

Book Description:

Between Christmas, the annual Fall Festival, and baby-mama issues, South Bay High is vibrating with activity, excitement, and drama...

The holidays are coming, along with all the madness and materialism that comes with them. As usual, Jayd is just trying to stay sane while everyone around her is losing it. Mickey's got a major secret and Jayd's girl Nellie is trying to stir up trouble with her loose lips. Vengeful Laura is trying to undermine Jayd's performance in the school production of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. Rah's baby mama, Sandy, is trying to keep him from seeing his daughter. And that's just for starters. Worst of all, Jayd's grandmother warns her that serious trouble is on the way. Between a spiritual cleansing, a potion, and the mystical support of her gifted ancestors, will Jayd be able to stop all this homegirl drama in its tracks?

Prologue

After playing ball all day I'd think Rah would be exhausted, but he's actually hyped from beating KJ and his boys in overtime. I enjoyed watching my boys stomp KJ's ego. If I'm not mistaken, I think I saw KJ shed a tear he was so pissed. I can't wait to see the look on his face at school tomorrow because me and my girls are letting everyone know KJ got his assed whipped, even if it was off campus. I know KJ thinks I had something to do with him losing and for once, he's right. But if Misty still thinks it's my fault she and KJ have the clap she's crazier than I ever gave her credit for.

I'm exhausted if for no other reason than because I had to deal with two crazy broads who are after Rah and Misty's hating ass all weekend long. Even if Rah's not my man anymore, I still have to fight with two of his ex-girlfriends over him. And thanks to Misty being my former best friend, everyone knows more about my business than they should. It's one thing to have my school enemies at school and my home enemies at home, but when they come together the outcome can only be negative for me. I'm going to need to give myself a cleansing after the long weekend we just had. My drama repellent also needs some tinkering and I hope my grandmother's up for the task. I can handle Rah's current leach,

Trish—his latest ex who just won't go away—and Misty always. But his baby-mama, Sandy, being up in the picture is more than I can bear alone.

Sandy remembers a little about how my grandmother and I get down, but she and I weren't friends long enough to get too close, unlike Misty and I. I befriended Sandy on her first day at my old school, Family Christian. Even though she's a year ahead of Rah and me in school, and two years ahead of us in age, she jumped Rah the first chance she got and made me her enemy soon after. I didn't know as much about my gifts then as I do now, and I'll be damned if Sandy's going to wreak havoc in my life again like she did two years ago.

This has been the longest ten minutes of my life and there's so much traffic on Crenshaw from the Sunday night cruising that we're stuck with each other for longer than usual. Rah and I haven't spoken a word since he told me about his plan to sue Sandy for sole custody of their little girl because I don't know what else to say. What he doesn't know is that I had a dream about Sandy leaving two years ago, but I never told him or Mama about it because, honestly, I didn't want her to stay.

On one hand, I'm glad Rah's ready to take full responsibility for his daughter. Sandy did keep her away from him for almost two years without so much as a phone call and she's not the most stable person in the world. But Rah has enough on his plate as it is. He's only a junior and he already takes care of his little brother and holds down the household while his mom strips all day and night. Raising a toddler will be more than he can handle and I'm afraid of him doing whatever he deems necessary to hold it down, including more shit that could land his ass in lockdown with his father.

"What are you over there thinking about?" Rah asks, turning down the smooth oldies he's playing on his car stereo.

Before I can answer him, Rah's phone vibrates again and this time he answers. He better not be talking to either one of his broads in front of me right now because I'm not in a very friendly mood. Rah's really got me worried about his next move and he seems too in control of everything, especially when it comes to Sandy and his baby girl.

“Who’s that?” I ask softly, not wanting to be too rude but letting him know I won’t be ignored. Rah looks at me out of the corner of his eye and then back at the bumper-to-bumper traffic facing us. We haven’t moved more than three feet in the last five minutes and it doesn’t look like it’s going to get any better anytime soon. Whoever’s on the phone is making him smile, so I know it can’t be one of his other girls.

