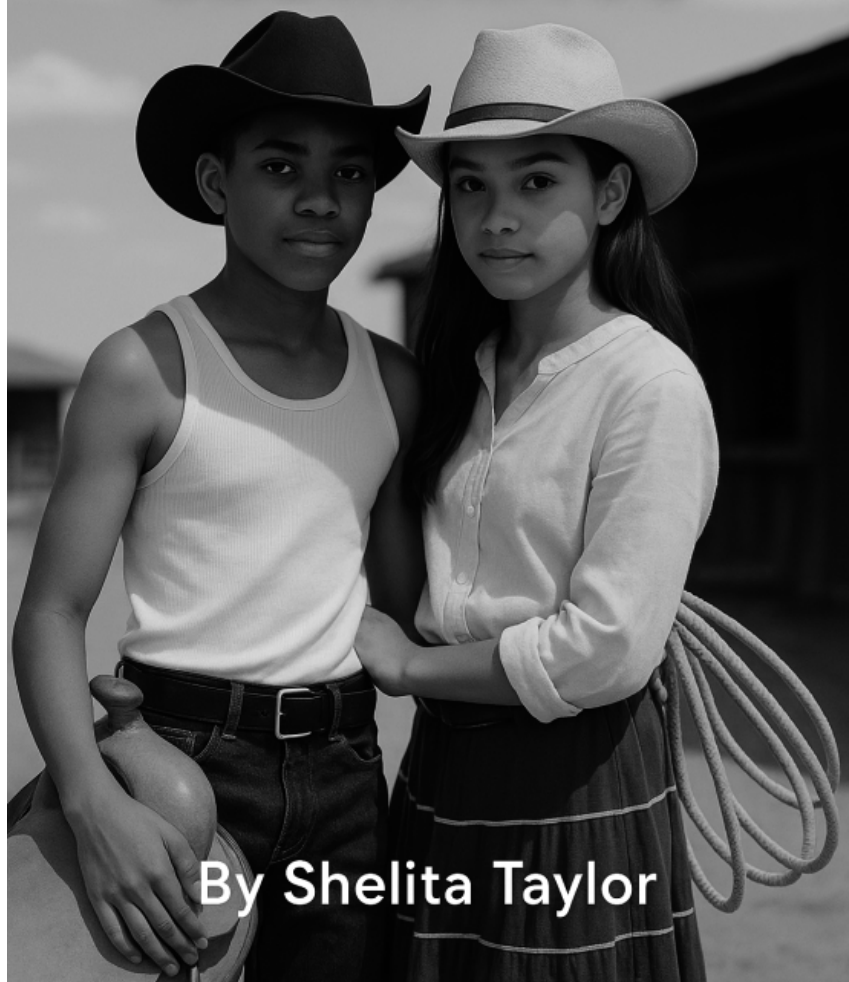


# HARMONIES OF NEW BEGINNINGS



By Shelita Taylor

# *Harmonies of New Beginnings*

By: Shelita Taylor

## **Introduction: When Innocence Meets Curiosity**

At thirteen, Savannah was beginning to understand who she was and what a romantic relationship might mean for her. Growing up in a Baptist household meant adhering to strict rules, especially when it came to dating. If she were ever to have a boyfriend, he would need to be a church-going boy with good manners and a respectable family background. Her elders constantly reminded her not to rush into relationships and to choose wisely. Savannah respected their wisdom, but her curiosity often got the better of her.

Her mother warned her that boys only wanted one thing: sex. As a virgin, Savannah did not fully understand what that meant. Also, she was taught that sex was for married couples, it was not something she spent much time thinking about.

Though Savannah still held onto her innocence, she could not shake the feeling that she was ready to explore the world of dating. The excitement of the unknown outweighed any lingering fears, leaving her eager to discover what romance might bring. She had no idea what to expect, but she was excited to find out. Savannah's first taste of romance came unexpectedly one summer afternoon. It wasn't planned or was dramatic just a chance meeting that would mark the beginning of her journey into relationships. That is when Albert, her first long-distance boyfriend, entered her life.

It all started one summer day when Savannah and her best friend, Tanesha, were lounging at home. They received a call from their older friend, Abilene, inviting them over. Eager to break free from their usual routine, Savannah and Tanesha set out for Abilene's house. On the way, they made a quick detour to a nearby store, unaware that this small errand would lead to an unexpected encounter.

Inside, they ran into Darius, a boy from school who had a crush on Savannah.

"Hey, Savannah," Darius called out with a playful smirk. "You're too good to say hi now? And who is this?"

Savannah let out a dramatic sigh, rolling her eyes. "Hi, Darius. This is Tanesha—my best friend." She glanced at Tanesha and then added dismissively, "Tanesha, this is Darius. He's... a boy from school."

"Hi," Tanesha said shyly.

Darius chuckled, clearly amused. "A boy from school? Is that it?"

"That's it, that's all, Darius," Savannah replied with a flirtatious chuckle, grabbing the items she wanted from the store.

"Can I have a hug?" he asked, walking up to Savannah as she bent down to grab a candy bar from the bottom row of the shelf.

"Sure," she replied, standing back up and not realizing how close he was to her. She tried to give him a church hug, but Darius wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her as close to him as possible.

"Thank you, and you smell so good," he whispered in her ear.

"You're welcome and thank you. Now let me go. We have somewhere to be," she said, pulling away as he slowly released her.

"Where you got to be? It is not with me, so I do not care. I will see you later when you walk home," he said, walking backward toward the door. Just then, his best friend appeared from around the corner of the store.

After paying for their snacks, the girls hurried out and made their way to Abilene's house. When they arrived, Abilene greeted them warmly and explained that her boyfriend, Alfanzo, and his brothers would be arriving soon. Savannah and Tanesha exchanged nervous glances but stayed.

When the boys arrived, the atmosphere was tense at first. But as the group started talking, laughter filled the room, and Savannah began to feel at ease. While the gathering was innocent fun, it planted a seed of curiosity about boys and relationships.

Savannah's interactions with Alfonso's brothers ignited a newfound confidence within her. Though she wasn't attracted to either of them or hadn't exchanged numbers, the experience reassured her that she was ready to start dating again. As she and Tanesha left Abilene's house, they carried a renewed sense of self-assurance, stronger and more confident than when they had arrived.

A few weeks later, Savannah met Richard and Albert, both friends of Abilene. She initially started talking to Richard, but after discovering he already had a girlfriend, they settled into a genuine friendship. Not long after, Albert expressed interest in taking her out—with Richard's blessing—and she agreed. The only catch? She had yet to meet either of them in person.

Albert asked her out with Richard's blessing, and she agreed. The only problem was, she had not met either one of them in person.

They talked on the phone every day, and Savannah felt a connection she had not experienced before. A few months went by, and they finally met in person. Albert did not look anything like he had described over the phone, but she did not judge him. It did not change her feelings for him, but his dishonesty made her distance herself. Still, they continued to date a few weeks after that. Soon, Savannah would be reminded of her own lie that complicated things even more. Since she was not allowed to have a boyfriend, she had given Albert a fake name and lied about her age. It worked for the entire seven months they had been dating, but the truth came out when Savannah's little sister, Diana, deliberately exposed her secrets during a phone call. Diana snuck onto the phone with Albert while Savannah was in the restroom and revealed the truth about her name and age.

Albert's hurt was undeniable when he discovered Savannah's lies, which caused him to distance himself. She was an eighth grader in middle school, and he was a tenth grader in high school. Though he eventually forgave her, the trust they had built was gone. Their phone calls grew shorter, and their connection faded. Savannah tried to hold on,

but deep down, she knew it was over. She was hurt, but it did not take her long to move on. A few days later, she met someone new.

One day, Tanesha and Savannah were at Tanesha's house, and they decided to go to a party in the neighborhood. That is where Savannah met Barnard. He was standing with his group of friends along the wall. Savannah did not notice him, but he had his eyes on her all night. As they were leaving the party, he walked up to her and started a conversation. They exchanged numbers and talked all night, instantly connecting. Barnard quickly became Savannah's boyfriend. He was also in the tenth grade, but he did not care that she was in the eighth grade. By the six-month mark, they were madly in love, so much so that they introduced each other to their parents, and everyone knew they were together. Everything felt perfect. They spent every weekend together, and it felt unreal to Savannah—she was in heaven. That was until their budding relationship hit a devastating roadblock when Barnard was sent to juvenile detention.

Savannah's heart sank as the news reached her—it was a twist for which she hadn't prepared for. She wrote to him, went to visit him with his dad, and they reconnected when he was released. They picked up right where they left off, and their bond grew even deeper. A few months later, however, Barnard started acting differently to her, and she could not understand why. He stopped calling as much and did not want to see her as often. Then he went back to the juvenile center for fighting and causing problems at school. This time, Savannah discovered he had been unfaithful. He had been dating other girls at school behind her back, and that was why he had been distant. As much as it hurt, she stayed with him—until she found out he was trying to date one of her close friends. She finally ended the relationship through a letter and stopped taking his calls.

A year later, Barnard got out of juvenile and searched for Savannah. They started hanging out again, but one day, while they were together, he asked to take her virginity. Savannah was about to allow it, but his

uncle kept peeking through the door, making her uncomfortable and nervous. She asked Barnard to lock the door, but he refused. Barnard did not defend her privacy, so she left his house and started walking home. He followed behind her, trying to convince her to come back, but she refused. Angered, he called her out of her name and walked back to his house, not caring how she got home. As she walked down the wet, misty street, one of his friends came around the corner and offered her a ride home. When Barnard saw Savannah get into his friend's car, he started blowing up her phone. She ignored his calls and made it home safely. Barnard later called, apologizing, but it was completely over between them this time.

They spent days without speaking, and when they did, most of the conversations ended in arguments because Barnard could not convince her to take him back. Savannah promised herself she would take the lessons from her failed relationships and channel them into personal growth.

Just when she felt ready to move forward, life brought Gwen into her world—a bubbly new neighbor who lived just down the street. Their friendship formed naturally, giving Savannah the sense of stability for which she had been searching. The two girls quickly became inseparable, spending every day together. Gwen often spoke about her godmother, who played a significant role in her life. Savannah admired the bond they shared and appreciated the warmth Gwen's godmother Helena brought into their friendship.

When Gwen invited Savannah to her church one weekend, Savannah hesitated. Her strict Baptist upbringing had always painted other churches as unfamiliar and unwelcoming. But her curiosity, fueled by her growing trust in Gwen, pushed her to take a chance. The experience was unlike anything she had expected, opening her mind to new perspectives and leaving her grateful for Gwen's influence. That weekend, the girls went shopping, saw a movie, and spent time with Gwen's godmother, who made Savannah feel like part of the family. It was a week-

end that marked a turning point for Savannah—a step toward understanding herself and the world around her.



## Chapter 1: New Friendships and New Beginnings

Entering an unfamiliar setting, Savannah's heart surged with anticipation. For years, she had been part of the same church where gossip and judgment flowed freely. Silent conflicts spilled into the parking lot, casting palpable tension. The idea of stepping into a new sanctuary—uncharted territory—felt like a breath of fresh air. No preconceived notions. No scrutinizing glances.

Taking a seat beside her closest friend, they seamlessly blended into the choir's harmonious melodies. As they sang, Gwen's family engaged in conversations around them.

"How was it?" Gwen asked.

"I enjoyed the sermon and the singing, but the singing was the highlight," Savannah replied.

"That is fantastic! You must come back. Everyone enjoyed having you today," Gwen insisted.

"Did they? That is kind. I would love to return," Savannah said with a smile.

An older woman, Mrs. Hampton, approached with a warm smile. "Gwen, are you going to introduce us to your friend?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hampton. This is Savannah, my best friend from school and the neighborhood," Gwen replied, introducing her to the first lady of the church.

"Nice to meet you," Savannah said, and Mrs. Hampton warmly invited her to return. The parking lot buzzed with familiar faces, and soon, Savannah was introduced to the entire congregation.

Leaving the church, Savannah's thoughts lingered on a striking young man with deep brown eyes and chocolate-toned skin who had unabashedly stared at her. They headed back to Helena's house to change clothes and freshen up. The whole time, Savannah couldn't stop

thinking about the "chocolate boy" with the movie star smile and shiny white teeth. The connection between them was so magnetic and unreal. It felt like they belonged together, and nothing was going to stop that from happening.

Savannah, Gwen, and Helena stopped by the snow cone shop just to kill time before heading to the surprise spot Helena said she was taking them. They sat in the car, enjoying their snow cones, and then headed to the freeway. The ride seemed long, but singing and laughter filled the air, making the time feel short. At least fifteen to twenty minutes had passed.

Their journey led them to a church member's house for a meal. To Savannah's surprise, the man greeted them with a beaming smile, holding the door open.

"Hey, y'all! Come on in!" he enthusiastically welcomed them.

As they entered, Helena asked about his mom, and he pointed down the hallway, indicating she was in her room. Savannah's eyes met his again as he turned the corner, and she couldn't shake the captivating gaze. Gwen and Savannah followed Helena into the lively living room, where children were engrossed in various activities.

Gwen greeted everyone, and they moved into another room where Mrs. Lewis, the mother, lay in bed.

"Hi, babies!" Mrs. Lewis called out, and Gwen gave her a warm hug.

"Make yourself at home. Genesis is not finished cooking, but she should not be long," Mrs. Lewis said. Helena sat down, and Gwen turned to Savannah.

"Wanna go back in there?" she asked, and Savannah nodded. As they left Mrs. Lewis's room, Mrs. Lewis slyly asked, "Where are you two going?"

"Back in there with the kids," Gwen replied.

"Okay, now. Play nice, and do not be in there being fast, because there are two boys in there. Gwen, you know what I am talking about."

“Yes, ma’am,” Gwen said. The two returned to the room with the kids. The intriguing guy was sitting on the couch, casually inviting them to join him. Savannah took a seat, feeling an undeniable connection.

“Hi,” he said.

“Hi,” Savannah replied, her heart racing with an unfamiliar excitement. The pull between them was undeniable.

“What’s your name?” he asked, his voice smooth.

“Savannah. And yours?” she answered, a little nervous but intrigued.

“That is a pretty name. I am Trevor.”

“Thank you. Your name’s nice, too.”

“Where did you meet Gwen?” Trevor asked, his interest piqued.

“We go to the same school and have become best friends,” Savannah replied, feeling more at ease with each passing second.

“Oh, okay. How long have you known each other?”

“A few months, but it feels like forever the way we click. How long have you known her?” she asked him.

“It has been about two years now. She started coming to our church with Helena during the summertime, and they always come over here after church on Sunday to eat, or Church choir rehearsal or bible studies on weekends. My mom is Helena’s godmother.”

“Oh, okay,” Savannah said, nodding as they continued chatting, time seeming to fly by.

Dinner was ready, and everyone gathered in the kitchen to eat. The warm, inviting atmosphere made Savannah feel more at home than she had expected.

