

Here and Now

When Cliff got home it was a close to eleven in the evening. He had been at the shop for damn near ten hours. He was tired hell. He only wanted to eat, take a shower, and fall into the bed. He had no desire to talk, but he remembered Keisha's meeting that she had scheduled today with the record exec. He knew she'd want to discuss it.

When she called him earlier she was extremely vague about the whole thing. All she said was she'd tell him all about it when he'd got home. Stepping into the foyer, the lights were low. The television was off and all he could see was the flicker of candles around the house.

Making his way inside the house, he glanced to his left to the den, where *the babies*, as he affectionately referred to Taylor and CJ played was cleaned. Usually there were remnants of their playing laying around, but tonight everything was clear and all was quiet for the most part.

Maxwell's *Whenever, Wherever, Whatever* played softly throughout the house. Cliff began to smile to himself. He knew Keisha was up to something. He wasn't quite sure what, but he knew for certain that by morning he'd be let on to her plan.

Slipping off his black ACG boots and removing his black skull cap, he stretched a little before running his hand down his scruffy beard. For years he'd been keeping his beard and mustache closely shaven and precise, but recently he'd been letting it grow out.

Keisha objected to it initially. Half-jokingly she'd offer to line him up while he'd decline with a smile on his face. Even Taylor would remark on it while rubbing it with her small fingers. But eventually everyone got used to it. He wouldn't cut it, but he'd trim it once a week to keep it groomed. His beard represented how he was feeling at the moment.

Heading to the kitchen there was a plate with a mouthwatering grilled T-bone steak, string beans, and mashed potatoes with homemade gravy on the island next to a Budweiser.

"Damn, Ma." He remarked to himself with a smirk on his face. Coming out of his black sweatshirt and revealing his white thermal shirt that hugged his muscular frame he sat down on one of the stools surrounding the island. As he began to eat he looked around for Keisha.

Then seemingly out of nowhere, she appeared wearing an over-sized gray pinstriped pajama top with just three buttons fastened. The shirt belonged to him. Taylor and CJ had gotten the pajamas for him for Father's Day one year. Her black hair was in loose curls that fell past her back. Her cocoa-colored skin glowed and her eyes danced while he admired her. He looked down and she wore his black cotton socks on her feet and he shook his head.

No matter how many times he asked her not to she still did it. It got on his nerves, because when he went to wear his socks they were either all mismatched or he could never find a decent pair.

"Hey baby." She said with a smile as she approached him leaning in for a kiss. He quickly wiped his mouth with a paper towel and awaited her soft lips. Gently she pressed her full lips against his sending a sensation through his body causing his manhood to rise. Little by little he sucked and bit down tenderly on her bottom lip.

Putting his hand underneath her shirt he discovered she wasn't wearing anything besides the top. Pleased he pulled her closer placing her on his lap while at the same time keeping his hands beneath. Seductively, his hands roamed and caressed her body. She let out a small giggle while remaining in his embrace.

"How was your day?" He asked looking her directly in warm brown eyes.

"It was good. I missed you." She said slipping her fingers between his beard.

"I missed you too." Cliff said continuing to look within her eyes trying to get a feel of how her day actually went. He felt she was still being rather elusive. He was trying to give her the benefit of doubt and let her explain what was on her mind, but she had a mean poker face. Cliff wouldn't force anything though. He knew better.

Keisha had a tendency to beat around the bush. Cliff was a patient kind of man. Everything in due time, but at the same time, "It is what it is." Cliff would often say.

Things are the way they are. And Keisha sometimes had a hard time shooting from the hip when it came to things directly affecting their marriage.

"So what's good? How did the meeting go?" He finally asked before releasing her off his lap and motioning for her to sit down at the island with him.

"Don't you wanna eat your food first, baby?" She asked as she fidgeted in the stool.

"I can do both." Cliff said before taking a bite.

She took a deep breath and prepared to explain.

"Look Keisha shit, whatever it is can't be worse than what's been going on. Stop acting like you can't talk to me." He said beginning to show his frustration. He tried to be as sensitive as he could, but at this point it was like pulling teeth trying to squeeze out the information.

