If I Can't Have You
Also by Mary B. Morrison

The Eternal Engagement
Darius Jones
Unconditionally Single
Maneater (with Noire)
Who’s Loving You
Sweeter Than Honey
When Somebody Loves You Back
Nothing Has Ever Felt Like This
Somebody’s Gotta Be on Top
He’s Just a Friend
Never Again Once More
Soulmates Dissipate
Who’s Making Love
Justice Just Us Just Me

Coauthored with Carl Weber
She Ain’t the One

Mary B. Morrison writing as HoneyB
Married on Mondays
Single Husbands
Sexcapades

Presented by Mary B. Morrison

Diverse Stories: From the Imaginations of Sixth Graders
(an anthology of fiction written by thirty-three sixth graders)
If I Can’t Have You

MARY B. MORRISON
Breast Cancer Survivors
Margie Rickerson, my sister
Myrenia Harris, my friend

Breast Cancer Warriors
Marion Bean, my sister’s best friend
Lucille Baloney, my grandmother, and
Mary Ann Henry-Barnes, my aunt
Your greatest fear shall come upon you.
Life is an awesome journey through the unknown, a priceless adventure of countless experiences. We are the pilots of our passion. We never control the outcome of our choices, but with each step we navigate the road ahead. What you do with your life is up to you and nobody else. It's impossible to be everything to everybody. Please don’t die before you decide to live to the fullest. Release your sexual inhibitions. Dance naked in the rain. Love and make love to yourself; you’ll be happier.

Remember, no man acquires success independent of another. For my achievements I’m thankful to the Creator, my publishers, editors, family, friends, and to each of you. I acknowledge and appreciate your emotional and financial support. You are a blessing to me and I pray somehow, even in a small way, that I, too, have or will positively influence you.

Darrin Gipson (Grand Lux Cafe) of Houston, Texas; Jay Fountain, Battalion Chief, Port Arthur Fire Station No. 1; Officer Mark Temple, Clemetric Thomas-Frazier, Ron Lockett, LaToya Fontenot, Mrs. Kathleen Fontenot, Rick Smith, and the Honorable Vanessa Gilmore, I thank you for welcoming me to your wonderful cities of Houston and Port Arthur. The information each of you provided is priceless.

The main reason I smile is because of my son, Jesse Bernard Byrd Jr. Honey, you’re the best. I’m proud to be your mom and I love you unconditionally. Another reason is my guardian angels—my mother, Elester Noel; my father, Joseph Henry Morrison; my great aunt, Ella Beatrice Turner; and my great uncle, Willie Frinkle—always lift me up when I need them. Wayne, Andrea, Derrick, and Regina Morrison, Margie Rickerson, and Debra Noel are my siblings. Thanks, guys, for
always believing in me. A special thanks to Richard C. Montgomery and Barbara Cooper for your continued support and unconditional love.

I genuinely appreciate all my Facebook friends and fans, my Twitter followers, MySpace crew, and my McDonogh 35 Senior High alumni. Happy thirtieth reunion to my class of 1982!

Thanks to my editor and friend, Selena James, at Kensington Publishing Corporation. To Steven Zacharius, Adam Zacharius, Laurie Parkin, Karen Auerbach, Adeola Saul, Lesleigh Irish-Underwood, and everyone else at Kensington for growing my literary career.

In loving memory of Walter Zacharius. I miss you. It is my honor to be a part of your undying legacy to the world of literature. Your spirit will dwell within me forever.

Well, what’s an author without brilliant agents? I’m fortunate to have two of the best agents in the literary business, Andrew Stuart and Claudia Menza. You are appreciated.

I thank everyone that is making the Soulmates Dissipate seven-film project possible—director/producer Leslie Small; Jeff Clanagan, CEO of Codeblack Entertainment; and producers, Dawn Mallory and Jesse Byrd Jr.

Wishing each of you peace and prosperity in abundance. Visit me online at www.MaryMorrison.com and sign up for my HoneyBuzz newsletter. Join my fan page on Facebook at Mary HoneyB Morrison, and follow me on Twitter @marybmmorrison.
“I came to tell you something,” she said softly.

Loretta sat across the table from me at our favorite restaurant, Grand Lux Cafe, on Westheimer Road. Her naturally chocolate lips were perfectly painted with that sweet raspberry gloss I’d tasted twenty-three times. I wanted to lean over the table, suck it all off, up my count to twenty-four.