After dinner, they all relaxed, watching a movie together. Savannah found herself drifting in and out of sleep, content in the comfort of the evening.

Helena’s voice broke through her daze. “Let us go, girls! You two have school in the morning.”

Savannah and Gwen slowly got up, exchanged goodbyes with everyone, and left, still buzzing with the lingering energy of the night.

When they arrived at Helena's house, Savannah and Gwen went inside to grab their things before being dropped off at home. They collected their bags and returned them to the car. Helena dropped Savannah off first before heading down the street to drop off Gwen.

Savannah stepped into the house, her mind still replaying the events of the evening. She put her things away and began preparing for the next day. After taking a shower and doing her hair, she walked into her mom's room to share the details of her weekend. Her mother, Mrs. Caldwell's, was less strict than her own father about Savannah having a boyfriend, so she felt comfortable talking to her about Trevor. Her mom had taken her over Benard house many times before, but it was top secret.

As she shared the story, her mom listened with a hint of amusement. "Sounds like you had a fun time. That Trevor seems like a nice boy," she said. Savannah smiled to herself, a warmth filling her chest at the mention of Trevor's name.

By midnight, everyone in Mrs. Caldwell's house was either in bed or in their rooms, winding down for the night. Savannah, still buzzing from the day's events, lay in bed with her phone, thinking about Trevor and the unexpected connection they had shared. The thought of him lingered, and as she finally closed her eyes, the last thing on her mind was their conversation.

## Chapter 2: The Spark Before the Flame

It was three a.m., and Savannah had to wake up because her phone rang. She answered, "Hello."

"Hi, are you sleep?" Trevor asked.

"Yes, I was. I have to be up at seven a.m. for school, but it is fine. I apologize for not calling you. I showered, spoke with my mom, and fall asleep." She said with sleep still in her voice.

"No, it is fine. I will just call you back tomorrow. Sorry to have woken you." He replied.

"No, it is fine. I am up now."

"Okay, I couldn't stop thinking about you and I couldn't sleep." He replied and they chatted for a little while until they both fell asleep on the phone.

She woke up to her phone still on with Trevor on the line. Her heart melted realizing they semi slept together. The intense longing to know a stranger was not new; she had felt it with her first love, Barnard. It made Savannah realize that when she loves, she loves with everything in her heart. And when she does not, she does not.

A few minutes later her alarm went off.

"Hello! Hello!" Trevor yelled as he woke up from her alarm.

"Yes. I'm still here. I was just about to tell you I have to get up and get ready for school."

"Okay. Sorry I fell asleep. I guess I will talk to you later."

"Yeah, I will call you after school. Bye and you have an awesome day at school."

"Okay and you too, bye."

Since Savannah was now in tenth grade she had to go to school at eight thirty but she had to walk her little sister to her school first, but she was so sleepy. She hit the clock, turning off the alarm. She fell back into bed, only to be woken again thirty minutes later by her little sister

Diana, who barged into her room, yelling, "Owoo, Momma! Savannah is still asleep!"

"I am not! I am getting ready!" Savannah yelled out, hopping out of bed.

The temptation to stay home and sleep in was strong, but she shook it off and dragged herself to the bathroom, across the hallway from her room. She splashed cold water on her face, brushed her teeth, and styled her hair in a rush.

By the time she stepped outside, she felt like a zombie, but she was meeting up with her friends at their usual spot.

"Good morning, guys!" Savannah called out to Winston, Ray, and her cousin Joanna.

"Good morning!" Winston replied cheerfully, his usual energy contagious.

"Morning," Ray mumbled, still half-asleep, his eyes barely open.

"Morning," Joanna said distractedly, absorbed in her phone.

"Good morning!" Gwen said, her bubbly personality breaking through Savannah's grogginess.

"What took you so long?" Ray asked, raising an eyebrow. "I was about to leave, but they said to wait."

"You know we weren't going to walk without you," Winston chimed in.

"Yeah, he was about to walk by himself," Gwen teased behind Winston.

"Thank you, guys. Ray wasn't going to walk alone, and he loves me way too much to leave me behind. Right, Ray?" Savannah teased him, and he couldn't help but smile.

"I stayed out a little bit late last night and couldn't sleep when I got home," Savannah added with a sigh, rubbing her eyes. "But I'm definitely napping after school."

As they walked, Savannah's thoughts kept drifting back to Trevor. Every glance, every conversation from the weekend felt so real, so im-

portant—she could still feel his eyes on her. Was it too soon to feel like this?

Gwen, always perceptive, caught onto Savannah's distracted state. "Somebody had a great weekend," she teased, her voice laced with curiosity.

Savannah couldn't hide her smile, but she shrugged it off. "Maybe I did, maybe I didn't."

"I sure did," Savannah said with a huge grin. "Ooo girl, we are definitely doing that again."

"Do what again?" Winston asked, raising an eyebrow, his curiosity piqued.

"None of your business, Winston," Savannah and Gwen said in unison, laughing.

Winston kept pestering them all day for details, but they only fed him a story to keep him at bay. Even though thoughts of Trevor constantly occupied Savannah's mind, she managed to get through the school day.

Later, as they neared their street, Gwen dropped a hint that she had news for her. Savannah's heart raced—she immediately thought it was about Trevor.

When they got to Gwen's house, Savannah stayed behind, eager to hear what Gwen had to say.

"What is it, girl? Is it about Trevor? Does he like me?" she asked, her voice betraying her excitement.

"Calm down. Yes, and yes. We're going over there today when Helena gets off work," Gwen revealed with a smile.

Savannah screamed with joy, unable to contain her excitement. The thought of seeing Trevor again felt like a shot of adrenaline, making her feel like she could run a marathon.

"How do you know he likes me?" she asked, trying to keep calm, but her voice betrayed her eagerness.

“He told me yesterday,” Gwen explained. “Plus, I see him and his siblings all the time because we all have choir rehearsal on Mondays, Bible study on Wednesdays, and we mostly hang out at their house on weekends.”

“Okay, I’m so ready to see him again. Let me go change and fix my hair. I’ll be back after I’m done,” Savannah said, already rushing off to her house to freshen up.

When Savannah arrived home, she immediately asked her mother if she could go to choir rehearsal with Gwen, promising she’d be back before curfew. Her mother hesitated at first but eventually nodded in approval.

“Don’t make me regret it,” her mother warned.

“I won’t! Thank you, Mama!” Savannah said, already dashing to her room.

She picked out a cute outfit, touched up her hair, and hopped in the shower. After a quick rinse and a fresh coat of lotion, she brushed her teeth and gave herself one last look in the mirror. Her hair was flawless, her outfit was just right, and her nerves buzzed with anticipation.

Stepping outside, she barely made it a few feet before Winston and the other guys playing basketball froze mid-game, their heads snapping in her direction.

“Savannah, you are looking good! Where you headed?” Ray asked, his crush on her evident in the way his eyes lingered.

“Thanks,” she said, flashing a quick smile. “I’m heading to Gwen’s.”

The boys didn’t let up, following her down the street, bombarding her with more questions. She ignored them, staying focused on her destination, her excitement outweighing their teasing.

Knocking on Gwen’s door, she was met with Christy’s playful smile.

“Well, look at you! Miss beauty pageant herself,” Mrs. Christy teased.

Savannah grinned. “Thank you.”



"Where exactly are you two headed? Because you're way too dressed up for choir rehearsal."

"We're just going to church," Savannah replied smoothly, stepping inside. She knew better than to mention boys—Gwen had warned her that her mother didn't like her thinking about dating until after graduation.

Mrs. Christy raised an eyebrow but chuckled. "Mmm-hmm. Well, you sure are going to impress the Lord tonight," she said sarcastically, knocking on Gwen's door. "Savannah's here! We're coming in."

Savannah tried to suppress her giddiness, but her heart raced at the thought of seeing Trevor again. She had no doubt that tonight's first impression would be a lasting one.

"Yes, ma'am. Amen," she said with a sly smile. "They say first impressions stick forever."

She stepped into Gwen's room, ready for whatever the night had in store.

"Hey, buddy!" Gwen squealed, throwing her arms around Savannah as if they hadn't just spent the entire day together.

Mrs. Christy arched an eyebrow. "Didn't y'all just walk home from school together?" she asked, shaking her head with a laugh. "Acting like y'all haven't seen each other in years."

"We're besties!" Gwen declared, making Savannah giggle as they held onto each other dramatically.

Mrs. Christy chuckled and waved them off as she left the room. "Alright, alright. Y'all carry on with your silliness."

Just as they started getting comfortable, Gwen's stepfather, Mr. Wooden, appeared at the door, arms crossed, skepticism written all over his face.

"And where exactly are y'all going again?" he questioned.

"Church," Gwen replied casually, avoiding his gaze.

Mr. Wooden scoffed. “Mmm-hmm. And I’m supposed to believe that?” He leaned against the doorframe, shaking his head. “Y’all dressed up like that just to sing a few hymns? I wasn’t born yesterday.”

Gwen sighed dramatically, rolling her eyes as she grabbed Savannah’s hand. “Ignore him,” she muttered under her breath, tugging her toward the front door.

Savannah followed quickly, glancing back just in time to see Mr. Wooden trailing after them, still grumbling about “teenagers and their sneaky ways.”

They stepped onto the porch, relieved to put some distance between themselves and his lecture. Moments later, Helena’s car pulled up, and they practically sprinted toward it, eager to escape.

As soon as they slid into the back seat, Savannah exhaled, finally letting her nerves settle. But that feeling was short-lived.

Helena threw them a sly grin through the rearview mirror. “So... change of plans,” she announced.

Savannah’s heart skipped a beat.

“Instead of choir rehearsal,” Helena continued, turning the car in the opposite direction of the church, “we’re going somewhere else first.”

Gwen’s face lit up. Savannah, on the other hand, felt her stomach twist with nervous anticipation.

“Where?” she asked hesitantly, but deep down, she already had a feeling she knew the answer.

Helena’s smirk deepened.

“You’ll see.”

As they pulled up to Trevor’s house, the nerves Savannah had been suppressing surged back with a vengeance. Her heart raced, her palms damp as she forced herself to stay calm. This was happening. She was about to see him again—sooner than she had even dared to hope.

The car rolled to a stop, and she took a steadying breath, gathering all the composure she could muster. But no amount of preparation could ease the jittery excitement twisting in her chest. She felt like a

teenager again, caught in the raw mix of first love's innocence and the vulnerability that came with it.

They approached the large front door, Savannah's heart pounding so loudly she swore the others could hear it. Before she could brace herself, the door swung open.

Trevor's brother, Ralph, greeted them, but Savannah barely noticed him. Her gaze locked onto Trevor, half-hidden behind the doorframe. The soft glow of light reflected off his glistening skin, and headphones rested atop his head. The sight sent her pulse into overdrive. Then, their eyes met.

Everything else faded.

The way he smiled—subtle, almost teasing—made her stomach tighten with a mixture of nerves and excitement. She tried to stay composed, but the heat rising in her cheeks gave her away.

Needing a moment, she moved toward the bathroom, her legs slightly unsteady beneath her. She had barely closed the door before she let out a deep breath, pressing a hand against her racing heart.

On the other side, Trevor shut the front door, exhaling sharply as he tried to shake off the rush of emotions. He felt it too. The pull between them.

Minutes later, a soft knock at the bathroom door made Savannah freeze. She hesitated, then slowly opened it.

And there he was.

Standing just a few feet away, holding a towel, his eyes locked onto hers once again. Time stood still.

Her breath caught. So did his.

"Kiss already!"

Ralph's teasing voice shattered the moment. Savannah and Trevor flinched, both snapping out of their daze, their faces burning.

Trevor cleared his throat and stepped into the bathroom, while Savannah quickly slipped past him, feeling the weight of his presence lingering in the air between them.

Savannah sank into the couch beside Gwen, trying to calm her racing heart. The lively chatter in the living room buzzed around her, but her focus was split between Gwen's laughter and the distant sound of Trevor's voice.

Moments later, Trevor strolled into the room, and it was as if the air shifted. The conversations quieted as all eyes shifted between him and Savannah. The connection between them was undeniable, and the room seemed to hold its breath in anticipation.

Savannah avoided Trevor's gaze, instead focusing on the intricate pattern of the couch cushion beneath her fingers. But she didn't miss the quick glance he threw her way, the faintest smile tugging at the corner of his lips.

Just as Savannah was beginning to feel the weight of everyone's attention, Mrs. Lewis's warm voice broke the silence.

"So, you're the girl my son can't stop talking and thinking about?" she said, her grin lighting up her face as she looked directly at Savannah.

Savannah's head snapped up, her heart skipping a beat. Mrs. Lewis's words hit her like a ton of bricks.

"Who, me?" Savannah stammered, wide-eyed and unsure if she'd heard her correctly.

"Yes, you. Who else?" Mrs. Lewis teased, leaning back with an amused chuckle. "He can't stop talking about your smile and your beautiful chocolate skin. I think the boy is in love."

Savannah felt heat rise to her cheeks as her heart flipped and fluttered in her chest. Love? Did she just say love? Her gaze instinctively darted to Trevor, who stood rooted in place, his cheeks darkening as he gave his mom a look that said, *Really, Mom?*

Savannah could barely process what was happening. Mrs. Lewis's words replayed in her head, her chest tightening with a mix of joy and disbelief. Could this be real? Did Trevor—*really*—love her?

She opened her mouth to say something but found herself speechless. Instead, her lips curled into a shy smile as Trevor finally walked over, scratching the back of his neck awkwardly.

"Mom," Trevor said softly, trying to defuse the moment. But the damage—or magic—was already done.

The teasing continued, voices bouncing around the room with playful jabs, but Savannah barely heard any of it. Her mind was stuck on one thought: *Trevor might actually feel the same way I do.*

She tried to temper her excitement, telling herself not to jump to conclusions. Yet, the way his eyes lingered on her, soft and steady, made it impossible to ignore the possibility.

"He's not in love with me," she muttered under her breath, though the smile tugging at her lips betrayed her disbelief.

"You know he is," Gwen replied confidently, nudging her side.

Savannah laughed, shaking her head, but the butterflies in her stomach refused to settle. She glanced up, catching Trevor's gaze from across the room. He was sitting beside his little sister Terri, but his focus wasn't on whatever conversation was happening around him—it was on her.

For a moment, it was just the two of them, the room fading into the background. His smile, subtle and knowing, sent a shiver down her spine.

Then, reality snapped back into place as Gwen's voice broke the moment.

"Well, dang, get married and have kids already!" Gwen teased, her grin wide and mischievous.

Savannah felt her cheeks heat up, but before she could respond, Trevor leaned forward, his tone light yet filled with an undercurrent of confidence.

"We will. Stop hating, Gwen!"

His words hung in the air, and Savannah's heart skipped a beat. She stared at him, searching his face for any sign that he was joking. But

his expression was calm, unbothered—as if what he'd just said was the most natural thing in the world.