"Alright." She said while looking down at her hands.

"Alright what?" He asked irritated for a moment. After a couple of seconds, he couldn't help but to laugh and shake his head, "I mean, you ain't told me nothing. Damn, is it bad news?"

"That all depends on how you look at it."

Cliff put his knife and fork down scooted back from the island. He folded his arms across his chest. He had worked all day and wasn't in the mood to be blindsided.

"Last time I'm askin'. I'm tired as fuck and I done had a long ass day. *What is it?*"

"So you know Missy and I had the meeting with the record company today," She reiterated.

Cliff nodded clearly annoyed.

"Well, they saw the Free Press article about us." She continued to explain.

"Right, right. I already knew that. What was said in the meeting dealing with the business though?"

"I'm telling you."

"Well go ahead-"

"I will if you stop interrupting me." She said rolling her eyes.

"*Go ahead.*"

"They have this new girl group named Jasmine. They are three young girls in their 20s. They have really good singing voices, pretty and-"

"Ma, what that got to do with you and Missy?"

"They want us to style them and come up with an image for the group." She said with slight agitation in her voice.

Cliff took it all in for a moment. He'd seen her and Missy's work and he had to admit they were good at what they did. He was proud of what Keisha had accomplished. They had hit some hard times and she turned what she loved to do into a profit.

"Word, Ma? That's what's up. I'm proud of you. Now tell me how is this is a bad thing?" he asked smiling.

"The record company is in Manhattan." She revealed.

"They want y'all to commute back and forth?"

“Not exactly.

“Then what exactly?”

“They want us to relocate to the east coast as in New York.”

Cliff fell quiet. He wasn't even hungry anymore. Now he could understand why it was so difficult for her to spit it out.

Though Brooklyn was his hometown and he loved New York with all of his heart, he and Keisha had built a life in Detroit. He had a lot invested in Detroit. This was major. The entire family would be affected. Taylor had been in Detroit her whole life with her grandmother and Yvette and she was old enough to have some anxiety about leaving her family and home behind. He wasn't sure if he wanted to put her through that.

On the other hand, CJ was still young and it would give the kids an opportunity to have a closer relationship with Cliff's family. The kids only saw his parents over the holidays and during the summer. To top it off, Cliff knew that his mother would love to have her grandchildren near.

There were so many unknowns they would have to deal with. How was he going to sell the house? The housing market was so bad and they were damn near sitting on a mansion. That was going to be the hard part. He couldn't just walk away from the house.

The barbershop would be easy to flip though. He could lease it to own to one of the barbers. Mike maybe. The car wash was approaching foreclosure as they spoke. And the landscaping business he contracted his customers so he could just give them a chance to find a new contractor and just close out accounts.

The more he thought about it, the more moving back home appealed to him. It was just a matter of execution. If they were going to do it, they'd have to be done right.

Keisha stood on the opposite side of the island waiting for his response. He knew she needed his comfort and he wanted to feel her body close to his.

“Come here, Ma.” He said in his cool fashion.

She slowly made her way towards him. He pulled her into his arms and embraced her. “I'll see what I can do. We just need to weigh all our options and see what's best for us. Cool?” He asked looking down at her waiting for her response.

She looked in his chest but not in his face, “There's one more thing baby.”

“What's that?” He said placing his thumb underneath her chin raising her face up until her eyes met his.

“They offered us a contract for two hundred forty thousand dollars a year a piece.”

“Knock it off.” He said before laughing. She soon joined him and slapped his chest playfully.

“So what do you think?” She asked as the laughter came to a stop.

Cliff's eyes lowered and he began to stroke his beard, “I think it's worth thinking about.”

“Oh you think it's worth thinking about?” she teased.

“That's what I said.” He countered back with a roguish smile. He began to mess with the buttons on the shirt she was wearing. “Yo, take this off.” He said in his composed way. Since they'd discussed business about her career, it was time to get down to the *business*.

She had him turned on the worst way when he came in. And knowing that she had nothing on underneath his pajama top had his manhood throbbing.