“Yeah, Nigel, we’re right around the corner from your spot, man. We’ll be there in five minutes.” Rah hangs up his cell and throws it on my lap before giving me a sarcastic grin. “Here. Now you can monitor all of my calls.” He smiles at me and puts his blinker on, ready to cross traffic. But because he’s not in a classic pimped-out ride, no one takes him seriously.

“Very funny,” I say, tossing the phone into his lap. I’m glad he’s got jokes because I need a good laugh right about now. Rah and I have been way too serious lately. I’m glad I have him to talk to about both the good and bad in our lives, but what happened to my cool kicking-it companion? Good kissing messes everything up. I should have learned that lesson by now.

“Is it cool if we roll by Nigel’s spot? They’re having a little session to continue the celebration.” After we left Pann’s stuffed like a holiday turkey, we went back to my mom’s and grabbed my stuff so I could get back to Compton earlier than usual. My mom hasn’t made it back from Lake Tahoe yet and I still have much work to do. But kicking it with my friends is always a priority, even if my girls still aren’t currently speaking to each other. Maybe a session is just what we need to chill us all out.

“You know I’ve got to get back to Mama’s soon,” I say, looking at the clock on the dashboard. It’s always nice spending the weekends with my mom, but it’s back to reality during the week. Maybe one day my mom will be able to handle having me full-time, but I’ve already asked her several times and the answer’s always no. “It’s already after five.” I usually get home around seven on Sundays and I don’t want to give Mama any reason to be irritated with me. If I come home smelling like weed she’ll grill me like I was the one smoking, even though she knows me better than that.

“Yeah, I know, girl. And I still have to pick up Kamal from my grandmother’s house, so we’ll just kick it for a minute, cool?”

I nod my head in agreement as he turns down Slauson Avenue heading toward Nigel’s pad. I can’t help but wonder how my girls are getting along and whether or not Nellie’s in a forgiving mood. She and Mickey ignored each other during the game and at lunch, but at least Nellie kept her mouth shut about Mickey’s baby-daddy decision. I hope it stays that way until things cool down a bit because I’d hate to see what would happen if Nellie wanted to give Mickey a taste of her own bitchy medicine. That’s a gift no one should have to accept.

Chapter One

Misgiving

“Can’t you tell the way they have to mention/ How they helped you out, you’re such a hopeless victim.” —LAURYN HILL

When we get to Nigel’s house I can see Chance’s Nova and Nigel’s Impala in the driveway. As nice as their classic cars are they should’ve been the ones cruising down Crenshaw this evening. I guess Nigel’s parents are out for the night, leaving us to chill alone in his beautiful home. Nigel lives in a huge old house in Lafayette Square that his parents recently had renovated when they relocated from Compton two years ago. His older sister is away at Spelman, so it’s just him and his parents and they give Nigel all of the freedom he could ever ask for.

When we walk into the foyer the bright chandelier hanging from the ceiling sparkles, sending rainbow rays from the setting sun across the white walls. We step down the few steps and into the main room, which serves as both a living

room and entertainment area with a minibar in the back corner.

“Come on in and make yourselves at home. We’re up in my room,” Nigel says, closing the door behind us as I follow Rah up the stairs. The houses on this side of Los Angeles have been here forever, and the white folks are moving back in and attempting to buy them up, even if they are only a stone’s throw away from the hood. Daddy calls it gentrification. I call it hood jacking. They’re moving back to Compton, too. But it’s going to take a lot longer for them to take our streets back over, unlike here in the big city.

“Where are the folks?” Rah asks as Nigel swoops past us to open his bedroom door, letting us into his private fortress away from the rest of the house. From the looks of it, the other three rooms on this floor are still in the process of being remodeled. When we walk into his room the pungent aroma of incense mixed with tobacco and other smoke hits me. Damn, now the shit’s going to be all in my hair. I may have to sport it wet all week if the smell’s too much for me.

“Oh, they had some sort of fundraiser at the community center off Vernon and Manchester. You know my dad can’t resist getting a pat on the back for writing a check even if he wouldn’t normally be caught dead on that side of the hood.” Nigel’s dad used to play professional basketball, but retired early after a knee injury. Now his dad is a top executive at a sports gear company and his mom’s a not-so-happy housewife.