*Did he mean it? Was he serious?*

Savannah's thoughts raced, but the warmth in her chest grew stronger. She couldn't stop herself from imagining a future where Trevor's words weren't just a tease but a promise.

As the teasing swirled around them, something shifted between Trevor and Savannah, something unspoken but undeniable. Whatever it was, it felt new, exhilarating, and like the beginning of something much bigger than either of them could have anticipated. And for the first time in a long time, Savannah felt ready to let it unfold.

## Chapter 3: Heartbeats and Distance

Savannah was living on cloud nine, and nothing could pull her down. She was with a new guy, she just had made the junior track team at school and she made captain on the cheerleader team and excelling in her classes. The world felt perfect, even with Bernard lurking in the background, trying to drag her back into his mess.

Rumors about him swirled through the halls, but she refused to pay them any mind. He didn't go to her school, but he started dating a girl named Sherri that went there. She obviously told him everything she could find on Savannah and her newfound love. His calls became more frequent, each one laced with bitterness as he tried to rub his new relationships in her face. But when that failed to get the reaction he wanted, his tone turned spiteful.

"Just admit you miss me," he said one evening, his voice thick with frustration.

"I don't," Savannah replied coolly. "I told you, I'm happy."

The silence on the other end of the line was deafening, but she didn't waver. Bernard, heartbroken in the same way she once was, couldn't stand the idea of her moving on without him. But she no longer cared.

He pushed further, whispering to girls at school, fueling petty drama, trying to turn them against her. One even confronted her in the hallway, stepping into her space with an attitude.

"I heard you were talking trash about me," the girl sneered.

Savannah simply smiled; her confidence unwavering. "No, but I heard Bernard still can't get over me. Maybe that's what you should be worried about."

The girl faltered, then stormed off, and Savannah walked away with her head high. She was no longer the girl who cried over Bernard's late-night lies. She was loved, seen, and finally choosing herself.

Meanwhile, on the other side of town, Trevor couldn't focus on anything but his newfound love with Savannah. Even during football practice, she was on his mind. Every ball he threw, every mile he ran, it was all with thoughts of their future together. He wanted to give her the world—and he was determined to do just that.

Their connection felt divine, deeper than love itself. It was as if their souls were intertwined, sensing each other's emotions no matter the distance. When one was happy, the other could feel it; when one was down, the other carried the weight. There were no limits to how far they would go for each other, not even miles could keep them apart in spirit.

But two weeks had passed since they last saw each other, and it was driving them both crazy.

"I miss you more," Trevor murmured into the phone, lying in bed, his voice thick with longing.

"Awww, really? You know I miss you more. More than you miss me," Savannah teased, her voice soft and sweet.

Trevor sighed, gripping his pillow tighter. The sound of her voice was like an angel's, soothing yet making his heart ache all the same. He wanted nothing more than to see her, hold her hand, and lose himself in late-night conversations about everything and nothing.

"I wish I could see you today," Trevor sighed. Then, a sudden thought hit him. "You know what? I'm going to ask my mom to pick you up so we can go to the park and grab some food."

Excited, he hopped out of bed and headed straight for his mom's room.

"Mom, I'm bored..." he started.

Before he could even finish his sentence, Mrs. Lewis cut him off. "I'm not taking you anywhere, Tre. Your father and I have a date tonight, and I'm about to get pampered while he gets his hair cut. So, no—especially if I must drive."



Trevor groaned. "Mom, come on. Can Savannah and I just tag along? We'll sit at our own table."

"No, Tre. We want to be alone."

"So do we," he countered.

His mother shot him a look before shaking her head. "Ask your sister to take you."

"You know she might say no—she's probably with Chad."

"You won't know until you call and ask."

Trevor sighed in defeat. "Okay, Mom."

He walked out of her room, lifting his phone back to his ear. "You heard that, right?" he asked Savannah.

"I'm still here," she said softly.

"Alright, hold tight. I'm gonna call Genesis." Trevor clicked over to dial his oldest sister, adding Savannah to the three-way call.

The phone rang a few times before Genesis answered with a playful laugh. "Hello—stop it, Chad! It's my brother," she said, her voice carrying over loud music.

"Genesis, where are you?" Trevor rushed out. "Mom said to pick up Savannah before you head home."

"No, she didn't," Genesis replied, turning the music down.

"Yes, she did! She told me to ask you because she and Dad are going on a date, and she's about to go get pampered."

"Uh-huh. Let me call Mom." She hung up before he could say another word.

Trevor chuckled to himself. "Alright then."

Savannah giggled on the other end. "Well?"

"Get ready, love," Trevor said, grinning. "Looks like we're going on a date too—just like everybody else."

Lying in bed, Savannah kicked her feet playfully in the air, a habit she did without thinking a cheerleader's reflex. The thought of spending time with Trevor made her heart race with excitement.

This weekend was going to be special. Savannah jumped out of bed and started looking for something to wear. She landed on a beautiful dress her mother had bought her a few weeks ago, pairing it with matching sandals. Excitement bubbled inside her as she rushed to the bathroom, taking a quick shower before touching up her hair, brushing her teeth, and washing her face. She checked herself out in the mirror, feeling confident and ready until a knock at her bedroom door brought her back to reality.

"Hey, where do you think you're going?" Mrs. Caldwell asked, raising an eyebrow as Savannah opened the door.

"Oh! I was so excited I forgot to ask you, can I go to the movies with Trevor?" Savannah asked, batting her lashes playfully.

"Hmm, I don't know because I forgot to ask before I made plans," her mother replied, arms crossed. "Did you forget that your dad and I are going on a date tonight? You're supposed to babysit."

"Wait—was that tonight? I thought that was next weekend!" Savannah's heart sank. "Okay, I'll call Trevor and let him know I can't come. But his sister is already on the way—she might be here any minute."

"Yes, it's tonight. And oh, so you were just planning to walk out of this house and hop in some stranger's car without permission?"

"No, Mom, I was going to come let you know before I left," Savannah defended herself, shifting on her feet. "And she's not a stranger. You can meet her when she gets here."

Mrs. Caldwell tilted her head, hands on her hips. "Oh, so you were going to tell me you were leaving like you're grown and paying bills? And she is a stranger if I haven't met her."

Savannah sighed. "No, I meant ask you. I'm sorry, Mom. I was just really excited to get out of the house this weekend, especially since I spent the last two weekends babysitting while you and Dad worked."

Mrs. Caldwell studied her for a moment, then finally relented. "Alright. Finish getting dressed—your ride just pulled up."

"Thank you!" Savannah beamed and turned back to the mirror. She grabbed her favorite perfume from the dresser, spraying a light mist before picking up her purse.

"Savannah, your ride is here! Come on!" Diana, her little sister, yelled from outside her door.

"Okay, I'm coming!" she sang back. She grabbed a sweater—she already knew the movie theater would be freezing.

As she walked out, she pointed a warning finger at Diana. "Don't go in my room while I'm gone!"

Diana grinned mischievously. "And can I just watch TV in your room?"

Savannah shut the front door before her sister could finish, laughing as she rushed to Genesis's car.

"Hey!" she greeted as she slid into the backseat.

"Hey, Savannah. Let's get you to this boy before he blows up my phone," Genesis said with a smirk. "Trevor keeps calling, asking if I picked you up yet."

This weekend was going to be special.

"Oh my. Really? Let me call him," Savannah said, reaching for her phone.

"No, don't call him!" Genesis and Chad said in unison before she could dial. "We're going to play a prank on him—see how he reacts."

Laughing, they chatted the entire drive to Trevor's house. As they pulled into the driveway, Trevor stood outside, pacing.

"Savannah, lie down so he doesn't see you," Genesis whispered.

Savannah quickly ducked, trying her best to hide while Genesis and Chad hopped out of the car.

"Where is she? And why did you stop answering your phone?" Trevor snapped; his frustration was evident.

"Oh, her mom said she couldn't come," Genesis lied smoothly. "So now you owe me even more gas money because we drove all the way

over there for nothing. And I don't have to answer my phone every time you call."

Trevor's face fell. "No, let me call her!" he said in despair, turning to rush inside and grab his phone.

As soon as he disappeared, Genesis quietly helped Savannah sneak out of the car and into the house. They tiptoed toward Trevor's room, where he was frantically searching.

"Where did I put my phone?" he muttered, rummaging through his things.

"I don't know. Where did you put it?" Savannah teased, sneaking up behind him.

Trevor spun around. "Oh my God! Savannah!" His face lit up as he scooped her into a tight hug, all his frustration melting away.

Genesis and Chad burst into laughter from the doorway.

Trevor pulled back, narrowing his eyes at them. "What are y'all laughing at? Liars! I should've known you were up to something when you stopped answering my calls."

"Aww, look at you, brother. You're so in love," Genesis teased. "You looked like you were about to cry when I said she wasn't coming."

"I was about to cry! And then I couldn't find my phone!" Trevor admitted with a grin before turning to Savannah. "And yes, I am in love with her. We're in love with each other."

Savannah giggled. "I'm sorry, love. It was funny, though." Seeing how much he cared for her warmed her heart. It felt like being in the calm of the ocean after braving a storm.

After more teasing and laughter, Genesis and Chad left for her room. But before they did, Savannah caught something Trevor said in his rambling excitement—he wanted to marry her, start a family, and take care of her.

Her heart skipped a beat. She felt the same way, but in the back of her mind, doubts lingered. It had only been three weeks. They had both just gotten out of relationships. How would this really work?

To pass the time, Trevor and Savannah settled into beanbag chairs in his room, watching a TV show and talking until his sister was ready. After waiting a while, Trevor got up and walked to Genesis's room, knocking softly.

"Come in," she mumbled sleepily.

Trevor peeked inside. "Hey, you do know it's eight o'clock now, right?"

"Yeah, yeah. Give me 'til eight-thirty," she groaned, rolling over.

Trevor shook his head and returned to Savannah. "Want to take a walk around the neighborhood while we wait?"

"Sure," she said, letting him help her out of the beanbag.

Hand in hand, they strolled down the street. Trevor opened up about how he saw the world, showing her his favorite hangout spot after school. It felt peaceful. It felt right.

After thirty minutes, Trevor glanced at his watch. "Alright, let's wake Genesis up."

They walked back inside, making their way to her room again.

Trevor knocked. "Come on, Genesis! You need to get up and take us to the movies," he said, shaking her shoulder gently.

She groaned, finally sitting up. "Okay, okay, I'm up," she mumbled, dragging herself to the bathroom.

Trevor and Savannah waited outside in the back of the car, discussing what snacks they wanted and what games they'd play in the arcade.

After fifteen minutes, Genesis and Chad finally emerged, and they all piled into the car, heading straight to the theater.

"Call me when y'all are ready to leave," Genesis said as she dropped them off.

"Okay! Thanks, bye!" Trevor and Savannah said excitedly, walking up to the ticket booth.

Trevor bought their movie tickets, and they strolled into the theater, making their way toward the game room. Just as they stepped inside, a loud voice rang out.

"Trevor!"

Savannah froze.

Trevor stiffened beside her.

The voice was familiar. Too familiar.

## Chapter 4: Truth and Trouble

Trevor and Savannah glanced over their shoulders to see a girl standing near the theater exit. Trevor instantly regretted coming. As they turned around, the girl made her way toward them.

“Oh... Katrina. Hey, girl,” Trevor said, his voice nervous. “I didn’t know that was you—I couldn’t see your face from that far away.”

“Hm. Yeah, it’s me.” Katrina eyed him skeptically before turning her gaze to Savannah. “Who’s this? You not gonna introduce me to your friend?”

“This is Savannah, my girlfriend,” Trevor said, gripping Savannah’s hand.

“Hi,” Savannah said softly.

“Oh, okay.” Katrina’s tone dripped with attitude and jealousy. “Well, I’m his ex-girlfriend, Katrina.”

“Okay, well... Katrina, I’ll see you at school when we go back,” Trevor replied quickly, wasting no time pulling Savannah toward the game room. Katrina stood there, hands on her hips, her sour expression lingering as they walked away.

She remained frozen in place until her friend called her name, snapping her out of her daze.

Inside the game room, Trevor sighed and turned to Savannah. “I’m sorry about that. I told Katrina earlier at school that I was probably going to the movies with my new girlfriend tonight. I didn’t think she’d show up.”

Savannah raised an eyebrow. “So, you two still talk?”

“Yes, but only as friends,” he insisted. “She cheated on me—that’s why we broke up. Then she got with the guy she cheated with, but he used her and cheated on her too. After that, she started talking to me again. Last week, she tried to ask me out and apologize, and that’s when I told her I have a girlfriend now.”

Savannah crossed her arms. "Okay, thanks for letting me know... now. My ex has been calling me too, begging to get back together. But after he started dating a girl at my school and had her gather info on me, I cut him off completely." She gave him a pointed look. "But I see you think it's okay for us to talk to our exes, only as 'friends.' Noted."

"Huh? Wait, no! I didn't mean it like that," Trevor stammered. "I mean... I don't know what I mean. I've been telling her to stop calling me and that I'm serious about you, but she won't stop. She keeps calling me crying and even coming by my house." He exhaled deeply, his voice raw with frustration. "Savannah, I like you so much, and I don't wanna lose you."

"Really, Trevor? Why are you just now telling me this? Do you still love her?"

"No, I mean, I have love for her, but I'm not in love with her. I just don't like seeing girls cry or being sad—it's just how my heart is. Since she was hurting from her heartbreak, I felt obligated to be there for her. But I'll stop talking to her if it makes you feel uncomfortable."

"I understand. That's why I accepted my ex's calls at first, but when I realized he was still out to hurt me and my heart had already moved on, I stopped answering. He doesn't seem to want to change or just be a friend."

"I get it. I'll stop talking to her."

"Okay. And please don't tell her anything else about me."

"Noted. Now, let's go play some games until the movie starts."

They played a few games, and the mood lightened back to a happy one. About thirty minutes later, they went to the snack counter, grabbed some popcorn and drinks, and headed into the theater.

"Oh, my goodness!" Savannah exclaimed, jumping at a scary scene. Trevor wrapped his arm around her, pulling her closer.

"It's okay. I've got you," he said reassuringly, his voice calm and steady.



The movie ended around 11:30, but Savannah suddenly panicked when she realized her mom had been calling her phone repeatedly. She hadn't noticed earlier because her phone was on silent.

"My mom's been calling since 10:45," she said, her voice tinged with fear. "It's almost midnight now—she's going to kill me. She might not even let me come out again."

"She's probably just checking on you," Trevor said, trying to calm her down. "Call her back while I text Genesis to pick us up."

"Okay," Savannah said, pulling up her mom's contact and calling. Her mom answered after two rings.

"Savannah, do you see what time it is?" Mrs. Caldwell scolded. "Your father and I are still out, but I know you're not home because I had someone check. You better get there before we do—or be on your way right now."