“You look ravishing,” I growled, then snapped my teeth. I complimented her all the time because I never wanted my Loretta to think I’d ever take her for granted.

Finishing my third beer, I’d been anxiously waiting for her for almost an hour. I had arrived thirty minutes early. She was equally as late. She’d texted me earlier that she had to wait for her mom to get to her house so her mother could watch her little girl. She wanted to postpone our date until tomorrow, after her daughter’s father picked up their child for the weekend, but I insisted on seeing her today. I couldn’t wait another twenty-four hours to gaze into her large brown eyes. Plus, I wasn’t good at keeping surprises a secret.

“I ordered you your favorite martini, but it’s warm now. I’ll get you another one. . . . Excuse me, Darrin, a fresh lemon drop for my baby, please,” I said, handing him the glass. I’d been there long enough to know a few things about the waiter, like he was twenty-three, had a deep voice, which made me slightly envious, and we were both Houston Texans’ fans.
Darrin nodded at Loretta. “Glad you made it. I’ll be right back with that—”

She shook her head. “No, but thanks. I’m not drinking today.”

“Then I’ll get you some water,” Darrin said, then asked me, “Sir, another beer?”

I nodded. I was feeling good and wanted to keep my buzz going.

Loretta’s big brown eyes connected with mine. When her thick lips parted, my dick got hard, making me reminisce about the first and last time she’d given me fellatio. Loretta had said, “I’m never sucking your dick again,” because I came too fast. Hopefully, she’d change her mind; but if not, that was okay with me as long as she kissed me somewhere.

Today was special. I’d requested a booth for us. Sliding close to the window, I said, “Come sit next to me.”

She shook her head. “I’m good.”

The space between the high red velvet cushion behind my back and the edge of the table grazing my stomach was a little snug for my wide midsection, but the smooth vinyl seating comforted my rock-hard rear end. My muscular body was still fit from when I wrestled in high school, and I earned my money doing construction work for the past twenty-five.

As I stared outside, there wasn’t much of a view, except rows of cars and the stores’ signage for Sport Clips, Nothing Bundt Cakes, and Stride Rite on the other side of the parking lot.

I looked at my girl and moved back to the middle of the booth so I could sit directly across from her. Her wide pink tongue peeped at me, commanding my attention. The scent of fresh bubble gum traveled from her mouth to my nose when she sighed. Loretta’s mouth was always inviting. I winked at her, then smiled.

“You know what you just did to me, right? You gave me another woody,” I whispered. “You gave me a woody.” Then I started grinning.

Sighing heavily, she said, “Your dick is always hard.”

I lifted my brows twice, narrowed my eyes, and kept smiling at her. She made me feel sexy; she had done things to me no other woman had. She’d once tied me to my bed—naked, except for my cowboy boots—then rode me like she was a cowgirl and I was her bucking
bull. My bald head banged against the headboard as I screamed, “Loretta!”

My woman exhaled and rolled her eyes to the corners; then she returned her gaze to me. Her stare was dreamy. Or maybe it was my reflection that I saw. It didn’t matter. Either way, I was in love.

If she said she was pregnant, she’d make me the happiest man in the world. I swear, I’d jump on the table, wave my big Texas hat, and shout to everyone in hearing range, “We’re pregnant!”

Yelling too loud would hurt my throat. But the announcement of my very first kid would be worth the joy and pain. Twenty years ago, when I was twenty-five, I was shot in the shoulder and the bullet grazed my vocal cord. The damage was permanent; my voice was still deep, but since that day it’s been scratchy. When I first met Loretta, she thought I was hoarse. The louder I tried to speak, the more it hurt, but I loved to talk. I was brilliant and enjoyed sharing my wisdom with anyone who’d listen. Some women actually thought my voice was sexy. But not Loretta. When I talked too much, I annoyed her.

My baby rubbed the side of her nose. “I don’t want to go out with you anymore. You’re nice and all, but I can’t do this again. I met you here to let you know that this is our last date.”

Not another “let’s just kiss and say good-bye” bitch.

Usually, I’d want to ram my tongue down her throat and give her one of my juicy kisses, letting the saliva drain from my mouth to hers. Now all I wanted to shove in her mouth was my huge fist. Rip away that yellow blouse with the dangling collar, bite her breasts. Raise up her short skirt, spread her legs with my thigh, give her this woody throbbing against my zipper. Making her cum would make her stay with me.

