really knew what happened to William, Richard never spoke of his past but from Williams current state Imani new it was distressing.

William shook his head, forcing the words through his teeth, "I destroyed myself with drugs and alcohol when his mother le me. I couldn't find it in me to live, dying seemed to be the only escape. I failed that boy, he found me overdosed multiple times, held me until help came when I attempted to hang myself. I spent years in and out of hospitals, having my stomach pumped and therapy to try and retrain my mind. Now I can't sleep without the demons finding me, nor can I live without shadows of fear. They follow me, Imani, all those ghosts. Richard, he stood by me even though the demons now follow him too."

"I had no idea, I'm so sorry William." Imani knew the tears had betrayed her, they fell freely now. The older man placed a comforting hand on her cheek, she'd never heard him speak so much, she realised just how much Richard had gone through.

"What I'm trying to say is, he will stand by you until his last breath. That boy is as loyal and selfless as it comes, he's a complete asshole and a little crazy, but he loves you to a fault, Imani." William watched as his words found home in her mind. He didn't know where they came from, the words, but he felt a relief in saying it out loud.

She felt horrible, she'd just unintentionally torn Richard apart, she hadn't meant what she said, not so completely. She knew deep down she wouldn't change a thing, because as toxic as it was she thrived on knowing Richard would burn the world down for her.

Imani knew that hadn't been easy for William to share, she watched as he returned to those memories, his thoughts no longer were in the room with her. She stood mumbling more so to herself, "bed."

Almost in autopilot William allowed Imani to settle him into bed, despite the fight the shadows clouded his vision. He no longer knew what was real or not, sometimes he could swear someone was watching him, lurking in the darkened corners, wanting to hurt him. He could hear voices, taunting him, telling him to end it before he hurts anyone else. Shaking the eerie feeling, he spoke into the black room "Hold him, Imani, he needs it more than you think."

Releasing a shaking breath, she pulled the older man into a hug, knowing he needed it too. "I've got you, William." She reassured him, before pressing a kiss to his forehead and leaving him to find Richard.

Imani found Richard by the fireplace in his o ice, it almost felt like déjà vu except this time she felt trepidation coil around her bones. She had no words, not knowing how to fix what had been broken. "I find it hard to keep my sanity around you, Imani." Richard exhaled.

"Come to bed with me," she whispered, dropping to her knees in front of him, placing her hands on his lap. "We can talk about this in the morning?"

Richard didn't look down at her, he kept his eyes on the flames as they danced to a wicked beat. He knew he was going to be dragged to hell if he kept this up, he wouldn't take her with him. She deserved so much more, "I'll destroy you, I try to control myself, to not scare you o but one day I will snap." There was darkness but also passion in his words.

Imani felt her heart race against her rib cage, "so destroy me, Richard. I'm yours." She thought she wouldn't be able to say the words, but she needed to say how she felt more than he needed to hear it. Because it was only then she'd realised just how deeply, intrinsically he was a part of her being. Had been since the moment she'd walked into his cold, dark mansion all those years back.

This time he looked at her, "you don't understand, Imani. It's a visceral need, a primitive need, its fucked up but I want to tie you to me in every way possible." At this she stood and he sat back, following her body as it moved. She placed her knees either side of his legs and sat down on his lap. The so hues of yellow and orange warmed the side of her profile, she looked so fucking beautiful it was like electricity simmered through her.

"Mine," she cooed, wrapping her arms around his neck. Pressing her lips to his so ly she whispered, "I am so profoundly bound to you, I love you. Lose control, break me, claim me, Richard. Because I would fall to a thousand pieces for you, as long as it's you, always you..."

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This chapter burned through me, I hope it did the same to you...

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