"Mom, I know. We just left the theater. Trevor is calling his sister to pick us up. We got here late because his sister and her boyfriend had something to do before they dropped us off. Where are you and Dad?"

"Uh-huh. You just better get home. We're at a party for one of my coworkers, and it ends at 2 a.m. So be home before then or stay where you are and suffer the consequences tomorrow." Mrs. Caldwell's tone was firm. "And another thing—you're coming to church with us tomorrow. You've been skipping the last month of Sundays."

"Okay, no problem. I'll be home soon. Love you," Savannah said, trying to end the call quickly.

"I'm not playing with you, Savannah. Get home. Love you too and be safe out there."

"I will. You and Dad be safe too," Savannah replied before hanging up. She turned to Trevor, who was waiting for her to finish.

"My mom said I need to be home by 2 because she and my dad are still out."

"For real? That means I get to spend more time with you!" Trevor said with a wide grin.

“Yes!” Savannah exclaimed, just as excited. They hugged tightly, enjoying the extra time together.

Genesis pulled up and honked her horn, rolling down her window.

“Come on, lovebirds!” she yelled playfully.

Trevor and Savannah ran to the car, laughing and holding hands, as they all headed back to Trevor’s house.

“Are Mom and Dad back home?” Trevor asked his sister, Genesis.

“No, they won’t be back until about 2 a.m. They went out to eat and then to a party. Why?” Genesis responded, glancing at him curiously.

“Well, Savannah doesn’t have to go home until before 2 a.m. because her parents are still out at a party, too. I want to spend more time with her. Can we just hang out at the house for a little while, and then you can take her home?” Trevor suggested, his voice hopeful.

“You do know I still have to take Chad back home too, right?” Genesis replied, throwing a quick look at Chad in the passenger seat. Despite her words, she was already warming up to the idea of spending more time with Chad. Her mom had told her to have everyone home before midnight, but she thought, What’s the harm in bending the rules just a little?

“You know I can stay out later,” Chad said, turning to Genesis with a grin.

“Okay, fine,” Genesis agreed with a sly smile. “But we need to leave the house by 1 a.m. That should give us enough time to drop Savannah off and get back home before Mom and Dad return. And don’t push it, Trevor.”

Trevor and Savannah exchanged excited looks, while Chad leaned back in his seat, satisfied with how the plan was coming together.

When they arrived, Genesis parked in front of the house. They all stayed in the car for a few moments, laughing and joking around before finally stepping out. The cool night air carried their laughter as they made their way inside, their spirits high.

Once inside, Trevor and Savannah headed to his room, while Genesis and Chad disappeared into hers.

Trevor sat on the edge of his bed and patted the spot beside him, motioning for Savannah to join him. “Did you enjoy yourself tonight—outside of the run-in with my ex?” he asked with a soft smile.

“Yes, I really did,” Savannah replied, sitting down and leaning her head on his shoulder. “And thank you for being more open with me tonight. I really appreciate that.”

Trevor gently lifted her head, meeting her gaze. “You’re welcome,” he said softly before leaning in and kissing her. He found himself falling deeper into her light brown eyes, captivated by the way she made him feel. He pulled back slightly, trying to clear his thoughts.

“So... want to play my PlayStation?” he asked with a mischievous grin, determined to shift the mood before it drifted into something more serious.

“Yeah!” Savannah replied, her face lighting up. “I love playing PlayStation. I even have one at home, but I have to share it with my little sister.”

Trevor chuckled and grabbed a controller. “Well, tonight, it’s all yours—no little sister to bother you.” He handed her the controller and sat back, watching her dive into the game with excitement. He couldn’t help but smile as he realized how much he enjoyed simply spending time with her, no matter what they were doing.

“Okay, can I join in?” Trevor asked as he stood up and grabbed the other controller. He selected a 2-player game that Savannah was familiar with, and they played together, laughing and enjoying the moment, until they both dozed off in each other’s arms.

At 1:15 am, Genesis burst into Trevor’s room, her voice loud and panicked.

“Oh, hell no! Get y’all butts up! Right now! Mom just called and said they’re on their way home. We have to go—NOW!”

Savannah, who had been sleeping soundly in Trevor's arms, jolted awake at Genesis's voice. Trevor jumped up immediately, startled by Savannah's sudden movement. Both scrambled to put on their shoes, their hearts racing as they realized the gravity of the situation.

"Mom's going to kill me if she finds out Chad and Savannah were here past midnight! She'll know we just dropped them off if we don't get back home before she does," Genesis said, practically yelling as she sped down the street. Her eyes were glued to the road, her hands gripping the steering wheel tightly. She was driving so fast that she didn't notice their neighbors turning on their street before she turned off the street.

They reached Chad's house first. As he stepped out of the car, Genesis's phone started ringing, causing her heart to drop. Her stomach churned with nerves as the phone buzzed incessantly in her hand. Too afraid to answer, she ignored the call and kept driving.

"Bye, y'all! Thanks, Genesis!" Savannah called out as she rushed out of the car and toward her porch. Relief washed over her when she saw that her mother and father hadn't made it home yet.

"Bye, baby! I'll call you when we get home!" Trevor yelled out the window, waving as Genesis sped off the moment Savannah's door shut.

"Bye!" she yelled back as she walked up to her door and unlocked it.

Back in the car, Genesis was losing her mind, gripping the steering wheel tightly as her nerves took over. She knew her parents must have made it home by now and would've noticed her car wasn't in the driveway.

"Why didn't you let me say bye?" Trevor asked, his tone was a mix of irritation and worry, as Genesis sped down the street.

"We're in trouble," she snapped. "I think Momma and Daddy are home already because Mom has been calling me nonstop since I dropped off Chad."

“Call her back and tell her we went to the store or the gas station or something,” Trevor said anxiously.

“I can’t!” Genesis shouted. “She’s called me like twenty times, and I didn’t answer once. She’s going to know I’m lying.”

“Just say you left your phone in the car or something! God, you know how to lie—stop acting like this is your first time being out late!”

“Okay, okay!” Genesis replied, trying to calm herself. “Dial her number for me.”

Trevor grabbed her phone, took a deep breath, and called their mother back himself. He figured it’d be better if he spoke first—Genesis was too frazzled to handle it. The phone barely rang twice before Mrs. Lewis picked up, her voice already sharp.

“Why weren’t you answering my calls, Genesis?!” she yelled.

“Mom, it’s Trevor,” he interrupted quickly. “I asked Genesis if she could take me to game store because this new game came out at midnight. She told me no at first, but then she changed her mind at the last minute. By the time we got there, the line was super long, and they’d already sold out. That’s why we’re just now heading back, and she left her phone in the car as we waited in line but why you didn’t call me?”

Trevor’s words spilled out smoothly, rehearsed in his mind, hoping the story would stick before their mom could interrogate them further.

“Really, Tre? What game and what store?” Mrs. Lewis asked skeptically.

“The new boxing game I told you about the other day. You said you’d take me to get it, remember? And the only game store by our house, Mom.”

“Y’all better have been at a game store because if not, you both know what’s going to happen. You hear me, Tre? Matter of fact, you should’ve bought something so I could see a receipt.”

“I promise we were at the game store. We’re parking in the driveway right now. Mom, I would’ve bought something if the game hadn’t sold

out by the time I got to the front of the line. We're coming in the house now," Trevor said, ending the call.

Unbeknownst to Genesis and Trevor, their neighbor and little sister had already spilled the truth. The neighbor saw them driving off with Chad and Savannah, and their little sister, who they thought was fast asleep, had peeked out of her bedroom door and watched them leave.

When they walked into the house, Genesis already knew she was on thin ice. Trevor's story hadn't worked, and now she had to face the music. At least she wasn't going to be punished alone.

They tried to sneak past their parents' bedroom, but their mother called them inside before they could make it down the hall.

"Okay, look, I can explain, and I take full responsibility for everything that happened tonight," Genesis began. "The movie didn't end until eleven thirty, and Savannah's parents weren't going to be home until 2 a.m. from their party. I didn't want her to be alone at home that long, so I waited until it got closer to that time to drop her off."

Mrs. Lewis chuckled. "Haha. You think you can outsmart your own mother, child?" She laughed a little longer before straightening up. "So, where was Chad?"

Genesis's heart started racing again. She knew her mother didn't want her alone with Chad, especially since they already had one child together.

"I dropped him off after the movie," she lied.

"Oh, did you now?" Mr. Lewis cut in, raising an eyebrow. "That's funny because the neighbor said she saw a tall, light-skinned guy sitting in your passenger seat just a few minutes ago when you drove off the street." He shook his head. "How many times do I have to tell you, Genesis, that I don't want another baby being made in my house?"

Mrs. Lewis crossed her arms. "And y'all better have been in the living room—not those bedrooms. Tre, you're not off the hook, either.

We let you go out, and you wanted more time with your little girlfriend. Don't think I don't know exactly why everything happened tonight."

"If this happens again, you both will be punished. Do you understand me?" Mrs. Lewis's tone was firm.

"Yes, ma'am," Genesis and Trevor said in unison.

"I apologize," Trevor said, stepping forward to hug his parents.

Mr. and Mrs. Lewis rarely had issues with Trevor outside of the occasional fight at school, but Genesis always seemed to find trouble.

"I'm sorry, too. It won't happen again," Genesis added.

Mrs. Lewis shook her head. "I know it won't because next weekend, that car will be parked in the driveway. Since you don't like to listen, you won't be going anywhere. Now, go get my baby out of bed with your sisters. Goodnight."

"But Mom..." Genesis started to plead.

"But nothing. Goodnight." Mrs. Lewis's tone left no room for argument.

"Goodnight, Mom and Dad," Trevor said quickly, attempting to make a swift exit before they could drag him further into the grilling.

"Goodnight, son. And tomorrow, you're cutting the front and back yard," Mr. Lewis said.

"And you'll be washing my car as well," Mrs. Lewis added.

"Okay," Trevor muttered, rushing to his room this time.

Once inside, he grabbed his phone, eager to talk to Savannah. She'd been texting and calling earlier but had stopped because she must've fallen asleep. It was well after 2 a.m., but he still called her anyway.

After a few rings, Savannah answered groggily, clearly half-asleep.

"Hey," she murmured.

"Were you sleeping?" Trevor asked softly.

"No," she lied, her voice still thick with sleep.

They stayed on the phone together, talking in quiet whispers until they both drifted off to sleep—just as they'd been doing for the past two weeks.

## Chapter 5: Love, Laughter, and a Game of Hearts

Trevor pulled into the parking lot of La Petite Lumière, a charming French-inspired restaurant with warm lighting and an intimate ambiance. The soft glow from the windows and the gentle hum of conversation made it the perfect place for their special night.

Savannah was surprised that Gensis allowed him to drive her car, especially since they were pretty much the reason she got into trouble in the first place. After that night, Gensis hadn't been able to drive for the past two weeks. But luckily, Chad had gotten a car for his birthday last week, so he had been the one picking her up and taking her around.

"Trevor... this is beautiful," Savannah said as she stepped out of the car, her eyes lighting up as she took in the romantic setting.

"I wanted tonight to be perfect for us," he said, offering his hand. She took it without hesitation, their fingers naturally intertwining as they walked inside.

A hostess greeted them with a warm smile and led them to a private booth tucked in the corner, where a small candle flickered between them. The restaurant smelled of fresh bread, herbs, and something sweet baking in the back.

"This is so fancy," Savannah whispered as she looked around.

Trevor chuckled. "I wanted to take my girl somewhere nice. You deserve it."

She bit her lip, touched by his thoughtfulness. "You really know how to make me feel special."

"You are special," he said, reaching across the table to hold her hand. "This past month has been the best month of my life, Savannah."

She squeezed his hand. "Me too. I never thought I could feel this happy with someone."



A waiter arrived to take their orders. Trevor let Savannah pick first, and she chose a creamy pasta dish with shrimp. Trevor ordered a steak with mashed potatoes, then turned his attention back to her.

“So,” he started, playing with her fingers, “tell me something I don’t know about you.”

Savannah thought for a moment, then smiled. “Okay... I love to paint.”

Trevor raised an eyebrow. “Wait, paint? Like art?”

She nodded. “Yeah. I don’t really show anyone, but when I’m feeling a lot of emotions, I paint. It helps me express myself.”

Trevor grinned. “That’s dope. I need to see one of your paintings one day.”

“Maybe...” she said, blushing. “If you’re lucky.”

Trevor laughed. “Oh, I’m definitely lucky.”

Their food arrived, and as they ate, their conversation flowed effortlessly. They talked about their dreams—Trevor’s love for music and how he wanted to start producing, Savannah’s dream of traveling to Italy one day. They laughed about childhood memories, shared stories about their families, and even playfully debated over who would win in a video game match.

As the meal came to an end, Trevor reached into his pocket and pulled out the small velvet box.

“I have something for you,” he said, his voice softer now.

Savannah’s eyes widened. “Trevor... what is it?”

He slid the box across the table, watching as she slowly opened it. Inside was a delicate silver bracelet with a small heart charm.

Savannah gasped. “Trevor, this is beautiful.”

He smiled. “I saw it and thought of you. The heart represents how much I care about you, and the bracelet... well, I want you to wear it and always remember that I got you. No matter what.”

Tears welled in Savannah's eyes. She had never been given something so thoughtful before. "I love it," she whispered, looking up at him. "And I love you."

Trevor felt his heart stop for a second before it started beating twice as fast. He had been waiting to say it but hearing her say it first made it even more special.

"I love you too, Savannah," he said, his voice full of sincerity.

They sat there, lost in each other's eyes, as the candle between them flickered softly marking the start of something deeper, something real.

"Thank you for my gift. I really appreciate it, and I promise I'll never take it off. I just feel bad that I didn't get you anything," Savannah said, gently running her fingers over the bracelet.

Trevor smiled, shaking his head. "It's okay, baby. I don't expect anything in return. I just want to be the one who spoils you and makes you feel special."

Savannah's heart swelled at his words. "Aww, you're so sweet. You make me love you more every day."

Trevor reached over and tucked a curl behind her ear. "I love you too, baby. More than you know. I just want to make you happy."

After finishing their dinner, they decided to take a walk in the park. Under the soft glow of the streetlights, Trevor pushed Savannah on the swing, and they laughed, talking about everything and nothing all at once. The cool night air wrapped around them, but neither of them felt cold with the warmth they shared.

An hour later, Trevor drove Savannah home, making sure to get back before their eleven o'clock curfew. His heart was full as he pulled into his driveway, and just as he turned off the car, his phone lit up with Savannah's name. A smile spread across his face as he answered.

"Hello."

"Hi, love. Did you make it home?" Savannah's voice was soft and soothing.

"Yeah, I just pulled in."

“Good. I didn’t want to distract you while you were driving.”

Trevor chuckled. “You’re always a distraction, but the best kind.”

Savannah giggled. “Oh really?”

“Mhm. And I have another surprise for you tomorrow. I didn’t want to overwhelm you by giving you everything at once.”