The restaurant was packed on this blazing hot afternoon. Lucky for her, we were not alone. That, and I didn’t hit ladies for no reason—even when I felt they deserved a slap or two.

An affectionate pat on the back from me had sent a few grown men stumbling. “Watch it,” Loretta would scold when I touched her face. Then she’d ask, “When was the last time you washed your hands?”

Most of the time I had no idea. I was a manly man, operated heavy machinery, and used my hands to haul bricks and dig ditches. There
was no way I was going to run to a restroom every time I felt like
touching her.

It was my turn to exhale. “I don’t understand. I thought things be-
tween us were getting better.”

“For you,” she said.

Frowning, I said, “For me? I’ve done everything you’ve asked me to
do. I even went to that sex therapist you recommended, Numbiya
Aziz. I can’t lie. She taught me some things. Especially how to take my
time when making love to you. Now that I know how to make you cum
really hard, you can’t deny the sex between us is the best you’ve ever
had. Right?”

“For you,” she said again.

_Bitch, if you say that shit one more time!_

I wiggled my brows, pressed my lips together, then smiled. The heel
of my custom-made boot lifted, then thumped to the floor. Again and
again. Suddenly my jeans felt too tight. I shook my left leg sideways,
rubbed my thigh.

Darrin placed Loretta’s water and my beer on the table.

“What about the lingerie I just bought you? You trying to use me?
You gon’ put my shit on for some other nigga?”

Darrin quietly walked away.

Loretta opened her oversized blue Coach purse, handed me a red
plastic Frederick’s bag. “I thought you’d bring that up. I never wore
them. Everything is there, including the receipt.”

She placed the bag on the table. I left it there. I didn’t want no
fucking refund. I wanted her!

“Tell me what your problem is. Give me a chance to fix it,” I
pleaded. This woman was close to making me act irate, like a guest on
an old episode of _The Jerry Springer Show_. What was I supposed to do
with the $15,000 ring in my damn pocket? She was the one who’d told
me that a man had to spend at least two months of his salary on an en-
gagement ring. That was her way of asking me to marry her.

Her eyes turned red as she said, “I’m not the problem. You are. I’m
tired of telling you that you talk too much. Your voice is irritating. You
don’t listen to what I have to say. Your shoving your tongue down my
throat, draining your bodily fluids into my mouth, is horrible, but you
think each kiss is ‘the best kiss ever.’ You think we’re in a relationship, when I keep telling you . . . we’re not!”

“We are in a relationship!”

“I’m not your woman.”

Staring her down, I had to break her. Make her see things my way. I told her, “You are my woman. We talk on the phone every day. We go out every other day. And we’ve had great sex. Any decent woman would expect me to be her man. What’s wrong with you?”

“You. I’ve only known you for three weeks and my stress level has gone from calm to calamity.” Loretta slid to the edge of the booth. “As nice as you appear to be, you are not the man for me. You’re not the guy for any woman, Granville. You need help. Medication. Something. I barely know you. You’re too possessive. I could go on and on, but . . . ,” she said, standing in front of me. “Take care of yourself.”

Bitch, you’re the one who gave it up and sucked my dick on the first date.

There was someone for everyone, and Loretta was mine. I couldn’t let the love of my life walk away from me. I grabbed her wrist. “But we haven’t eaten. Look, I’m sorry. I apologize. I love you, Loretta. If you think I need meds, I’ll make us an appointment to see my doctor. Sit down. Let’s have lunch. You talk. I’ll listen. You’re right.”

“And you’re desperate. Let go of me.” She jerked her arm.

I wanted to release her, but I couldn’t let go. What if she was serious? What if I never saw her again? My fingers tightened. Worse, what if she was trying to leave me for another man? I felt sweat beading on my head, then streaming down my forehead. I wiped my nose.

Darrin rushed over to our table. “You okay?” he asked Loretta.

Loretta picked up her glass of water and tossed it in my face. Darrin took off. This was one of those few moments when Loretta made me want to hit her. The first time had to be an open-hand slap. Second time, backhand. Third, fist to the face if the bitch disrespected me. But abusing her in public would land me behind bars.

Maybe I was overreacting. She was probably trying to cool me off. Maybe. I rattled my head to shake off the excess water. She jerked her arm again.