“What’s up, y’all,” I say through the cloud of smoke in the large room.

Nigel’s room is off the chain. Even Jeremy would be envious of his sports-themed room that is at least the size of the living room downstairs. There is an aquarium like the one at Rah’s house, a king-sized bed in the center of the room, and two futons on opposite walls, which are now occupied by Nellie and Chance on one and Nigel and Mickey spread out across the other. Rah and I take a seat at the card table opposite the entertainment center, ready for a quick chill.

“That was a good game, man. Thanks for letting my boy play,” Chance says in between puffs. “What’s up with you, Jayd?”

If I didn't know better I'd say that Nellie has been smoking, too, but I'm sure it's just a contact high.

"Nothing much. Just ready to get back on my grind." I can only relax so much when I know I have mad work waiting on me at home. This is why I must get my own ride, and soon. I hate being at the mercy of other folks, even when we are chilling. When I'm ready to roll I don't want to have to ask anyone. And, by the looks of it, we may be here for a minute longer than I want to be.

"How's your leg?" I ask Chance as he passes the blunt to Nigel.

"It's cool. Just a little sore."

Rah's looking down at his vibrating phone. The way his jawbone just tightened up I'd say it was probably Sandy. As long as he doesn't answer in front of me we're good.

"You should've seen Nellie's prissy ass trying to get away from the gunshots without messing up her hair. It was hilarious," Mickey says, making us all laugh. But Nellie doesn't find it amusing at all.

"At least I take my health and well-being seriously, unlike you, mommy-to-be."

There was more venom in that comment than in a poisonous snakebite. The two of them have been hating on each other more and more lately and I'm sick of it. I wish Mickey would just come clean so we can move on from being full-time secret keepers and back to best friends chilling.

"Taking care of myself means getting out of dangerous situations I may find myself in," Mickey says, adjusting herself on Nigel's lap. "It's called street smarts, baby girl. And no, there's no book you can run and buy to teach them to you. You've got to live it to be it."

Nellie looks like she's about to burst with anger. It's been an extra long day and I can't deal with another fight.

"Okay ladies, that's enough," Chance says, feeling my pain.

“Where’s the blunt? Let’s get this vibe mellowed out.” Chance looks at Nellie, ready to laugh at her until he realizes she’s not joking.

“Y’all shouldn’t smoke around Mickey. She’s expecting,” Nellie says.

I knew Nellie would be Mickey’s nightmare of an auntie and from the look on Mickey’s face, she’s had about all she can take from our girl for one day.

“Nellie, sit down and shut up,” Mickey says, taking the blunt from Nigel and licking it, just to irritate Nellie even more. “Every pregnant chick I know is around weed twenty-four seven and their babies come out just fine.”

“Are you going to let her do that? She’s carrying your baby!” Nellie screams at Nigel, who’s way too high to take her tantrum seriously.

But Mickey’s completely sober, and now she’s also completely pissed off. “Mind your business, Nellie.”

“It is my business, Mickey.”

I feel like a kitten watching a tennis match. I look from Mickey to Nellie and back again, knowing they want to rip into each other right now.

Before I can stop her, Nellie lets the cat out of the bag. “Mickey’s not sure who the baby-daddy is and chose you, Nigel, because you’re going to be ballin’ one day.”

So much for Nellie holding her tongue and allowing us a chill ending to our victorious weekend.

“One day? Baby, if you haven’t noticed, I’m ballin’ now,” Nigel says, pretending to shoot another basket.

Rah looks at me as if to say it’s time to roll, and I couldn’t agree with him more. We’ve both had enough drama for one day.

“Did you hear what I just said?” Nellie shouts, stepping up to Nigel as Mickey steps up to her. “You may not be the father of Mickey’s baby.” As the words sink in, Mickey looks from Nigel to Nellie waiting for the next move. Chance, Rah and I wait in silence.