She flirted back and smiled at him, “Demanding aren't we?” she moved out of his embrace; backing out of the kitchen.

“Where you going?” he said trying to corner her but she was too fast.

"You don't want to finish your dinner? She continued to tease.

"It'll be here when I get back." He continued to approach her as she was made her way back up the steps facing him.

"But it will be cold." She was really playing hard to get.

"Come on Ma, you know what time it is." He took his hand and gripped himself which was already stretched across his leg.

Standing at the top of the landing as he looked up at her she licked her lips seductively and bit down on her bottom lip. Slowly she unbuttoned the top two buttons on the pajama top revealing her full milk chocolate breasts.

"And what time is it?" she asked with a smile plastered on her face.

"All I know is you better be ready for Daddy." He said boldly.

As soon as his foot hit the staircase, she took off running. As he entered their bedroom she was seated on the bed waiting for him. She had removed the pajama top. There were candles burning all around the room. Her creamy milk chocolate skin glowed under the dim candlelight. Her body awaited his touch.

"I'm ready for Daddy." She grinned.

Cliff nodded his head, "You better be." He stripped out of his clothes, climbed in the bed and positioning himself on top of her. Looking down at her, he appreciated her beauty. Placing his hand lightly on her face, he meticulously kissed her lips. Sharing a passionate kiss they both devoured each other's lips.

Trailing kisses from her lips to her cheek then neck, he lowered his lips to her shoulder blades while firmly gripping her body simultaneously with his strong, rough hands.

"Mmmmmmmmmmm" Keisha moaned out loud. He loved when she responded to his touch; it turned him on even more than he already was. Seizing her breasts he rubbed them decisively until he felt her tremble underneath him.

His mouth made its way to her dark hued nipples that were so hard they resembled black pearls. Taking his time Cliff covered her nipple encircling it between his tongue and lips while at the same time teasing the other with his large fingers never neglecting either one.

Keisha's moans and movements amplified as he continued to prod and stimulate her body. Lowering himself down her he lightly kissed her stomach as he silently took in her form.

Cliff loved every part of Keisha's being. He loved her rich smooth creamy cocoa skin. He loved how soft and warm she was. He loved her breasts. He loved the way her waist dipped in and how her curvaceous hips expanded. Down to her thick thighs he loved wrapping around him.

Parting her thighs, he bit, sucked and licked her inner thighs.

"Oh Cliff!" she moaned while running her fingers through his hair.

Inserting his index finger, it was saturated by her wetness. Thumbing her love button, he inhaled her fragrance before devouring her goodness. Spreading her legs as wide as he could he delved into her love nest first licking delicately but applying just enough pressure to cause her body to shake.

"Ahhhhhhhhh oh baby. Oh please, please. It feels so good." She whimpered.

Cliff loved to hear her moan. It only caused him to work harder. Sucking, licking and moving his tongue in and out of her canal caused her moans to intensify and her pleads for him to stop.

"Please Cliff stop. Please Cliff." She begged.

"Why?" he asked while interlocking his arms around her legs forbidding her to move as he continued to assault her womanhood.

Her moans continued and became louder, “Cliff please if I get any louder I’m a wake the kids.” She pleaded continuing to moan.

“Then you better chill.” He stated composed. He amplified his licks and sucks until her body let him know that her rain was coming down.

“Ahhhhhhhh!!” she cried out as an orgasm tore through her body.

Cliff slowly released her thighs from his grasp and looked up at her with a mischievous smile across his face. He climbed back on top of her until they were face to face. She was trying to steady her breath. Her cheeks were flushed and her hair was disheveled.

“It’s not funny.” She pouted pushing her hair out of her face.

Cliff chuckled, “Why not?” He asked between kisses.

“Cause it’s not.” She pouted.

They continued to share kisses until Cliff whispered in her ear, “Aye turn over.”

On the Other Side of Town.....

“Marry me?” Terrence asked gazing into Missy’s eyes as he lay on top of her. They had just finished making love and he was still buried within her walls.

This was the fifth time he’d asked for her hand in marriage. And this was going to be the fifth time she would turn him down. Shaking her head she smiled, lovingly stroked his cheek with her right hand and said, “Baby, you just stuck on this good stuff.” She replied trying to divert answering his question.