Why was Loretta treating me this way? All I tried to do was take good care of her. Treat her with respect. Buy her nice things. The first time I bought her daughter a gift, she gave it back saying, “The only
men who are allowed to give my princess gifts are her dad and her grandfathers. That’s it.”

I respected that, because I had to, but what woman wouldn’t let her man take care of her child? We were a family. I was willing to help her work out her issues if she’d give me the chance.

I dug deep into my pocket, I pulled out two 20-dollar bills and placed them on the table. Then I reached into my other pocket, pulled out the ring, held the box in my palm, flipped it open with my thumb, and knelt on one knee. Still holding on, I stared up at her.

“Marry me, Loretta.” The shine from the bling made me smile.

“For real? You expect that will make me say ‘yes.’ ” I squeezed her wrist as tight as I could, until she screamed, “Ow! Let me go!”

The people staring at me were supposed to be cheering for me, for us. I dumped the ring in my palm, snapped the box closed, jammed the box in my pocket, staggered to my feet. The baby I wanted us to have wasn’t growing inside her? The woman I loved had to have a reason to love me too. Anger festered inside me as she broke my heart and my grip, then slapped my face.

“Yeah!” I grunted. “You know you love me.”

Loretta marched out of the restaurant.

I snatched my hat off the window’s ledge and put it on as I chased her past Carter’s, down to Marshalls, and to her car. “Wait, give me one more chance.”

“Ugh!” Loretta stopped, waved her hands in front of my face. “What is wrong with you?”

“What’s wrong with you, skank-ass bitch? You’d better get your hands out my face. Hit me again and you gon’ need medical attention. I told you I’d put you on my health insurance. You’d rather be a hometown ho, spreading your pussy around Houston like pollen, than to let me take care of you?”

Calmly she said, “Yes.”

“You trifling bitch! You’re not going nowhere,” I said, blocking her driver’s-side door.

“You need to get your fucked-up, crooked yellow teeth, nasty-ass crusty feet, ‘slobbering like a dog in heat’ self away from me and my brand-new BMW.”

Fuck her 700 Series. I should kick a dent in it. Now, all of a sudden, she’s
trying to say I’m ugly. She wasn’t complaining when I was giving her this big, hard dick. My shit was long, wide, circumcised, and worth worshiping every day.

My mother’s voice echoed in my ears, “You can catch more bees with honey, honey.”

I calmed down. This wasn’t about me. It was about Loretta. I told my lady, “You’re right. I apologize. Please forgive me. This won’t happen again. Marry me.” I fought to put my ring on her finger. She yanked her hand away.

“Officer!” Loretta shouted. “Help me!”

I hadn’t noticed the cop getting out of his car until now. Wondered if that Darrin dude called PD on me. Regardless, I wasn’t looking for trouble. I stepped aside, hoping Loretta would get into her car and go home. That way we could continue our conversation in private.

“Is there a problem, sir?” the officer asked me. His hand was on his gun.

“No problem. Just a little lovers’ quarrel with my girlfriend.”

Spectators were gathering alongside the walkway in front of Marshall’s. Loretta cried like she was auditioning for the role of Tina Turner in What’s Love Got to Do with It. Made me want to take off my boot and beat her ass like I was Ike.

“I’m not his damn girlfriend. He’s harassing me. I’m trying to leave, but he won’t let me.”

“Sir, let me see your identification.”

“What did I do?” I asked. My eyes narrowed toward Loretta. “She’ll calm down shortly. Women always exaggerate. Soon as you leave, she’ll be begging me to come over to her house and you know what, man.” I hoisted my big Texas belt buckle.

After all this shit was over, I needed to go kick it at Grooves Restaurant and Lounge tonight. Meet me a down-to-earth woman who knew how to enjoy herself minus all the drama. Buy her a few drinks. Toss back some more brews. Get wasted. Get my dick sucked and forget about Loretta until tomorrow.

“I’m not going to ask you again, sir.”

Fuck!

I eased my wallet out of my back pocket and handed my license to the officer.
“Wait right here,” he said. “Better yet, you come with me. Ma’am, you wait here.”

I had to follow that nigga all the way over to Old Navy. Stood beside his car. Women could fuck things up in a heartbeat. When shit didn’t go their way, they wanted the police to rescue their ass. Just like that, Loretta was about to know what I didn’t want her to ever find out.