“Aww, now I’m curious,” she teased.

Trevor got out of the car, walking inside the house. “Guess you’ll just have to wait and see.”

“Hey, Mom. Hey, Dad,” he greeted as he passed through the living room.

“Hey, Tre. Glad you made it back safely and on time,” Mr. and Mrs. Lewis said in unison.

Trevor grinned. “So am I.” He made his way to his room, still on the phone with Savannah.

“Oh, and tell Gensis I said thank you for letting us use her car tonight. I had a wonderful time with you, as always.”

“I will, baby,” Trevor said, lying back on his bed.

As usual, they stayed on the phone until they both drifted off to sleep. Their connection was growing deeper by the day, and at this point, neither of them wanted to be without the other.

The next morning, both Savannah and Trevor woke up to find their phones had died overnight. Before Savannah could rush to plug hers in, the mouthwatering aroma of bacon, eggs, grits, and toast drifted through the air. She smiled, knowing exactly what that meant—every Saturday morning, her dad was the first one up, cooking breakfast for the family.

She quickly placed her phone on the charger, then headed to the bathroom to brush her teeth and wash her face. Once she was done, she happily skipped to the kitchen, her stomach growling in anticipation.

“Good morning, Mom, Dad, and Diana. How’s y’all’s morning going?” Savannah greeted her family as she grabbed a plate.

“Morning, little lady. My morning is going well, but how was your night?” her mother asked with a knowing smile.

“Mine too, baby girl,” her dad added, batting his eyelashes dramatically. “And yeah, how was last night with Trevor?”

“I wanna know too! Did he get you anything special?” Diana chimed in, turning in her seat with excitement.

Savannah giggled at their curiosity. “Well, since you all must know... it was magnificent,” she said dreamily. “Yes, he got me something—this bracelet with a heart charm.” She held up her wrist, her eyes shining. “And he took me to La Petite Lumière, this super charming French-inspired restaurant. We had a candlelit dinner, and afterward, we took a walk in the park. It was like a dream come true.”

Her mother smiled proudly, happy to see her daughter glowing with joy. While she had reservations about Savannah dating, she knew she couldn’t stop her. Rather than push her away, she chose to support her, ensuring Savannah always felt comfortable coming to her.

“How romantic,” her mother said, placing a hand over her heart.

Her dad, ever the playful one, rested his cheek on his palm with a dramatic sigh. “How sweet,” he teased, making everyone laugh.

“Let me see the bracelet!” Diana exclaimed, turning eagerly in her seat.

Savannah walked over and extended her wrist.

“Ooo, that’s a beauty,” her dad said, nodding in approval as they examined the delicate charm.

Her mother, however, raised a curious brow. “How can he afford all this? You two are only in high school.”

Savannah was ready for this question. “He worked hard for it, Mom. He spent the summer cutting grass and helping the elderly around his neighborhood to earn money. Plus, he gets an allowance every month. And before you even ask—no, he isn’t doing anything illegal,” she said quickly, reading her mother’s thoughts. “I checked all of that myself, and you know he’s in church faithfully.”

Her mother exhaled, her shoulders relaxing. "Alright, alright," she said, her heart rate settling.

"That's good," her dad said with a nod. "Keeps himself busy."

"Exactly." Savannah took a bite of her breakfast, then hesitated before asking, "Speaking of Trevor... he has one more surprise for me today. So... if you two don't mind, can I go over and see what it is?"

She looked at them hopefully, silently praying they'd say yes.

"Sure, as long as you're home by curfew and I don't have to pick you up," her mother said, glancing at her husband, who nodded in agreement.

"Thank you both!" Savannah beamed, rushing over to hug her parents.

Her dad gave her a firm look. "Now, don't get too comfortable always going over to his house. Sometimes, invite him over here."

"Yes, sir," she agreed quickly. "I'll invite him over tomorrow for Sunday dinner then. Since I didn't get him anything, that's the least I could do—unless you want to take me to get him something?" She gave them a hopeful look, already wondering if Trevor's parents would be okay with him coming over.

Her dad leaned back in his chair, considering. "Let us think about tomorrow."

"I'll take you to buy him something," her mom said, cutting to the chase.

"I wanna go too!" Diana whined, bouncing in her seat.

"Okay," their mom said with a small laugh. "Let me finish my food, and then we'll go."

"Mommie, can I go too?" Diana asked again, tugging on her mom's arm.

"Yes, go get dressed. I'm about to go get ready too," she replied. Then, she turned to Savannah with a pointed look. "And hurry up, Savannah."

Savannah stuffed her mouth with food and then rushed to her room. She already knew exactly what to get Trevor—he always smelled so good, so she decided to buy him more cologne.

She grabbed a pair of comfy sweats she loved lounging in, paired them with a plain white T-shirt, and slipped on her white tennis shoes. After quickly brushing her hair into a ponytail, she grabbed her cell phone off the charger along with her headphones.

As soon as she turned on her phone, several missed calls and text messages popped up in her notifications. Without hesitation, she called Trevor first.

“Hey, baby. I’ve been trying to call you. How’s your morning going?” he asked, slightly out of breath.

“It’s going good, love. I just turned my phone on and saw that. I had breakfast with my family, and now we’re about to head out to do some shopping. What about you? Are you running or working out?” Savannah asked, already knowing the answer. Trevor loved staying fit and never missed a Saturday morning workout, no matter how late he had stayed up the night before.

“Working out in my room,” he admitted. “I got worried when you didn’t answer. I thought you were mad at me or something.”

“No, why would I be mad at you? Especially after last night?” she asked, smiling at the thought of their date.

“I don’t know. You usually turn your phone on right away, that’s all. But I’m glad your morning is going well. What are you going to buy?”

“I apologize for worrying you, baby. I smelled breakfast and instantly got hungry—that’s all,” she said with a small laugh. “I’m going to pick out something to wear for today. Speaking of which, where are we going? Or are we just hanging out at your house?”

“Oh, well, I was thinking of taking you to a different park so we could play tennis, since you said you love it. If that’s okay with you?”

“Yes! That sounds like fun. Now I know exactly what to buy,” she said excitedly. “And I already asked my parents about coming over today.”

“Cool. What did they say?”

“They said yes, but they also told me not to get too comfortable just going to your house. They want me to invite you over here sometimes, too.”

“Okay, that sounds good to me. I’d love to spend the day at your house.”

“Actually, I asked if you could come over tomorrow after church for Sunday dinner, and they said they’d think about it. So, you should check with your parents just in case they say yes.”

“Okay, I’ll ask as soon as they get home. You know my mom teaches Saturday school, and my dad runs boxing classes on weekends.”

“Oh wow, I didn’t know that! I just realized they’re always gone.”

“Yeah, and Gensis is always stuck watching us. She gets a kick out of telling us what to do,” Trevor said with a chuckle. “I usually go with my dad to his practices, but ever since I met you... I’ve had better things to do.”

Savannah blushed, loving how he always made her feel special.

“Yeah, I watch my little sister, Diana, all the time after school until one of my parents gets home,” Savannah said. “I didn’t know you boxed too.”

“Yeah, I haven’t fought in any matches yet, but I plan to this year.”

Before Savannah could respond, a knock sounded at her bedroom door.

“Savannah, are you ready?” Mrs. Caldwell called.

“Yes, ma’am! I’m about to head to the mall now,” Savannah replied before turning back to the phone. “My mom’s finally ready but let me know when your first match is. I’d love to come and support you.”

Trevor smiled. “Okay, I’d appreciate that. Do you need to get off the phone so you can talk to your mom on the way, or do you want to

keep talking until you get to the mall?" He hoped she wouldn't have to hang up, but he'd understand if she did.

"We can keep talking until I get to the mall," Savannah said, making Trevor's heart melt. She always put him first, it was like she could read his mind.

"Okay," he said, feeling a warmth spread through him. They continued their conversation about boxing, and Savannah's mother and sister even chimed in as they made their way to the mall.

After about an hour of shopping, they stopped to eat. Savannah couldn't stop smiling, thrilled with the cologne she had picked out for Trevor. She couldn't wait to give it to him.

As they were leaving the mall, Savannah spotted Benard and his dad, Mr. Richardson.

"Hi, Savannah!" Benard and Mr. Richardson called out, waving as they approached.

"Hi, Benard. Hi, Mr. Richardson," Savannah replied, immediately feeling a sense of unease. She hoped he would behave in front of his father.

"Hi, Mrs. Caldwell. Hi, little Diana," Benard said, greeting her family, who knew him well.

"Hi, Benard. Hi, Mr. Richardson," they responded. Mr. Richardson tilted his hat in greeting.

Benard reached out for a hug, and Savannah gave him a quick church hug, making sure to keep her distance. As he pulled away, he leaned in just enough to whisper in her ear, "You sure do look beautiful." Then, he stepped back, a smug smile on his face.

Savannah forced a polite smile, ignoring the comment.

"Y'all finished shopping?" Benard asked.

"Yes, I just bought an outfit and some shoes," Savannah replied casually.



"And a special present for her new boyfriend," Diana blurted out, her voice innocent but causing an awkward silence to settle between them.

Benard's expression shifted slightly, but Savannah kept her focus on Mr. Richardson.

"Well, yeah," she said, clearing her throat. "We have to get going. It was nice seeing you again, Mr. Richardson."

"Likewise," he said with a nod.

As they walked away, Savannah exhaled softly, relieved the encounter hadn't been worse.

They made it to the car and arrived home in no time. As soon as they walked through the door, Savannah headed straight to her room, closing it behind her. She wasted no time calling Trevor to tell him about running into Benard at the mall.

"He needs to back up and worry about his own girlfriends," Trevor said, irritation lacing his voice.

"Yeah, but let's not even give him any more energy," Savannah said, steering the conversation away. "What time are you coming to pick me up?"

"At six," Trevor responded, glancing at the clock. It was already 4:30.

"Okay, I'll be ready by then," Savannah said, a huge smile spreading across her face. She grabbed a spray bottle and misted her hair with water before working in some conditioner, curling the ends around her fingers. She wanted to look cute, even if she'd be sweating while hitting tennis balls.

There was a pause before Trevor asked, "Are you getting off the phone with me?" His voice held a playful pout, as if he'd break down if she said yes.

"No, love," she assured him with a soft laugh. "I was just letting you know I'd be ready. I'll talk to you as long as you want me to."

“Good, because I was about to cry,” Trevor teased. “You know I can’t live without you, can’t even breathe without you. You are the love of my life, Savannah. I’ve never loved a girl like I love you.”

Savannah felt a wave of warmth rush over her, butterflies fluttering in her stomach. Trevor always knew exactly what to say.

“Aww, Trevor,” she whispered. “I love you too. You are my world. I can’t wait to spend the rest of my life with you.”

At that moment, she didn’t think she could be any happier.

## Chapter 6: Brushstrokes & Butterfly Kisses

An hour and a half later, Trevor knocked on Savannah's front door.

"Hello, Mr. Caldwell. Is Savannah here?"

Mr. Caldwell held the door open, a knowing smile on his face. "You know she's back there waiting for you. Come on in, son."

"Savannah! Trevor's here for you!" he called down the hallway.

"Okay!" Savannah's voice rang out from her room.

Mr. Caldwell chuckled, shaking his head. "Go on back there and get her. You know she takes forever getting ready."

Trevor laughed. "Okay, ha-ha." He walked down the hall, feeling both excited and slightly nervous as this was his first time going to her room.

He knocked on her door, and Savannah swung it open, expecting one of her parents. Her expression shifted when she saw Trevor standing there.

"Sorry, I didn't know it was you. Did my dad actually let you back here?" she asked, raising an eyebrow. She knew her parents were strict about boys in her room.

Trevor smirked. "Yeah, he sent me back here himself. Guess he figured I'd be waiting all night otherwise."

Savannah rolled her eyes playfully and stepped aside. "Well, since you're here, I might as well give you a quick tour."

She left the door open as Trevor walked in, taking in her space—her neatly made bed, soft pastel walls, and shelves filled with books, framed pictures, and little trinkets that reflected her personality.

"Your room is so you—beautiful and full of life, adventure, but also peaceful and calm," Trevor said, admiring the space.

Savannah smiled, touched by his words. "Thank you. I appreciate how well you know me already."

Trevor shrugged, flashing a playful grin. "That's my job—to get to know you."

He walked around, picking up a few stuffed animals and pausing in front of the canvases leaning against the wall. His fingers traced the edges of one painting before turning to her. "Are these the paintings you were talking about?"

"Yeah, take a look."

Trevor studied them, his eyes widening. "Oh, my goodness, love. You are insanely talented. Wait... is this a drawing of us?"

Savannah nodded. "It is. I'm not quite finished yet, but I will be soon."

"This is amazing. I have an artist for a girlfriend!" He turned to her, eyes shining with admiration. "You're so smart, talented, and beautiful. Do you plan on selling your work?"

"Not these," Savannah said proudly. "I might draw other things to sell, but these are my trial-and-error pieces. I want to make sure anything I sell is top quality."

Before Trevor could respond, a knock at the door interrupted them.

"You two should get going before it gets too late," Mrs. Caldwell said, standing in the doorway.

Savannah let out a small sigh. "I was just showing Trevor my drawings. And Mom, why did you knock when the door was already open?" she asked, raising an eyebrow.

Mrs. Caldwell chuckled. "So, I wouldn't scare you two, Savannah." She shook her head playfully. "Now, I'm heading to my room. Trevor, please drive safely with my daughter in the car."

"Yes, ma'am," Trevor said respectfully.

Savannah grabbed her purse, Trevor's gift, and turned off her room light before following him out.

"Yes ma'am. I will drive safely and get her home safely." Trevor replied as they all made it to the front door.

“He drives very safely, Mom. We are heading out. See y’all later. We’re about to go have some fun.” Savannah said excitedly as she hugged her mom, dad, and Diana.

“Okay, have fun, baby girl.” Mr. Caldwell said, placing a kiss on her forehead before watching them walk to the car and drive off.

“I really like your parents. They’re so kind and always smiling—unlike mine. They’re always yelling, lol, but they’re cool sometimes,” Trevor said as he drove them to a restaurant not far from the tennis park.

“I like your parents too. They are kind, and I hadn’t heard them yell. But maybe when you act up, they do, lol.” Savannah replied, giggling.

Trevor laughed. “Yeah, that’s true.”

They pulled up to a small, cozy burger diner and went inside. The classic 1950s-style interior, with its black-and-white checkered floors and red vinyl booths, gave off a warm and nostalgic vibe. They chose to sit at the bar, ordering their food while engaging in a deep conversation about the upcoming holidays and how they wanted to spend them together.

After finishing their meal, they headed to the tennis courts. Under the soft glow of the evening lights, they played match after match, laughter echoing across the court as they playfully competed against each other.

“You play like a professional, love. Are you ready to take a break?” Trevor asked, trying to catch his breath.

