

## **Book Description:**

South Bay High's Jayd Jackson finally has her own ride, but that sure doesn't mean her troubles are over...

These days, Jayd just can't seem to get a break. Her car is more trouble than it's worth; her girl Mickey is being forced to attend continuation school; and Rah and his ex Sandy are still arguing.

Despite these distractions, Jayd concentrates on making potions for hair and developing her own signature braid technique, which is getting her a lot of respect and money. But then school starts up again, and with it comes more drama. If Jayd wants to keep it all under control, she'll have to look deep into herself and take her destiny into her own hands...

## **Prologue**

As I stand here with my cell phone to my ear, listening to Rah's rationale about why he has to leave me stranded with no date, to drive all the way out to Pomona to meet Sandy's crazy ass, I can feel my head getting hot. I now know the heat of a thousand suns. The tears well up behind my tired eyes, but I refuse to let him hear me cry. I haven't even made it into the bathroom yet and I already want to throw my cell in the toilet and flush the bull Rah's feeding me.

"Jayd, did you hear what I just said?" Rah asks, responding to my silence. I put the lid down and take a seat on the toilet, slowly removing my beach attire from my afternoon out with Jeremy. I was in a great mood before Rah came by, bursting my bubble. Now, the last thing I feel like doing is going to a party. I'm not in the mood to celebrate a damned thing unless it has something to do with his ex-girlfriends, Sandy and Trish, disappearing from our lives for good. "I'm sorry about this, baby. I'm going to get there and back as fast as I can."

“It’s all good, Rah. No worries.” My untruthful words are barely audible to me so I know he didn’t hear me. Every time he pulls this shit I tell myself it’ll be the last time, just like the last time. When will too much finally be enough?

“If there was another way, I’d do it in a heartbeat.” Rah sighs deeply through the phone and I can feel his frustration. I wish he were stronger in his stance with both Sandy and Trish. Maybe I should have made the Bitter Bwoy Brew I concocted to repel his broads, to work on myself instead. This boy’s drama is starting to drain me and I’m tired of being his willing victim. “You believe me, don’t you, baby?”

“I believe you think you’re doing the right thing and that’s all that matters.”

“I don’t like the sound of that,” Rah says while I finish undressing, ready to wash up and get back downstairs. I can feel my mom’s impatience and I know she’s about to give me a psychic earful if I don’t hurry up. She wasn’t planning on being my ride this evening and I know she has other plans with her boyfriend, Karl, which means I’m cramping her style.

“Well, what do you expect? You not only threw off my day, you also threw off my mother and Karl’s plans as well. But like I said, no worries. You’ve got to go handle your business and so do I. I’ll talk to you later,” I say, abruptly ending our phone conversation. I need to get all of my tears out and keep it moving if I’m going to make it through the holidays. Otherwise, I’ll be stuck in this love quicksand indefinitely and I can’t afford to stop for anyone, Rah included.

## Chapter One

“Keep on moving/ Don’t stop like the hands of time.” —SOUL II SOUL

“Jayd, hurry up and get down here. We’ve got to get going if Karl and I are going to make it to Mama’s dinner in time enough to leave early. We’re going to a party at his brother’s house afterwards and I don’t want to get there too late.” Leave it to my mom to have an exit plan for a family dinner. “I heard that, young lady. What happened with Rah? We already have to take you home unexpectedly and that’s going to take up even more of our time to be together.” Why does my mom have to sweat my mind with her telepathic conversation while I’m rushing to get dressed? She can wait another ten minutes and I’ll be downstairs with her and Karl where she’ll be able to grill me all the way to Compton.

“He had to go get his little girl,” I mutter, still in shock that Rah has left me stranded for yet another holiday. What is it with him and all the other broads in his life? How come they can snap their fingers and Rah comes running, usually leaving me behind in the dust? I’m the one he supposedly loves, but what I want always comes last. What the hell?

“Well, I don’t understand what that has to do with him not coming to Mama’s, but whatever. Did you tell him he could bring his daughter? I know Mama would love to see the baby.”

“Mom, can this wait until I’m out of the bathroom, please? I’m trying to wash my face and I still have to pick out an outfit to wear.” I didn’t want to cry in front of my mom because she would tease me to no end. She’s always viewed shedding tears as a weakness, especially if they’re falling over a dude. But I can’t hold them in any longer, especially not now that I’m looking in the mirror. I trace the tracks of my tears down my cheeks, washing them away in the gentle lather. I wish I could wash away the pain behind them just as easily.