They had been dating off and on since they met at Keisha’s shop over four years ago. And from the start Terrence had tried to lock her down. Truth was he’d already locked her down; he just didn’t know it.

He was forever bringing up placing a label on their situation. Her counter was they didn’t need a label to describe what they had. In her mind, once you put a label on what they had things would get complicated. And the last thing she wanted was to get complicated.

It wasn’t that she had been seeing another man. And she knew that he wasn’t dating another woman. They spent holidays and birthdays together. Whenever a play or concert came to town they went together.

She was always on his arm for family functions and everything in between. They went on double dates with Keisha and Cliff. They vacationed together. They practically lived together. And most of all she loved Terrence.

Despite all those things she couldn’t bring herself to define the relationship. Not to him, Keisha or anyone else for that matter. She would often say they had an “understanding”. They didn’t date other people, yet they weren’t exclusive. She knew one day that he would grow tired of her game but part of her was willing to take that chance.

Looking up into his penetrating dark brown eyes it was killing her not to profess her undying love for him. But she had to protect herself. Once she proved vulnerable to him she would lose what control she had and that was not an option.

“Is that right?” he finally responded as his jawbone tightened. She could tell by his glare that he was becoming irritated with her. She attempted to lighten the mood.

“You know this the best you ever had.” She giggled.

He smirked and responded, "Could be." He softly kissed her lips slowly slipping his tongue in her mouth.

She was dreading telling him about the job offer in New York. In front of Keisha she put up a front like she didn't care what Terrence thought about the move, but she really did.

Yes the move would be awesome for Keisha and her. Her fashions would finally get the attention that they deserved. They were both finally living their dreams. Plus she needed a change in scenery a new city would definitely do the trick. Not to mention the fact that the money was on point.

After leaving the meeting with Keisha, she made her way over to his Indian Village apartment in downtown Detroit. When she arrived he already had dinner waiting for her and he was in the Living Room grading papers.

Terrence was a History teacher at an all-boys academy in Detroit. He had just recently got the job and he really loved it. He liked showing the "young men", as he called them a positive image.

Terrence put himself through school working at FedEx. He graduated from Eastern Michigan University last Fall. Unlike Missy, Terrence wasn't originally from Detroit. He was born in Chicago.

When Terrence was ten, he and his mother Clair, moved to Detroit. Her mother, Bernice suffered a stroke. And with Clair being an RN she dropped everything, leaving behind her life including her husband Gary in Chicago.

Gary didn't want to uproot his son, but Clair was no match. When he came home from work one day only to find the house had been cleared of all young Terry's things along with Clair's. He didn't even threaten to charge her with kidnapping. He just made a point to have his son during summer vacations and holidays.

Terrence had a strong relationship with his grandmother and mother. His relationship with his mother at times put a strain on him and Missy's relationship. His mother was always interfering in their business. Terrence balanced the women pretty well, but at times Missy couldn't help but find herself on the backend. But she really couldn't say much because she had yet to "define" their relationship.

But as she lay with Terrence it made her rethink her stance. As he looked down at her with his piercing dark brown eyes she couldn't find the words to explain the changes on the horizon. Giving him a once over she could get over how sexy he was.

From the gate, Terrence wasn't her type. First of all he was younger than she was. Five years to be exact. He didn't disclose it to her until after they had been dating for maybe three months, and by then it wasn't a big deal. She'd never dated a younger man, but he was mature, and his age never affected their relationship negatively. In fact, at times he acted older than her.

Missy had a pattern of dating "pretty boys". Her usual contenders would have soft wavy hair and light eyes. They had to be at least over six feet, have no piercings or tattoos. She liked corporate men and didn't date hustlers. And they must have pretty white teeth and a nice smile.

Every expectation she had for men, Terrence proved her wrong. The only attribute he had on her list, were his fine smile and pearly white teeth. He wasn't at least six feet standing at 5'9. When they first met he worked as a courier for FedEx. His eyes weren't light and he didn't have wavy hair. And he wore a small diamond stud in his left ear.