Savannah smiled as she wiped her forehead. “Sure, and thank you, love. You play very well too.”

They walked back to the car, deciding to grab ice cream and relax at the park before heading home. As they sat on a park bench, enjoying their ice cream, the cool evening breeze swept through the air, making Savannah shiver slightly. Trevor noticed and instinctively wrapped his arm around her, pulling her close.

“You cold, love?” he asked.

"A little, but this ice cream is too good to stop eating," Savannah said with a giggle.

Trevor chuckled. "That's dedication." He took another bite before glancing at her. "So, since we were talking about the holidays earlier, what's your favorite holiday memory?"

Savannah's eyes lit up as she thought back. "Christmas, hands down. Every year, my family would wake up super early, and my dad would blast old-school Christmas music while my mom cooked breakfast. My little sister would be running around in her pajamas, impatiently waiting to open gifts." She smiled at the memory. "One year, when I was about eight, I really wanted an art set. My parents made me think they didn't get it, and I tried to hide how sad I was. But after we opened all the gifts, my dad pulled out this big box from behind the couch—it was the exact art set I wanted. I was so happy I started crying."

Trevor smiled warmly. "That's sweet. I bet you started drawing like crazy after that."

"Oh, definitely. I even tried drawing my family that day, but everyone looked like stick figures with big heads," she said, laughing.

Trevor laughed with her. "That's cute, though. You've come a long way since then." He took another spoonful of his ice cream. "For me, it's Thanksgiving. My mom always goes all out with cooking, and we have this tradition where we say what we're thankful for before eating. One year, my dad was on this health kick and tried to make us eat a 'low-fat' Thanksgiving dinner. No butter, no sugar in the sweet potatoes—everything tasted terrible."

Savannah gasped dramatically. "Oh no, not the sweet potatoes!"

"Right?!" Trevor said, shaking his head. "We were all suffering, but my uncle snuck in some 'real' food from his house. My mom caught him, but she just laughed and let us eat it. That was one of the best Thanksgivings ever."

Savannah giggled. "I love that. It's always the little things that make holidays special."

Trevor nodded in agreement. "Yeah. And now, I feel like this year will be even more special... because I get to spend it with you."

Savannah felt her heart melt at his words. "Me too, love. I can't wait."

They sat in comfortable silence for a moment, enjoying the peacefulness of the night. Savannah rested her head against Trevor's shoulder, feeling completely content.

"I never thought I'd find someone who makes everything feel so right," she whispered.

Trevor kissed the top of her head. "Well, believe it, because I'm not going anywhere."

Savannah smiled, knowing deep in her heart that she had found something real.

With the stars twinkling above them and their fingers intertwined, they stayed there a little while longer, savoring the moment before heading home—hearts full, minds at ease, and love growing stronger with each passing second.

"Before I forget, here." Savannah said as she passed Trevor his gift, her eyes gleaming with excitement as they sat in front of her house.

"For me?" Trevor asked, a huge smile spreading across his face.

"Yes, for you, love!" Savannah replied, watching him eagerly as she waited for his reaction.

Trevor glanced at the bag, then at her, before leaning in and pressing a slow, passionate kiss to her lips. The warmth of his touch sent a shiver down her spine. "You're amazing, you know that?" he whispered before pulling away to open his gift.

He reached inside and pulled out a sleek, black bottle of cologne. His eyes widened as he turned it over in his hands, recognition lighting up his face. "My love, thank you so much. You know how much I love cologne and smelling good. This is a new fragrance! I see it on commer-

cials all the time, but I never tried it—and it smells so good.” Trevor exclaimed, spraying a small amount on his wrist before inhaling deeply. “Mmm, you’re gonna be all over me after I wear this.”

Savannah laughed. “I’m already all over you.”

Trevor smirked, setting the cologne aside. “Here, love. I brought you your second gift.”

“Love, you didn’t have to. You’ve already spent enough on me,” Savannah said as Trevor handed her a card that said Happy Anniversary at the top, decorated with delicate gold foil. She carefully opened it, and her heart swelled at the heartfelt message inside.

To my beautiful Savannah,

Every moment with you is a blessing, and every day I find myself falling harder for you. You are my peace, my joy, and my forever love. I can’t wait to see what the future holds for us. Happy anniversary, my love.

A soft gasp escaped her lips as she pulled out a small bundle wrapped in a satin ribbon. Inside was her favorite candy and a set of high-quality painting materials—new brushes, a variety of vibrant paints, and a fresh canvas.

“Trevor...” Savannah’s voice was thick with emotion as she looked up at him. “You shouldn’t have. You are so thoughtful.” She ran her fingers over the new art supplies. “How did you know I was running out?”

Trevor chuckled. “I pay attention, love. Every time you show me a new painting, I notice you switching to smaller canvases or reusing old ones. I wanted to make sure you had everything you needed to keep creating.”

Savannah set the gifts down and threw her arms around his neck, hugging him tightly. “I love you so much.”

“I love you more.” Trevor kissed the top of her head, holding her close.

They sat there for a moment, wrapped in each other’s warmth, neither wanting the night to end.



Savannah pulled back slightly, her fingers tracing his jawline. "This has been the best anniversary ever."

Trevor smiled. "It's only the first of many, love."

With one last lingering kiss, Trevor walked her to the door, watching as she stepped inside with a dreamy smile on her face.

As he drove away, Savannah stood at the door for a moment, pressing the anniversary card to her chest. She knew, without a doubt, that she had found something real—something worth holding onto forever.

## Chapter 7: Echoes of Love & Lies

Five months later

“He sure has been spoiling you, and you’ve been so happy. I’m proud of you, best friend,” Tanesha said as she and Savannah lounged on her queen-size bed.

Savannah had been spending every weekend with Trevor, even staying overnight at his house—but not in his bed, of course. In the past few months, she had learned so much about him, and their bond had only deepened.

“Yes, he does spoil me, and he makes me so happy. He buys me my favorite things without me even having to ask, and we’ve been so in love for the past five months. Girl, I’m just so thankful God brought him into my life,” Savannah said, feeling butterflies in her stomach at the mere mention of Trevor’s love.

“I’m so happy for you,” Tanesha said with a smile, but her tone shifted as she sighed. “I wish Montel would call me. I’ve been going through it with him.”

“What happened?” Savannah asked, sitting up, sensing the frustration in her friend’s voice.

“Before he went back home yesterday, I found out he was talking to Bre across the street the whole time. And he never even called me.” Tanesha’s voice cracked slightly. “I had no idea he was cheating on me. And his best friend, Jeremy, whose house he’s always at, didn’t even tell me. We all hang out together, and he acted like everything was fine.”

“Oh, Tanesha...” Savannah whispered, feeling her friend’s pain.

“That’s not even the worst part,” Tanesha continued, wiping her eyes. “I can’t believe I gave him my virginity last weekend. Everything was going so well—he was over here every day, making me feel special. And then, just like that, he goes back home for school and does this to me.”

Savannah reached for her friend's hand, squeezing it gently. "I'm so sorry. You didn't deserve that. Have you talked to him?"

"No. And I don't even know if I want to." Tanesha exhaled deeply. "I don't know if I should cry, scream, or just act like I don't care."

"You have every right to be hurt, but don't let him take away your worth," Savannah reassured her. "You gave him a piece of you because you cared about him. If he couldn't appreciate that, then he didn't deserve it."

Tanesha nodded, swallowing hard. "I just wish I had known before. I feel so stupid."

"Don't say that" Savannah insisted. "You trusted him. That's not stupid—that's love."

Tanesha wiped her face and forced a smile. "Enough about me and my drama. Let's talk about something good. What are you and Trevor doing this weekend?"

Savannah smiled softly, though a strange thought crossed her mind—was love always this unpredictable? Was it possible that one day she could feel as hurt as Tanesha did now?

She quickly pushed the thought aside. Trevor wasn't like Montel. Or at least, she hoped not.

"We're not doing much this weekend because he has practice and other things to take care of. I have a football game to cheer at tomorrow, though, and I was going to see if you wanted to come. You need a change of atmosphere," Savannah said, hoping to cheer up her best friend. "Plus, you can finally meet Trevor. He's coming to see me cheer after his practice."

Tanesha's face brightened slightly. "Okay, you know I'm always down to go somewhere with you, bestie. We always have a great time together. That's why I was so hurt when you stopped coming over like you used to. But I get it—you've found love. I can't even be mad because I did go missing last week with Montel." She sighed. "But seriously, how

can boys do girls like that? They love us enough to take our virginity, but not enough to just be with one girl?"

Savannah reached over and squeezed Tanesha's hand. "I know, girl. It's not fair."

She let out a soft sigh before continuing. "And I'm sorry, Nesha. It's been hard being away from him, I'm not going to lie. It's like every time we see each other, a magnet pulls us together, and we don't want to let go. But that's why, when you called me today, I came right over—I could hear the hurt in your voice."

Tanesha gave a weak smile, and Savannah squeezed her hand again. "Let's go somewhere after the game too. I'll hang out with you this weekend since Trevor will be busy. My dad always says, 'Boys will be boys.' They're wired differently than us, so we'll never fully understand them."

As Tanesha nodded in agreement, Savannah pulled out her phone, quickly typing a few sweet messages for Trevor to see once he finished practice. He stayed on her mind so much that she found it hard to focus on anything else—unless it absolutely needed her undivided attention.

"Yeah, that's true," Tanesha said, her voice laced with reflection. "But you seem to find boys who fall deeply in love with you, and you stay in long relationships. So, I guess not all boys are wired differently... just the ones I choose to date."

Savannah gave her a knowing look. "You'll find the right one, Nesha. Sometimes, we have to go through the wrong ones first."

Tanesha sighed, flopping back onto the bed. "I hope so, because I'm tired of these failed talking stages and heartbreaks."

Savannah laughed softly, nudging her. "Then let's make this weekend all about fun. No stressing over boys, okay?"

Tanesha smiled. "Deal."

They lounged around, catching up with a bunch of friends they usually hung out with, and before they knew it, they had ended up at a party that night. The music was loud, the energy was high, and Savan-

nah and Tanesha danced and laughed, enjoying the moment without a single worry. It felt good to let loose, to just be present in the moment with her friends.

Meanwhile, back at home, Trevor was anything but carefree. He sat on the edge of his bed, staring at his phone, willing it to light up with a message from Savannah. She had been texting him all day—sweet little notes that always made him smile—but now? Silence. He knew she was out with her friends, and he wanted to respect that, but the thought of her being around other guys gnawed at him.

His mother's voice pulled him from his thoughts. "Tre, are you alright? You haven't come to the kitchen to eat your dinner."

Trevor sighed, running a hand over his face. "Yeah, I'm alright. Just not hungry right now. I'll eat later, Mom."

She stepped further into the room, arms crossed. "Is it Savannah? Did you two break up or something?"

Trevor's head snapped up. "No! Why would you think that?"

His mom raised an eyebrow. "Because I saw you talking to Katrina earlier outside. What did she want?"

Trevor let out a groan. "Oh, that... Savannah doesn't know about that, and please don't say anything to her. She doesn't like Katrina much, and Katrina's been trying to get back with me even though she knows I'm in love with Savannah."

His mother nodded knowingly. "I see. Well, if that's the case, you need to make sure Katrina understands there's no chance and, more importantly, keep her away from Savannah."

Trevor exhaled, rubbing the back of his neck. "That's not even what's bothering me. Savannah's friends wanted to hang out with her this weekend since we've been spending so much time together, and now she's at a party. I haven't talked to her for hours."

His mother smirked slightly. "Oh, so you think she's dancing with some other boy, huh?"

Trevor frowned. "I hope not, but it's a possibility... I mean, she's having fun. I can tell because she stopped texting me, too. I just have to wait until she gets home to talk to her."

His mom chuckled softly and sat beside him. "Tre, it's okay for you two to spend time apart. That's when trust comes into play. If you know she loves you, then you have nothing to worry about."

Trevor nodded slowly, but the unease in his chest remained.

"What if she is dancing with a guy?" The thought alone sent a crashing weight onto his heart. He exhaled sharply, gripping his chest as an unfamiliar ache settled deep within him.

His mother's concerned gaze fell on him immediately.

"Are you okay, son? What's wrong with your heart? Do we need to get you to the hospital?"

Trevor quickly shook his head, trying to dismiss the panic in her voice. "No, Mom. I'm fine. I just need to lay down for a while."

His mother studied him, unconvinced. "You do know love can stir up all kinds of emotions, right? Sometimes, you have to learn how to balance those feelings. Be careful, and make sure you can trust the person you're with."

Trevor sighed, running a hand over his face. "I do trust her. I just—" He hesitated. "I don't know, Mom. It's hard not to overthink when I know she's out, having fun, and I'm just sitting here, missing her."

His mother offered him a small, knowing smile. "Then you've got it bad, son. But love is more than just wanting to be around someone all the time. It's about faith. Let her breathe, and if she's the one for you, she'll always come back."

Trevor nodded, but her words didn't fully ease his heart.

Back at the Party

The music pulsed through the house, bodies moving in sync with the beat. Laughter and conversations filled the air, but Savannah suddenly felt a shift inside her—a strange, uneasy feeling.

She couldn't explain it, but her heart felt heavy, as if something was pulling her away from the fun. It wasn't guilt—she wasn't doing anything wrong—but it was as if Trevor's emotions had somehow reached her.

She pulled out her phone, staring at the screen. No missed calls, but her gut told her he needed to hear her voice.

Without hesitating, she stepped outside onto the porch and called him.

The phone barely rang before he answered.

"Love?" Trevor's voice was soft but held an undeniable tension.

"Hey, baby," Savannah said, her tone gentle. "Are you okay?"

Trevor let out a slow breath, the weight on his chest easing just a little. "I am now."

Savannah frowned. "Trevor, what's wrong? I can feel it... something's bothering you."

There was a beat of silence before he finally admitted, "I guess I was overthinking. I got so used to talking to you all the time, and when you stopped texting, I started wondering if you were with someone else."

Savannah's heart clenched. "Baby, no. I'd never do that to you."

He sighed, rubbing his temple. "I know, I know. I trust you, love. It's just... I miss you."

A soft smile spread across Savannah's lips. "I miss you too, Tre. That's why I had to call you—I could feel it. You're my heart, love. No matter where I am, I'm always yours."

Trevor exhaled, the tension finally melting away. "I love you, Savannah."

"I love you too, Trevor. Now, get some rest. I'll call you when I'm home, okay?"

"Okay, love. Have fun."

As they hung up, Savannah took a deep breath, the uneasy feeling vanishing. No matter where they were, their love always found its way back to each other.

"I can eat now," Trevor said, standing to his feet with a huge smile on his face.

His mother chuckled, shaking her head. "Oh, my goodness. She must have felt your misery?" She asked the question playfully, though she already knew the answer.

Trevor nodded; his eyes filled with certainty. "Yes. She said she could feel that something was wrong with me." He paused for a moment, then looked at his mother with unwavering confidence. "I'm going to marry her, Mom."