“What happens between me and Mickey is between me and Mickey.” Nigel looks down at his girl, who looks victoriously at our girl. Nellie looks around the room and feels humiliated. I told her this would happen. She runs outside fuming and Chance is right behind her.

“Man, I’ve got to pick up my brother. I’ll holler at you later,” Rah says. “Jayd, you ready?”

Man, am I glad that’s over for now. “Yeah. See y’all at school tomorrow.”

As we walk out of the garage I look in the driveway to see Nellie and Chance talking in his car. Knowing my girls, there’s going to be some drama to follow in the morning. I know Nellie thinks she was trying to help, but that’s the problem with giving people things they don’t want: they have the right to throw them back in your face no matter if they needed it or not.

“How was your weekend, baby?” Mama asks, rolling over in her bed and sitting up under her blankets. The floor heater in the hallway has to heat up the entire house and Mama likes to keep the door closed, which makes it pretty chilly in here at night. We used to sleep with a portable heater on the floor in between our matching beds, but Mama had a dream about it catching her bed on fire and got rid of that and her electric blanket just to be on the safe side.

“It was okay. How was yours?” I ask, plopping down on my made bed and placing my backpack, purse and weekend bag down beside me. It’ll be so nice to have my own room one day. But I must admit, I’m happy to be home. My mom’s couch gets a little uncomfortable after a couple of nights and with the long weekend we just had, my back is screaming for my tiny bed.

“You know, Jayd, I just finished working at that shelter all week like I do every year, on what I refer to as the misgiving holiday, and they already asked me back for Christmas. And not only do they want me back to help serve, they also want

me to donate one hundred of my prosperity gris-gris. Now mind you, I just donated twenty-five of them to several of the guests, including Pam, who should be dropping by tomorrow afternoon if she remembers,” Mama says, referring to the neighborhood crackhead she feeds on a regular basis.

“Wow, one hundred,” I say. I’ve only made a few of the infamous charm bags myself and one can take me all night. I can’t imagine making as many as Mama does on a regular basis. “Are you going to make them?” I ask as I unpack the items in my weekend bag and spread them across my bed, organizing it all into tiny piles. There’s a pile for my toiletries, dirty clothes and clean clothes.

“Hell no, I’m not going to make them,” Mama replies, looking at me and my stuff over her glasses as she eyes my inventory. I know Mama goes through my things when I’m not at home. I can tell by the way everything’s so neatly folded when I return and I’ve never cared that much about avoiding creases. That’s why I keep all of the important stuff—like letters from Mickey and Nellie—in my locker at school.

“I don’t see why you even go to the shelter in the first place. Don’t you get tired of helping people for free?”

Mama looks at me like I’m someone else’s child, not the granddaughter she practically raised from birth. “Never, Jayd, never. What I do get tired of is being taken for granted by those I do choose to help. I can see why Netta sticks to doing hair. Being a full-time priestess is no joke,” she says, taking a small, open container off of the nightstand and rubbing her special menthol and eucalyptus shea butter ointment on her hands.

“Yeah, but there has to be a better way to help folks than getting run down while you do.”

“I feel you, girl, and trust me. There are those days when I want to throw this book at some of my clients, literally.”

Mama points at the large spirit book. If she hit someone with that it would knock them out instantly. “But that’s why we are here, Jayd, especially those of us who can help. It’s when we give to people who don’t appreciate our efforts or when

we give for the wrong reasons that we get in trouble.”

“I hear you loud and clear,” I say as I reflect on Nellie’s unsolicited news this afternoon. I begin to take out my homework that didn’t get finished over the holiday weekend. “I hate when they make us do assignments on Thanksgiving. What is there really to be thankful about when discussing the actual holiday?”

Why did I say that out loud? Now Mama’s really going to go off.

“That’s why I call Thanksgiving the misgiving holiday. Only in this country can you have a national holiday that’s supposed to be about joy and being thankful for what you’ve got, based on the massacre of the natives who were here before the Europeans arrived. As long as Queen Calafia was here before Cortez and his men showed up, they never had to break bread with people they didn’t want to.”