The policeman opened his door, got into his car. Ten minutes later he got out. “Put your hands behind your back and turn around.”

“Why? What did I do?”

“I’m not going to ask you again . . . sir.” The officer unfastened the latch securing his stun gun and pulled it out.

I faced the fuckin’ patrol car, did as I was told. I knew the routine. The officer removed my hat, tossed it on the backseat, placed his hand on top of my head, shoved me into the car, and left the door open.

I sat there, feeling like an idiot. Watched him motion for Loretta to come over to his patrol car. She stared like I was in a lineup and she needed to ID me. I stared back at that ho. After all I’d done for her, that bitch didn’t have an ounce of empathy for me. Just like the rest, she’d get hers.

“Let me see your license,” the officer told Loretta.

She opened her purse and handed the ID to the cop.

“I don’t know your relationship to this man, but there’s something you should know,” the officer said. “Granville Washington has three protective orders against him filed in Harris County by three different women. If he’s harassing you, I suggest you do the same, Ms. Lovelace. This man is a ticking time bomb waiting to explode.”

He didn’t know me. If I was such a threat, why was I forty-five years old and making ninety Gs a year busting my ass building offices? What the cop failed to mention to Ms. Lovelace was that all three POs were unwarranted. And even if they were legit, Harris County had nearly 4.5 million residents, and Houston was the fourth largest city in the United States, with over 2 million people. It was hot as hell. Every heat record was broken this year. Folks in Houston were understandably agitated sometimes and the prisons were already overcrowded. So having a few POs was no reason to lock a brothah up.

“Arrest him! He’s insane. I want to press charges.”
“Wish I could, ma’am, but I don’t have cause to arrest this man. He hasn’t violated the law.”

Watching Loretta walk away, I smiled on the inside. It would be in her best interest to take the officer’s advice. I’d never violated a protective order. Better to get another woman than go to jail and become someone else’s woman.

I wasn’t finished with Loretta Lovelace yet. If she were wise, she’d wear my ring, and she’d never turn her back on me again.
“'You can’t see it. . . . It’s electric!’”

The music moved through me like lightning. Happiness filled the room with smiles and laughter. My hips swung to the beat and my feet moved along the hardwood floor as though my Louboutin red-bottom stilettos had wheels.

I was glad my girlfriend had let me sponsor her post-wedding reception at Black Swan and the Nest at Black Swan. My gift to her cost me twenty grand to rent out the entire space on their most popular night, Saturday. Food, alcohol, the champagne fountain, decorations, party favors, and all the trimmings were an additional thirty thousand, but Tisha was worth every penny.

We’d been friends since kindergarten, joined at the hip with Loretta. The stories we shared over the years from losing our virginity to pledging different sororities were beyond entertaining. What I loved most was, we weren’t three of a kind. Each of us had unique looks and styles, and we’d taken separate career paths. At times our friendship was tested, but our bond was never broken for long. When things fell apart, Tisha was our glue.

As I spun around, the split in my green-and-gold spaghetti-strap dress exposed my left leg from my ankle to the space adjacent to my vagina. “Daring,” “diva,” and “delicious” best described my infectious personality. Every day I opened my eyes, I was ready to see the world
and all the rich men in it. A broke man couldn’t do anything to or for me.

I spun again, almost tripping over my man as he got down on one knee. I gyrated in his face. Feeling the heat of his hand against my inner thigh, I moved with an “uh, yeah, take that, and this” motion.

*Damn, if the place were empty, I’d shake out of my thong and let him taste me.*

My man strived to be the best at *e-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g*. I did too. Our individual success made us a dynamic power couple.

“I love you, Madison Tyler. Will you marry me?”

In the midst of grooving, with over fifty people surrounding us and doing the electric slide, I stopped dancing. The moment I’d been waiting for had arrived in style. I couldn’t hold back the tears. What girl didn’t want a husband to love and adore her for the rest of her life? I was positive I wanted to get married.

“Yes! Yes, I will marry you, Roosevelt!” I wasn’t sure if he was the one, but he’d do for now. I was attracted to one of his assistant coaches, Blue Waters, but he wasn’t the head coach or close to being hired as executive vice president/general manager like my man. Sorry, Blue. Any girl who knew her self-worth understood that status mattered.