His mother's eyes softened as they walked into the kitchen. "Aww, now that's what you call a true love connection. You better marry that girl and take good care of her."

Trevor grinned. "I plan to."

His mother smiled warmly as she plated his food, watching the newfound energy in her son. Love had a way of bringing light even in the darkest moments, and she could see it written all over him.

Back at the party, Savannah was ready to leave. She missed Trevor, and she knew he missed her too. All she wanted was to give him her full attention, so after one last dance with her friends, she grabbed Tanesha's arm, pulling her to the side.

"I'm ready to go. Are you?"

Tanesha gave her a curious look, sensing the shift in Savannah's energy. "Not right now. I just got TJ's number over there, and I wanted to dance with him one more time. Then we can go. You must really miss Trevor, huh?"

Savannah sighed, her expression giving her away. "Okay... and yes, I do."

Tanesha smirked. "I knew it! But just one more dance, and we're out."

"Okay," Savannah agreed, though impatience bubbled beneath her calm exterior.



Tanesha rushed back to the dance floor, eager to share another song with TJ. As they slow danced, she rested her head on his shoulder, enjoying the warmth of the moment.

"We're leaving after this song," Tanesha told TJ, looking up at him. "When are you heading out?"

TJ met her gaze with a small smile. "I'll leave after this song too and walk you two back across the street."

Tanesha's smile widened. "That's sweet of you."

TJ chuckled. "Well, I'm a gentleman."

They laughed, and as they stepped onto the porch, Savannah exhaled, knowing she'd soon be able to call Trevor and hear his voice again.

"We're ready. TJ is walking us home," Tanesha said, glancing at Savannah, who instantly perked up.

"Okay, let's go!" Savannah exclaimed, practically jumping off the porch, eager to get to a quiet place.

"Lol, you're really ready. Everybody inside told me you were out here waiting," Tanesha teased, giggling at how fast Savannah moved.

"Sure am, lol," Savannah replied, already focused on texting Trevor as they walked.

"I see that," Tanesha said with a smirk. "But did you have fun?"

"Yes, it was a vibe! I'd definitely do it again... but my man needs me," Savannah admitted with a dreamy smile.

They made their way back to Tanesha's house, Savannah texting Trevor the entire time.

"Thank you for walking us home, TJ," Savannah said as they reached the door. Without waiting for a response, she rushed inside, heading straight to Tanesha's room to call Trevor. The two talked late into the night, their conversation lulling them both to sleep.

The Next Morning

"Savannah, wake up!" Trevor's voice came through the phone, groggy but firm.

"You have a game at 10 a.m., so set your alarm. Or I can call you to make sure you're up. I'm heading to practice now, but it's only 7 a.m., so you still have time to sleep—just put your phone on the charger."

Savannah groaned, rolling onto her side. "I'm up. I'm up. I'm up," she mumbled, barely opening her eyes.

She spoke briefly with Trevor before he went into the gym for practice, then drifted back to sleep for another hour. When she and Tanesha finally got up, they got ready for the game, waiting for Mrs. Caldwell to pick them up.

They arrived at the stadium by 9:20 a.m., giving Savannah time to warm up with her cheer team. Meanwhile, Tanesha and Mrs. Caldwell found front-row seats to watch.

#### At the Gym

Trevor was locked in, finishing up his punches and working on his coordination, but his mind kept drifting to Savannah. He wanted to see her after the game, to spend time together before the weekend slipped away.

By 10:30 a.m., practice wrapped up, and Trevor helped his dad clean up the gym. Once they were done, his dad dropped him off at the stadium.

As he walked toward the bleachers, scanning for a seat, Savannah spotted him from the field. Her heart nearly leaped out of her chest. She wanted nothing more than to run straight into his arms.

Savannah's heart swelled with excitement as she cheered, stealing glances at Trevor in the stands. Just knowing he was there, watching and supporting her, made her want to give it her all.

But then, her mood shifted.

Her eyes locked onto a familiar figure moving down the bleachers—Katrina. She was smiling as she made her way toward Trevor, her confidence on full display.

Savannah's stomach twisted, but she kept her stance, refusing to let her emotions show. This was her moment on the field, and she wouldn't let anyone take that away from her.

Still, the question lingered in her mind... Why was she here?

## Chapter 8: Whispers, Warnings & What-Ifs

Savannah's mind was all over the place as she watched Katrina walk toward Trevor. Her focus wavered, and before she knew it, it was her turn to jump. She pushed off the ground, but her timing was off—her form unsteady. When she landed, a sharp pain shot through her ankle.

She collapsed onto the field, clutching her foot as a wave of pain surged through her. Gasps echoed from the crowd, and within seconds, her mother, Tanesha, and Trevor were sprinting toward her.

From the bleachers, Katrina glanced over at the commotion, a smirk tugging at the corner of her lips. Oh, she has game, she thought to herself. Faking an injury so Trevor won't see me? That's cute. But it's fine—I live right down the street from him. I see him every day.

Meanwhile, Trevor dropped to his knees beside Savannah, his heart pounding. "Baby, are you okay?" He reached for her hand, his concern written all over his face.

Savannah winced. "I think I sprained my ankle."

Her mother crouched beside her, already assessing the injury. "We need to get you off the field. Can you move your foot?"

Savannah tried but hissed in pain. Trevor didn't hesitate. "I got her." He gently scooped her up into his arms, ignoring the curious stares from the crowd.

As he carried her toward the sidelines, Savannah leaned her head against his chest, trying to steady her breathing. She could still feel Katrina's presence in the stands, but right now, all that mattered was the warmth of Trevor's arms around her and the safety she felt in them.

Trevor helped Savannah into the car, making sure she was as comfortable as possible before sliding in beside her. Mrs. Caldwell glanced

at them through the rearview mirror, shaking her head with a small smile.

"I swear, you act like she broke her leg, Trevor," she teased as she started the car.

Trevor scoffed. "She's hurt, Mrs. Caldwell. I'm just making sure she's okay." He tightened his hold around Savannah, who nestled into his side with a soft sigh.

Mrs. Caldwell chuckled and focused on the road, taking Tanesha home first. "Call me later, bestie," Tanesha said as she stepped out of the car. "And take it easy on that foot!"

"I will," Savannah promised.

Once they dropped Tanesha off, Mrs. Caldwell drove home, pulling into the driveway smoothly. "Alright, let's get you inside."

Before Savannah could even attempt to move, Trevor was already unbuckling her seatbelt. "I got you," he said, lifting her into his arms effortlessly.

Mrs. Caldwell sighed. "You do realize she can hop, right?"

Trevor ignored her, carrying Savannah inside and setting her gently on the couch. "Comfort first," he said with a grin.

Mrs. Caldwell shook her head again. "You two..." She handed Savannah another ice pack. "Keep this on for a while. I'll make you something to eat."

As soon as her mom disappeared into the kitchen, Savannah looked up at Trevor, her heart swelling with warmth. "You really didn't have to carry me like that."

Trevor smirked. "I know. But I wanted to."

She rolled her eyes playfully, but deep down, she loved how protective he was of her. Even with Katrina's presence earlier, in this moment, it was just the two of them, and that was all that mattered.

"I'm so happy my mom allowed me to come with you. It hurt my heart seeing you fall to the ground like that. I ran so fast I passed by

your mom and Tanesha,” Trevor said, still shaken from the moment Savannah went down.

“Really? I got distracted, that’s all,” Savannah admitted, shifting slightly on the couch to get comfortable. “I saw Katrina walking down the bleachers to sit next to you and lost focus. What was she doing there?”

Trevor sighed. “Yes, and I didn’t know she was there. Baby, you have to believe me. I don’t know why she was there because we don’t go to either school. I came to support you.”

Trevor lied because he had actually mentioned the game to Katrina the day before but didn’t expect her to show up. He hoped Savannah wouldn’t press the issue, but the way she studied him made him uneasy.

“You didn’t know she was there?” she asked again, her voice softer now, like she wanted to believe him but wasn’t fully convinced.

Trevor shook his head quickly. “No, baby. I came for you. You know that.”

Savannah let out a slow breath. “Okay,” she said, though something in her gut told her there was more to the story. She decided to push the thought aside for now.

Trevor reached for her hand, squeezing it gently. “I hate that you got hurt. I feel like it’s my fault.”

She frowned. “It’s not your fault. I just got distracted.”

“Because of Katrina.”

Savannah hesitated before nodding. “Yeah.”

Trevor sighed, running his free hand down his face. He wanted to tell her the truth—that he had mentioned the game to Katrina in passing—but he didn’t want to cause more tension. He had no intentions of meeting up with Katrina, and he figured Savannah would just get more upset if she knew.

“I don’t want her coming around you,” Savannah admitted. “She still likes you, and I don’t trust her.”

Trevor lifted her hand to his lips, kissing her fingers softly. "You don't have to worry about her. You're the only one I want."

Savannah nodded, wanting to believe him. "Okay," she whispered.

Trevor smiled and nudged her playfully. "Now, let's focus on getting you better. You need anything? A snack? More ice?"

She giggled. "Maybe just some cuddles."

Trevor grinned. "That, I can definitely do."

He climbed onto the couch beside her, carefully wrapping an arm around her as she snuggled into him. For now, they let the moment soothe them, but deep down, Savannah couldn't shake the feeling that Katrina wasn't going to disappear so easily.

Savannah and Trevor had drifted off to sleep, wrapped in the warmth of each other's presence. The soft glow from the television flickered against the dark walls, the low hum of late-night programming the only sound in the quiet room.

A gentle shake stirred Trevor awake. "Trevor, we're going to get you home. I spoke to your mom and let her know we're bringing you," Mr. Caldwell whispered.

Trevor blinked groggily before sitting up. "Okay," he mumbled, rubbing his eyes.

Mr. Caldwell turned to Savannah, gently nudging her shoulder. "Savannah, honey, wake up."

She groaned sleepily. "I'm up," she whined, stretching before rubbing her tired eyes.

Mr. Caldwell chuckled and walked out of the room, leaving them to gather themselves.

Trevor turned to Savannah, his voice soft. "Are you coming with us to take me home?"

She nodded. "Yeah, of course. Are they ready to go?"

"Yeah, they're waiting."

"Okay, let's go."

They stood, Savannah moving slower as she adjusted to the weight on her injured ankle. Trevor instinctively reached for her, steadying her as they made their way to the door. She locked up behind them before they climbed into the car.

The ride to Trevor's house was filled with laughter, thanks to Mr. Caldwell's endless supply of jokes. He teased Savannah about her fall, making light of the situation while keeping the mood lighthearted.

"So, tell me, what exactly happened out there?" he asked, a smirk on his face.

Savannah hesitated for a brief moment before forcing a laugh. "Oh, you know, just lost my footing. Bad timing, I guess."

She wasn't about to tell the real reason she got distracted—not with Trevor sitting beside her. She didn't want to make him look bad, and truthfully, she wasn't sure how much of it was Katrina's fault and how much was her own insecurity.

Trevor glanced at her, as if sensing there was more to the story, but he didn't say anything. Instead, he reached for her hand, giving it a reassuring squeeze.

Mr. Caldwell laughed. "Well, I gotta say, I don't think I've ever seen someone fall so dramatically. You made it look like a scene straight out of a movie."

Savannah rolled her eyes playfully. "Wow, thanks, Mr. Caldwell."

They all laughed, and for a moment, the tension from earlier melted away.

Trevor smiled at Savannah, silently grateful that she didn't bring up Katrina. But deep down, he knew this wasn't the end of it.

They pulled up to Trevor's house, and before he could even unbuckle his seatbelt, Savannah was already stepping out of the car. She wrapped her arms around him, holding on just a little tighter than usual.

"I love you," Trevor whispered against her ear.

A soft smile played on her lips. "I love you too."



They stood there for a moment, swaying slightly in each other's arms, neither wanting to let go just yet. But eventually, Trevor pulled away, pressing a lingering kiss on her forehead before turning toward the house.

Savannah watched as he walked to the front door, her heart full, before slipping back into the car. The moment he stepped inside, Mr. Caldwell pulled off, leaving the night behind them.

Trevor sighed contentedly as he entered his room, kicking off his shoes and reaching for a pair of comfortable clothes. His body ached from the day's events, but his mind was at ease. He had Savannah. That was all that mattered.

Just as he was heading to the bathroom, a sharp knock echoed through the house.

His movements stilled.

His eyes flicked toward the front door, a strange heaviness settling over him. He didn't need to look through the peephole to know who it was—he could feel it.

Katrina.

His jaw clenched. A part of him wanted to ignore it, to pretend he didn't hear anything. But another part—the part that still carried a small, fractured piece of their past—couldn't shut her out completely.

He took a deep breath, his heart warring with his mind, before slowly making his way to the door.

Trevor hesitated before opening the door, already bracing himself for what he might find.

Katrina stood there, tears streaming down her face, her expression heavy with heartbreak. She didn't say a word—just stood there, shoulders trembling, as if waiting for him to fix whatever was broken inside her.

Before Trevor could even process what to say, his mother, Mrs. Lewis, appeared beside him, her presence both firm and gentle.

"Hi, Katrina," she said softly but with authority. "I know your heart is heavy, but it's nine o'clock at night, and Tre needs to get ready for church tomorrow. You can see him after service if you still need to talk."

Katrina's lips quivered as she tried to hold herself together. "O-okay," she finally choked out, her voice barely above a whisper, drowning in her tears.

Mrs. Lewis gave her a sympathetic nod before gently closing the door, leaving Trevor standing there, exhaling a breath he didn't realize he had been holding.

"I'll see you tomorrow," Trevor said, his voice low and steady before he turned back inside, locking the door behind him.

Katrina wiped her face with the sleeve of her hoodie and hurried back home, her heart aching with every step, tears still streaming down her cheeks.

Back at Savannah's house, she had just stepped out of the shower, steam still clinging to the bathroom mirror. Dressed in her cozy pajamas, she propped her ankle up on a pillow, sighing as she settled in with her strawberry smoothie. Just as she was about to take a sip, her phone buzzed.

She smiled at the sight of Trevor's name lighting up her screen.

"Hi, love," Savannah answered softly.

"Hi, baby. I miss you already," Trevor murmured, his voice filled with warmth.

They melted into their usual late-night conversation, talking about everything and nothing until their voices faded into sleep, the call still connected between them.

The next morning, they both woke up early for church, still on the phone as they got ready. It had become their little tradition—keeping each other company even in silence.

"Church service was amazing," Mrs. Caldwell said as they walked to the car afterward. As usual, Mr. Caldwell lingered behind, chatting with everyone and helping the elders to their cars.

"It truly was. I enjoyed seeing the family," Savannah responded, stretching her legs carefully to avoid irritating her ankle.

"They sure were happy to see you," Mrs. Caldwell added. "You know they've been missing you since you started going to church with Gwen."