Mama can’t stand any of the commercialized holidays, except for Christmas—which she’s changed into her own holiday, much to the disapproval of my grandfather. But Daddy knows better than to mess with Mama, especially when it comes to her spirit work.

“I feel you, Mama. People make too big a deal about the holidays anyway. I like the way we celebrate Eshu on Christmas Eve and our ancestors on Christmas Day.” Truth be told, it feels no different, especially since the entire family gathers on Christmas Eve like we always have. The only difference is that being that he’s a full-time pastor, Daddy says his prayers and Mama says hers.

“I hope you understand why studying about your ancestors is so important, Jayd. We give because it’s a large part of who we are, never because we expect something in return. Be just as leery of people who give because they want to be thanked for it as you are of people who want more of what you give without giving anything in return. Either attitude is the opposite of good character and that shit doesn’t fly in my book. Your ancestors can testify to that mistake.”

Yes they can, all of them.

“Speaking of ancestors, I’m doing my report in government class on Queen Califia.”

Mama looks at me with that coy smile of hers I only get when she’s extremely pleased with my growing crown. “I’m proud of you, girl. I know that wasn’t an easy topic to choose at your school.” Mama reaches over to grab the spirit book from the shrine. She must’ve been using it tonight because it’s usually in the spirit room out back or in the kitchen. “Did you get all of the information out of here you need to get started?” Mama thumbs through the aged pages of the oversized book. Every family should have one of these to keep up with their lineage.

“Yes, I did. And I also have a teacher at school who may be able to help.”

She stops browsing and looks me dead in the eye. Her green eyes shimmer as she probes my sight, trying to see what I see. I know she can if she really wants to, but I’d prefer she ask instead. “A teacher at South Bay High that knows about the Black Queen of California and our Golden State’s namesake. Really?” Mama sounds more interested than I expected. It’s not like Califia’s that big of a secret. And besides, I think the story of her and her people may be one of the original misgiving tales to tell.

“Yeah, Mr. Adewale. He’s the latest addition to the faculty roster and he’s not bad on the eyes either,” I say, folding my clean clothes, ready to take them into to Daddy’s room to store in the closet. I can wash the dirty ones while I’m in the spiritroom working on my homework. I’d better get to work now if want to be in bed by a decent hour. It’s going to be hard waking up at five-thirty in the morning after not having to for several days.

“Mr. Adewale,” Mama says as the name rolls off her tongue like syrup. It’s almost as if she’s recalling something, but I can’t tell what. My skills aren’t nearly as tight as Mama’s. “Uh huh. Don’t you think you have enough boy trouble as it is?” she asks, again reading my mind. But as strong as my vibe is, I think anyone can tell I’m feeling Mr. A. “Speaking of which, how is Rah? Did you have a good time with him on Thanksgiving?”

“Well, I actually spent the day with Nellie, Chance, and Jeremy,” I say, leaving out the part about us having dinner at Pann’s on Thanksgiving. Details aren’t that important, especially not the ones that are going to get me yelled at.

“Where was Rah?”

I return Mama’s stare from across the small room and take a deep breath. I don’t feel like getting into our long weekend filled with baby-mama drama and hating girlfriends. But I can’t lie to Mama about it all if I want to get to work anytime soon.

“He was visiting his daughter.”

Mama’s curious look quickly morphs into a concerned frown as she remembers the pain I went through with Rah and Sandy. More importantly, she remembers the prayers we did for Rah to get his daughter back. Sandy ran off with their baby when she was only a few weeks old and hasn’t looked back since.

“How is the baby? She must be almost two by now, right?” I know Mama wants to go off, but she spares my feelings and doesn’t grill me any further about Rah and I do appreciate it.

“She’s fine, I guess.”

From my response, Mama can tell I haven’t seen his daughter, and rolls her eyes. I know there’s still a lot of mess and unfinished business between Rah and me regarding his baby girl, and I intend to get on it as soon as I can. I’ve got to tighten my hustle if I’m going to make it through Mickey’s pregnancy and through this battle between Rah and Sandy over their daughter. I also want to give myself the best Kwanza gift of all: a car. And it’s all going to take some serious hustling on my part.