“I already picked out your attire. You’re wearing the red dress hanging in my bathroom doorway. Merry Christmas. The shoes are already by the front door. Now, hurry up and get down here. We’ve got to keep it moving, Jayd, no matter

how tough shit is. Stick it out and come on.”

“Mom, I’m coming,” I say aloud, even if technically I am the only one in the apartment. How am I supposed to concentrate on being jolly with Christmas spirit when the one I want to be with is going to be with someone else—again? Having to give up spending turkey day with Rah to Trish and her brother was one thing. But, Rah passing up my grandmother’s Christmas Eve dinner to meet up with Sandy’s trifling ass is more than I can take.

“Jayd, haven’t you figured out that the moment you stop taking Rah’s mess will be the moment he stops dishing it out? You should know better by now.”

“That’s exactly what I said to Rah about Sandy and her baby-mama games. She’s playing him, and every time Rah participates in her drama, he’s letting her get away with it.” I quickly rinse the mango-apricot face scrub from my cheeks before filling the sink with warm water to quickly wash up with. I wish I had time to take a shower, but knowing my mom, she’ll leave me if I waste any more of her time.

“Well, it’s time to start following your own advice. And the sooner the better, because at the rate you’re going, Rah’s going to be a distant memory if you don’t step up your game. I remember Sandy being a train wreck and if that’s how she looks in my memory, I can only imagine what she must look like in your rearview.”

“You can only imagine; since when?” I ask, washing the salty ocean residue off my body, ready to slip into my new dress and my mom’s shoes, but not before I butter up with some of Mama’s Egyptian musk body butter. I only wear the good stuff on special occasions and Mama’s creations are the best.

“Jayd, I do allow you some privacy, don’t I? I don’t want to relive your memories, trust me. What I see in your little head is more than enough. Now, get down here. You’ve got five minutes.” I exit the bathroom and eye the full-length fitted dress hanging in my mother’s doorway. Damn, she’s got great taste. The Chinese-inspired design of the dress makes it that much more stunning and gives it a classic appearance. “I thought you’d like it. Don’t forget to wear panty hose or Mama will flip out on both of us. Make it quick, Jayd.”

“I’ll be right down.” As usual, the beach air has made my fresh press frizzy, so a slicked-back ponytail will have to do. I’ll have to hook my hair up later on tonight, or in the morning if I’m too tired from this evening’s festivities. Mama usually has a full evening of activities planned for everyone to participate in. She loves to play games like Taboo and Pictionary to get the entire family involved. Mama also makes us choose teams, especially since she and Daddy, my grandfather, are always the team captains. Any chance she has to beat Daddy at any game, Mama’s taking.

“Nah, nah nah nah. Wait till I get my money right,” Kanye serenades as Jeremy’s ring tone. Damn, I don’t have time for any more drama today and I just left him less than thirty minutes ago. What could he possibly want now?

“Hey, Jeremy. What’s up?” I ask, propping the phone up to my ear with my right shoulder while squeezing into my outfit. I’ve gained some weight between the holidays and won’t be slimming back down until after the winter break. I hope my mom doesn’t say anything about me stretching my gift out. It seems like she never gains weight, no matter how much she eats.

“What’s up is you,” he says, his voice as husky as ever. Damn, he sounds so sexy over the phone. “You want to go out tonight? My friends are having a little get-together at the beach and they asked about you.” I know that means his surfing buddies, who will undoubtedly be as high as kites and Jeremy will no doubt be flying right along with them.

“Thank you, but no thank you,” I say, putting my heels on before heading out the door. I take a quick glance in the mirror, realizing I have on no lip gloss or eye shadow, making me appear plain in this gorgeous dress. I also need something to cover my arms in these short sleeves or else I’m going to freeze my behind off.

“Grab a jacket and let’s get, little Jayd. You can primp in the car,” my mom says, this time much more impatiently. I grab my mom’s shawl from the coat rack, along with my purse, finally ready to leave. It’s after five now and I know Mama’s waiting on us before serving dinner.

“I promise I’ll stay sober,” Jeremy says, missing my point completely. “I really enjoyed kicking it with you today and I’m not ready for it to end.”

“Jeremy, I already told you I have plans with my family,” I say, slamming the door shut behind me as I run down the stairs. I can see my mom’s pissed look from all the way across the street. I bet she could kill someone with one of her looks if she tried hard enough.