He had intense slanted dark brown eyes outlined by thick eyebrows encircled by long curly eyelashes. Tiny freckles rested underneath them. His skin was smooth and the color of weak Lipton tea.

He wore his coal black hair in a close taper with a slight Mohawk and sported a precisely shaved beard and mustache he got shaped up once a week. Below his full soft kissable lips was a small patch of fine hair beneath the center of his bottom lip.

His chiseled arms were covered with tattoos. On his muscular left bicep was Isaiah 41:10; *Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.* On the other bicep was Psalm 27:1; *The LORD is my light and my salvation whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life of whom shall I be afraid?* Lower down on his inner right forearm was *Dear*, for his grandmother, Bernice.

Soft curly coal black hair lay down on his well sculpted chest. Broad shoulders, perfect Pecs, defined abs, his pelvic muscles looked as if they had been carved by a sculptor.

Yes explaining the new opportunity definitely was going to be taxing. "I have to tell you something." She said repositioning herself in the bed. He now moved on his side, yet he still facing her.

"If it's no again, I don't wanna hear it." He said half-jokingly.

"It's not about that." Missy said trying to build up her courage. She wished he would stop looking at her with those eyes.

"Then what is it?" He asked while he gently caressing her left breast sending a chill through her body.

She took a deep breath trying to gain her composure, "I want to tell you about the meeting today with the record company."

"How did it go?" he asked as he nibbled lightly on her neck turning her on to no end.

Focus Melissa! She scolded herself. Sitting up in the bed, she tried to stand her ground.

"Come on Terry, this is serious." Most people didn't respond to a nickname during serious dialogue, but Terrence did.

"Alright babe, I'm listening." He sat up in the bed next to her.

"Ok, at the meeting we spoke with an A&R representative for Universal Records,"

He nodded in agreement, "What was the outcome?"

"They want us to style for a new group, by the name of Jasmine."

"That's great babe." He said smiling before placing a kiss on her lips. "I'm so proud of you. That's what you want right?" he asked.

He was not making it easy.

Taking a deep breath she smiled, "Yes it is a great opportunity for me and Keish." She cracked her knuckles. Anytime she was nervous she did that. It was a clue to Terrence that it was something she was hiding.

"What's the catch?" He asked gradually moving away.

"I wouldn't really say it's a catch. The pay is super good and I would be doing something that I love."

"If there is no catch, why are you being so vague?"

“They want us to relocate to Manhattan.” She blurted out.

It was quiet for a moment after that. Missy tried to read his silence, but it was hard.

“So what do you think?” she asked finally breaking the stillness.

“I’m thirsty. I’m gonna get something to drink. You want something to drink?” he asked completely ignoring her question.

“Um I guess.”

“You want a beer?”

“No. Water is fine.”

“Cool.” As he stood up she watched him slip on his Nike Flip-Flops and walked towards the kitchen. Making each step she was overtaken by his poised stride. His perfect backside tightened with his every move and his back muscles flexed turning her on in every way.

When he returned he was holding a bottle of Dasani water and a MGD. He handed her the water before sitting down. Instead of lying back in the bed with her he opted to sit in the black leather chair next to the window.

“Thank you.” She said uneasily.

“You’re welcome.”

More silence.

“Are you going to take the job?” he asked looking out of the window.

The room was completely still. Missy glanced at the clock on the nightstand and it was 12:33AM. The moon was full and its light crept through his 11th floor window.

“It is an option.”

“Is that right?” he said never turning to look at her but simply taking a swig on his beer.

“Come back to bed.” She didn’t know what else to say. She didn’t expect him to jump up and down, but she didn’t expect this reaction either. She couldn’t read it for the life of her.

Finally turning to face her and making eye contact he replied, “Naw. I’ve got to finish grading these papers.” He stood up and took one last gulp of his beer.

Inhaling deeply she looked him back in the eye and simply said, “Alright.”

“Yup.” He slipped on a pair of gray lounging pants and made his way out front.

Missy rolled over in the bed as tears began to sting her eyes. She just knew it was over between them. He didn’t have to say it.