Roosevelt didn’t like his first name, but I appreciated it more than what everyone else called him, Chicago. I found Southerners strange in many ways. Being the fairest of Creoles from Port Arthur, Texas, I had a bundle of eccentric ways, but I wasn’t crazier than some of my relatives who still lived there.

A teardrop clung to Roosevelt’s eyelid. He had no middle name, so his family gave him a nickname when he was a toddler. They weren’t from Chicago, and he hadn’t visited the Windy City until he was in college playing football. The only rationale for his nickname was the Bears were his father’s favorite team. Since he was firstborn, the name stuck, but his brother, Chaz, was always called by his real name.

The ice cube he was sliding on my ring finger blinded me. *Damn!* My heart pounded like a drumbeat. I held my hand in front of my face and cheesed the widest grin ever. I pulled Roosevelt to his feet by his lapel, leapt into his arms, smashed my lips against his, and held them there.

The “Electric Boogie” faded from blasting to silence.
“Did Chicago just propose to Madison?” DJ Chip asked. He was the DJ for our football team and mixed up the beat every Saturday at the Black Swan.

My arm shot up in the air. “He sure did!” I flashed my ring to all the bitches at my girl’s wedding reception. All the single females’ eyes melted in my shine. It didn’t matter who caught the bouquet; I was the envy of them all.

The desperate ladies dying to get a man were not my problem. And if they believed catching a bundle of flowers was the way to change their status from single, all I could say to them was “good luck.” I gave Tisha a big hug, because she had to be feeling really small right now. Wasn’t my fault she divorced a cheating millionaire and married her broke-ass high school sweetheart in the name of love. What a joke.

Tisha trotted upstairs and into the Nest, the private room I reserved for her immediate family and her closest friends. Stealing the spotlight from Tisha wasn’t planned. How was I to know my engagement ring would be a bigger solitaire than all the chips in her wedding band and engagement ring combined?

I’d turned to kiss Roosevelt again, when someone snatched my biceps. The grip was that of a blood pressure machine about to burst. My fingers automatically curled into a tight fist. As cute as I was, I wouldn’t hesitate to knock a trick on her ass.

I didn’t want to fight, but I swore if I turned around and saw one of those bold bitches who wanted my man was trying to ruin my moment, I was going to put my rock to work and lay her ass out, then glide over her as though I was on the red carpet.

These bitches were beneath me. All women were beneath me, including my best friends, Loretta and Tisha. When I saw it was Loretta, I uncurl my fist.

Loretta didn’t have a date at the wedding because she’d wasted her time dating that loser construction worker, Granville Washington. She should’ve brought him, anyway. It was unladylike for a real woman to escort herself to a function. He worked for me. I’d heard of him, but I had never met him. I had too many employees to meet them all.

From what she’d told me, I told her not to do him. Told her just because that misfit allegedly had a big dick—“big” was relative to the
woman—and since Loretta and I didn’t travel in the same circle of men, I had no idea what he was working with. I said that she should leave him alone. He had nothing to lose. Outside of work, from what my girl said, he had no real interests other than taking her out, gazing into her eyes, drooling in her mouth, eating her pussy, and boning her.

From all the details she’d given me, Granville was a forty-five-year-old clumsy brute—six feet six inches, 285 pounds of muscle. The worst combination for a blue-collar man was to be good-looking, decent in bed, and to think he knew everything when what he truly was, was ignorant. Loretta should’ve taken my advice: took the dick and kept him moving. But no. Loretta always had to find the good in every man, until he treated her bad.

“Girl, let me—”

Before I finished protesting, I was being dragged off the dance floor, up the stairs, out the door, and onto the elevator.

“What the hell are you doing?” Loretta asked.

“I flashed my ring in her face. “Duh. Trying to enjoy the moment. What’s wrong with you?”

She pulled me through the lobby, then outside by the swimming pool. “You can’t accept Chicago’s ring. You’re going to ruin another good man. You’ve already got what, six engagement rings collecting dust. It’s women like you who mess it up for women like me.”

“Correction. It’s eight. This makes nine. And see, that’s where you’re wrong. It’s women like you who allow men to dictate to you, instead of you training them like I’ve taught you. That’s how you end up with fucked-up men like Granville. You give up the pussy, then find out they’re crazy. By the way, have you filed that protective order, like you said you were going to do?”

“Have you fired him, like I’ve asked you?”