“Don’t play about that, Jayd. Ever,” my mom says way too seriously. I wonder what that’s all about.

“Well then, invite me to come to dinner at your house for a change. I’ll be happy to escort you, that is unless there’s already someone else on your arm?” Oh yeah, that’ll go over real well, me bringing my white ex-boyfriend to Christmas dinner at Mama’s, even if my original date did stand me up.

“Why not? Enjoy yourself, Jayd. And you know Mama loves company on Christmas Eve. This would be the best time to bring Jeremy if you plan on keeping him around, even if I do disapprove of the little white boy. But at least he’s cute and treats you well. And if he meets you there, he can take you home and me and Karl can keep moving like we originally planned. So tell him to meet you there and get your ass in this truck now or he’ll be picking you up from here, too.”

“You know what, Jeremy,” I say, swinging the heavy door of the large SUV open before tossing my Lucky bag onto the seat. I always have to pull myself up high into these large vehicles, messing my dress up and causing me to work too hard. I wish Karl had driven his Camry instead of the Expedition today. “Why don’t you meet me there and then we can go out, cool?”

“Very,” he says before we hang up. I can hear his smile through the phone. As long as Rah has other interests, so will I, even if Rah is the only ex I really want to be with for Christmas. But like Mama says, gifts may not always come in the packaging I want, but I always get what I need. I just hope she understands that when I show up with Jeremy instead of Rah.

“I must be the luckiest man this holiday, with the two prettiest women in all of LA riding in my car,” Karl says while I settle into his ride. He pulls off and heads toward the 405 freeway, which will lead us to the 91, the quickest way to

Mama’s side of Compton from Inglewood. I’m going to have to learn all of the routes, since I’ll be driving soon. If I get my hustle on over the break, I’ll have more than enough to make a nice down payment on something small and economical. With the high gas prices, I know Karl must be regretting buying this ride.

“That’s why he got the Toyota to drive during the week. The truck is his weekend car,” my mom says, psychically defending her man. And I don’t blame her. My salty mood is no excuse for me talking about him. Karl’s a sweetie, even if he is twice our size, and he’s good to my mom. What more can a sistah ask for?

“So, young lady, what did you ask Santa for Christmas this year?” I like that Karl makes small talk with me without much effort. When I talk to my daddy it’s like pulling teeth without Novocain.

“A car,” I say. My phone, now on vibrate, signals a text from Rah. I’m through crying over his ass.

Hey baby. I’m sorry about how this day turned out. I’ll try and make it back and join you as soon as I can. I love you, girl. Don’t be mad at me for too long and holla at your boy when you get a min.

“Well, I think every teenager has the same thing on her list,” Karl continues, taking my mind away from Rah and back to my list. A loyal boyfriend’s also on the list, but I think that’s too much to ask for, even from Santa. “Anything more affordable?” Is he asking because he’s only making small talk or because he wants to get me a gift? None of my mom’s men have ever bought me anything.

“Cash always works,” I say, just in case this is more than an innocent probe. I can use all the dividends I can get my hands on.

“That’s my girl,” my mom says, gently rubbing Karl’s hand sitting on the armrest. If I didn’t know better, I’d say they’ve been in love forever. Hard to believe

they've only been dating for a couple of months. "No matter what they say, cash is still king in my wallet."

"So, you don't want the gold American Express card I got you with your name on it for Christmas?" Karl looks at my mom's eyes light up like a little girl on Christmas morning.

"Do I have to pay the bill?" My mom's nothing if not practical when it comes to her finances. Unlike other baby-mamas, her baby-daddy doesn't pay all of her bills. Mickey needs to come and spend the day with my mom to get a taste of what it's like being a single mother, for real.

"What kind of gift would that be?" Karl exits the freeway, only a few minutes away from my grandparents' house. Remembering that Jeremy's never been all the way to my grandparents' house before, I send him a quick text with the address. I'm sure he'll MapQuest it if he needs to.

"Well then, hell yeah, I want my card. Give it up," she says, patting him down like the police.

"I'll give it to you when we get to your mother's house. Back up, woman," he says, attempting to gently push my mom back down in her seat, but my mom's relentless in her quest. I hope Mama finds them as amusing as I do.

See you soon, Lady J.

Jeremy's text has all kinds of undertones in it. I know Jeremy wants us to get back together, but I'm not there. I hope he doesn't think his coming to Mama's house is a step in the direction of a relationship. Friends visit Mama too, and I have to make sure he understands that. The last thing I need is more drama with one of my exes.