“He’s not my problem, but I did inquire about him. According to his supervisor, Granville is an excellent worker and does the work of ten men. I’d be stupid to fire him, especially without cause.”

“Forget Granville. I don’t want you to marry Chicago. What are his parents going to say about this? If he marries you, our entire football team is going to hell.”

“Not my problem.”
So what if his parents hate me? I’m not doing them. Hell, they probably aren’t doing one another. If they were, they wouldn’t be all up in my business.

Roosevelt appealed to me because he managed our professional football team. He was unquestionably a man of power: hiring athletes, chartering planes, making sure hotels, equipment, and food for the players and staff were taken care of. The scouts and video techs reported to him. He dealt with salaries, trades, and contract terminations. Made sure if any of his starters were hurt, he had talented backup. As the general manager, Roosevelt was in charge of everyone around him, except me.

No man could tame me. I had plans for Roosevelt. My first order of business was to make sure I married him right before he inherited the $20 million his grandfather was giving him and his brother, Chaz. Ten was for Roosevelt and me, and the other ten was for Chaz.

“Look at it like this, Loretta. The second the pastor says, ‘You may kiss the bride,’” I’m going to be on a first-name basis with the owners, all sixty-one ballers, the assistant coaches, and the head coach. You should be nicer to me. I might hook you up with a millionaire like Blue Waters, girlfriend. Stop hating on me because you can’t find the right man.”

“Fine, if you want to ruin Chicago’s life, go right ahead,” Loretta said, flinging my arm toward me. “But don’t overshadow Tisha’s wedding day.”

“Not my problem. Tisha shouldn’t have divorced her first husband and she damn sure nuff should’ve married a man with more money than Darryl. That way he could’ve paid for her ring and their reception.”

Loretta shook her head. “Damn, Madison. She married her high-school sweetheart. Girl, you’re lucky you’re my friend, or else.”

Marrying a high-school sweetheart when you’re thirty-five was backtracking to the tenth power. That was a huge mistake for Tisha. Fortunately, her ex-husband paid her a solid $20,000 a month for alimony and child support, but that was about to decrease once the ink dried on her license. Why any woman would marry a liability was beyond my comprehension.

“You’ve got that one twisted. The soon-to-be Madison DuBois is going back inside to celebrate her engagement. I suggest you stay
your ass out here until you cool down. Trust me, you don’t want me to bust your business in front of Tisha’s guests.”

“Okay, Ms. Thang. Wait a minute,” Loretta said. “Since you’re so great at training men, I bet you that you can’t train Granville Washington.”

I stared at my girl. She must’ve been insane to give me a dare. She knew me better than that. Nobody challenges Madison Tyler and wins. I’d show her how good I was at getting my way with men.

“This’ll give me something to do while Roosevelt is on the road. But before I agree, what’s in it for me?”

Boldly she said, “Whatever you want.”

That wasn’t specific enough, but it was to my advantage. I could become Loretta’s worst enemy by the time I won this bet. I threw up my hands. Why was I entertaining her?

“Look, I’m not sure you have enough to lose for me to charm that loser.”

“Just what I thought. You’re all talk. Just because you have a banging body, booty, you’re gorgeous, and have a bubbly personality, you’re not all that, Madison. Men want women with integrity,” Loretta said, walking away from me.

“Integrity”? Is she serious?

I had all the assets men died to acquire. She also left out “scintillating.” If a man could get a beautiful woman whom all his boys wanted to fuck, he wouldn’t give a damn about her morals.

“Fine, I’ll prove it. But I’m not having sex with him.”

“That’s the only way you can win.”

I was so good that I could open an obedience school for men, but sexing Granville would go against my principles of giving charitable fucks. Not sexing him would give Loretta bragging rights . . . never. I’d show her ass. I was going to break this Granville guy in one weekend.

“Fine,” I said, walking away.

“One more thing,” Loretta said.

“What? Girl, what! You are ruining my moment.”

“Better for me to ruin yours than for me to stand by and let you do the same to Tisha. You never asked me what I wanted.”
I put my hand on my hip and placed my left foot forward. The split draped both sides of my leg.

Loretta said, “If I win, you’ll call off your wedding with Chicago.”

Whipping my dress like a bullfighter, I laughed, then shook my head. “Fine, bitch. Because we both know I’m not going to lose. You are.”