Savannah chuckled. "Yeah, I know. I missed them too."

Their small talk continued until Mr. Caldwell finally made his way to the car.

"Alright, let's go eat," he said, starting the engine.

They arrived at the restaurant and had just settled at their table when Trinity walked over, sliding into the seat next to Savannah.

"I just saw Trevor and his family up there in line," she said casually.

Savannah perked up immediately. "Really? Where?" she asked, standing up and craning her neck to look around.

Mr. Caldwell chuckled, shaking his head. "Sit down, girl. He'll come to you," he teased, causing the table to break into laughter as Savannah reluctantly sat back down, her eyes still scanning the restaurant for Trevor.

Trevor and his family entered the restaurant, and as soon as he spotted Savannah sitting with her family, he leaned over to his parents.

"Can Savannah and I sit at our own table?" he asked casually, already knowing he wanted some alone time with her.

Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell exchanged glances before nodding. "That's fine."

Trinity, however, wasn't about to be left out. "I wanna sit with y'all too!" she said excitedly.

Savannah rolled her eyes playfully. "Come on, big head," she said, making Trinity beam as she grabbed her plate and followed.

The three of them sat at a smaller table nearby, laughing and chatting about how their plan had worked so they could see each other. Between bites of food, Trevor brought up his idea.

"I want you to come over today," he said, looking at Savannah. "We can play games, watch movies, just chill."

Savannah grinned. "I'd love to."

After a little convincing, their parents agreed, and Savannah was officially going home with Trevor. But what she didn't know was that Trevor had another reason for wanting her there—he didn't want to face Katrina alone anymore. He wasn't sure how to push her away without being cruel, and deep down, he still cared about her—just not the way he cared about Savannah. But breaking Savannah's heart? That wasn't an option.

When they arrived at Trevor's house, they headed straight to his room. He turned on a movie, grabbed some clothes, and handed Savannah a comfortable outfit to change into.

"You can change in here. I'll use the bathroom," he said, leaving the room to give her privacy.

By the time he returned, they were both dressed in comfy clothes, curled up under a blanket, watching the movie. Just as they were getting comfortable, a loud knock sounded at the front door.

Trevor's heart slammed against his chest. *Please don't let that be Katrina.*

He held his breath as his little brother ran to answer it. Then, relief washed over him when he heard familiar voices.

"Hi, everybody!" Gwen and Helena shouted as they stepped inside.

"Hi!" multiple voices called back from different rooms.

Gwen didn't hesitate to barge into Trevor's room, jumping onto the bed between him and Savannah.

"Savannah! Girl, is that you?" Gwen squealed.

Savannah laughed. "Yes, it's me!"

The three of them talked and joked for a while before Gwen finally got up and wandered off to hang out with Trevor's brother.

Finally, alone again, Trevor and Savannah returned to their movie, played a few games, and eventually dozed off in each other's arms.

Hours passed, and before they knew it, it was time for Savannah to go home. She changed back into her original clothes, slipping her shoes on as Trevor grabbed his hoodie and walked her outside.

Helena was dropping Gwen off, so she agreed to take Savannah home as well. As they reached the car, Trevor wrapped his arms around Savannah, holding her close.

"I'll see you tomorrow," she whispered.

Trevor leaned in, kissing her deeply—long enough to make sure Katrina saw. Out of the corner of his eye, he spotted her watching from her bedroom window.

He pulled away and helped Savannah into the car, watching as they drove off before rushing back inside. The last thing he wanted was for Katrina to come outside and start something.

Just as he locked the door behind him, his phone buzzed. A message from Katrina.

**"I'm pregnant."**

Trevor's entire body went numb. His fingers felt frozen as he stared at the words, his mind spinning.

*A baby?* He wasn't even out of high school yet. He had big plans—boxing, college, a future with Savannah.

But then logic kicked in. It had been *months* since he and Katrina had been together. If she wasn't already at least eight months pregnant, there was no way the baby was his.

His fingers moved across the screen. **"It's not mine."**

Within seconds, his phone started ringing. Katrina. He let it ring. She called again. And again.

Instead of answering, Trevor went straight to his oldest sister.

"I need your advice," he said, his voice low and uncertain.

She gave him a knowing look before sitting him down. "Alright, little brother. Let's talk."

She explained how emotions could make people act out, and how Katrina might be using this to hold onto him. Then, she told him exactly what he needed to do to get her to leave him alone—for good.

Trevor listened carefully, realizing that the way he handled this could change everything.

And he wasn't about to let Katrina ruin what he had with Savannah.

## Chapter 9: Unspoken Truths & New Realities

A couple of months had passed, and Savannah's ankle had fully healed. She was back to cheering, feeling stronger than ever, and her relationship with Trevor had only grown deeper. With Thanksgiving just two days away, they were on school break and had already made plans to spend the holiday together.

Savannah lay sprawled across her bed, phone pressed to her ear as she talked to Trevor. The sound of the front door opening caught her attention, followed by the rustling of bags. She sat up just in time to hear her mother's footsteps in the hallway and quickly slipped out of her room.

"Thanksgiving is in two days, Mom, so I'm just making sure you got everything I asked you to cook," Savannah said, trailing behind her mother into the kitchen. Her eyes darted eagerly to the grocery bags, her excitement bubbling over. For weeks, she had been begging her mom to make all her favorite dishes—not just for herself, but because Trevor was coming over. She wanted everything to be perfect, from the honey-glazed ham to the sweet potato pie. She had even made sure to add his favorites to the list, determined to make this holiday extra special.

While Savannah was busy making sure everything was just right for Trevor, he was doing exactly what his older sister had advised—cutting Katrina off for good. He had gone out of his way to avoid her, both at school and at home. He changed his usual route from the bus stop, took different hallways, and if he saw her heading in his direction, he immediately turned the other way.

But no matter how much distance he put between them, Katrina felt every inch of it like a knife to the heart. Seeing him every day but never being able to talk to him, watching him slip further away—it was

eating her alive. The rejection, the avoidance—it was pushing her closer and closer to the edge.

Katrina's jaw clenched as she watched Trevor smiling on the phone through his window. She just knew he was talking to Savannah. The way his face lit up, the way he ran a hand through his hair, looking so relaxed—it made her stomach twist with jealousy.

She wasn't going to let Savannah have him all to herself.

She started showing up in places she knew Trevor would be—sometimes alone, sometimes with friends, but always with the same goal. If he was at the gym, she'd be there, pretending to work out while keeping an eye on him. If he was hanging out at the local basketball courts, she'd conveniently be walking by. If she knew he was going to the store, she'd find a reason to be there too.

But no matter how hard she tried, he never gave her more than a passing glance. He never stopped to talk, never acknowledged her presence beyond a brief nod, if that. It was as if she had become invisible to him.

The more he ignored her, the angrier she became.

One afternoon, she saw them again—Trevor and Savannah, walking hand in hand down the street, completely lost in each other. Trevor was laughing at something Savannah said, his eyes full of warmth and love. The sight made Katrina's stomach turn.

Savannah was living the life Katrina had imagined for herself.

Tears burned at the back of her eyes, but she blinked them away. If Trevor thought he could just erase her from his life, he was wrong. If he thought she would just sit back and watch him build a future with Savannah, he was mistaken.

She wasn't giving up that easily.

"So, what time do you want me to come over? Or—" Trevor paused, grinning through the phone. "We could see if you can spend the night over here first, chill with my family for a while, then head to your house after. It's up to you. As long as I get to see you."



His excitement was contagious, and Savannah could hear it in his voice. He wasn't just looking forward to spending the holiday with her—he had a surprise planned, too. They had been counting down the days to their one-year anniversary, and Trevor had kept up his sweet tradition of giving her a small gift every month on the day they met. Nothing extravagant, but always thoughtful and creative things he knew would make her smile.

"I'd love to spend the night with you," Savannah said eagerly. "I just hope we can get our parents' approval. Matter of fact, I'll go ask my mom right now. She'll probably have to call my dad to check with him, but let's see."

Without waiting for a response, she hopped off her bed, excitement bubbling in her chest, and skipped down the hallway toward her parents' room.

"Mom, can I spend the night at Trevor's house the day before Thanksgiving? Please?" Savannah asked, putting on her best pleading face. "That way, we can spend time with both of our families together."

Mrs. Caldwell glanced at her daughter, raising an eyebrow. "He's coming over on Thanksgiving, right?"

"Yes, but we want to have time together before then," Savannah explained, rocking on her heels.

Her mother sighed. "Let me talk to your dad first before I give you an answer. You do know we're having our usual pre-Thanksgiving gathering, right? All your cousins and everyone will be here that day."

"I know, Mom." Savannah nodded quickly. "I'll get to see them before I leave—if I leave." She flashed a hopeful smile before skipping back toward her room. "Let me know what Dad says!" she called over her shoulder.

"Okay, girl!" Mrs. Caldwell called out, giggling at how smitten her daughter was with Trevor. It was sweet how they could hardly spend a day apart.

Back in her room, Savannah flopped onto her bed, phone still in hand. “I think she’s going to say yes,” she told Trevor. “But it really depends on my dad. He gets the final say.”

Trevor chuckled. “Fingers crossed, then.” He sat up. “Let me call my mom and ask her. She’s still at work, so hopefully, she’s in a good mood.”

Savannah grinned. “You better catch her before she gets tired. You know how she is after a long day.”

“I know,” Trevor sighed. “She’s either all for it, or she’ll hit me with the ‘we’ll see’—which really means no.”

Savannah laughed. “Facts. My dad’s the same way. I’ll just have to turn up the charm.”

Trevor smirked. “Oh, so you’re about to start begging?”

She rolled her eyes playfully. “Not begging, just... persuading.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Whatever, boy. Go call your mama,” she teased, shaking her head.

Trevor laughed, switching the call over to his mom while Savannah lay back, staring at the ceiling, anxiously waiting for his mom’s response.

Trevor spent a few minutes on the other line with his mom before clicking back over to Savannah. “She said she has to check with my dad first.”

Savannah let out a relieved sigh. “Well, at least it wasn’t a straight-up no.” She giggled.

“True, but I really wish I could see you today. I just know my parents aren’t gonna want to drive me over there.”

“It’s okay,” Savannah reassured him. “Hopefully, we’ll get to spend all of tomorrow together—just you and me.”

“I’m praying for it,” Trevor said sincerely.

Before Savannah could respond, a knock sounded at her bedroom door. She sat up in bed. “Come in!”

The door swung open, and Gwen strutted in with a knowing smirk. "Hey, lovebird. Let me guess—you're on the phone with Trevor."

Savannah grinned. "Of course! What are you up to?"

"Not much. I was outside with Ray playing basketball. Well, they were playing I was just in the way," Gwen said dramatically before shooting Savannah a mischievous look. "Oh, and tell your man I'll be over there later. I'm spending the night with his brother."

Savannah gasped playfully. "Seriously? Ugh, I wish I could come too."

Trevor chuckled on the other end. "Wait, is that Gwen?"

Gwen leaned in, speaking loud enough for him to hear. "Yep, it's me! You better make sure your brother's got snacks because I do not play about my food."

Trevor laughed. "You already know he keeps the pantry stocked for you."

Savannah giggled, shaking her head. "I swear, you and his brother have the weirdest relationship. Y'all act like an old married couple."

"Girl, please." Gwen waved her off with a dramatic eye roll. "He just gets on my nerves *and* feeds me—that's all."

"Uh-huh," Trevor teased. "Sounds a lot like love if you ask me."

"Boy, don't start." Gwen laughed.

Savannah smirked. "Anyway, babe, I'll let you know what my parents say. I love you so much, but I don't want to hear Gwen running her mouth in the background. I gotta deal with her later too."

Trevor chuckled. "Alright, love. I'll call you back later. I love you."

"I love you too," Savannah said softly before hanging up the phone.

As soon as the call ended, Gwen dramatically flopped onto Savannah's bed.

"Finally! Now, let me tell you something. Remember that guy at church I told you I had a crush on?"

"Uh-huh." Savannah turned to face her, intrigued. "What about him?"

"He told me he likes me too," Gwen said, grinning. "And he wants to take me out this weekend."

Savannah gasped. "Are you *seriously* going?"

"Yes! Ralph and I have been having issues, and honestly, that's why I haven't been over there much. Plus..." Gwen hesitated, biting her lip. "I think he's been talking to that girl who's always flirting with him at church. She gave him her number, and I wouldn't be surprised if something is going on."

Savannah's eyes widened. "Wow... I had no idea. I've been so wrapped up in my own relationship, I didn't even notice."

Gwen waved it off. "It's fine. I wasn't really talking about it much. But... there's something else I need to tell you." She sat up, suddenly serious. "And please, don't be mad."

Savannah's stomach twisted. "What is it?"

Gwen took a deep breath. "Remember that picture in my room of me and Trevor?"

Savannah nodded slowly. "Yeah... why?"

"Well... I don't think I ever told you that he and I dated *briefly* before I moved onto this street."

Savannah froze, her heart dropping into her stomach. "What?"

Gwen quickly held up her hands. "It wasn't serious, Savannah! It was *nothing*. We hung out a few times, but there was no real connection, so we left it at that."

Savannah felt her pulse quicken. "Why are you *just* now telling me this?"

"Because I didn't think it mattered," Gwen admitted. "It happened before you and Trevor ever met, and I never had feelings for him. I wasn't trying to hide it from you, I just... never thought it was important. But the other day, Helena told me I should tell you, and it made me feel bad for not saying anything."

Savannah pressed her lips together, feeling like she could throw up. The thought of Gwen and Trevor—even if it was in the past—sent a strange, uneasy feeling through her.

Gwen reached for her hand. “Savannah, I swear to you, I have *zero* feelings for Trevor. Never have, never will. You guys are perfect together, and I would never do anything to mess that up.”

Savannah took a deep breath, trying to calm the whirlwind of emotions inside her. After a moment, she finally nodded. “I just... need a second to process this.”

“Of course,” Gwen said quickly. “Take your time.”

Savannah leaned back against her pillows, staring at the ceiling. Her heart still felt heavy, but deep down, she knew Gwen wouldn’t lie to her.

After a long silence, she finally spoke. “So... back to this church guy. What’s his name?”

Gwen grinned, clearly relieved. “Oh, now you *do* want to hear about him?”

Savannah laughed softly. “I need a distraction.”

“Girl, say less!” Gwen clapped her hands together. “His name is Jayden, and let me *tell* you, he is *fine*...”

As Gwen launched into the details of her new crush, Savannah let herself sink into the conversation, pushing the uneasy feelings about Trevor and Gwen to the back of her mind—for now.

A couple hours went by, and Trevor’s parents had agreed Savannah could spend the night *tonight* instead of the next day, especially since Gwen was already planning to stay over. Excited but slightly anxious, Savannah packed her bag, trying to push away the nagging thoughts swirling in her mind. Hours later, they were on their way.

She couldn’t wait to see Trevor and talk to him *face to face* about what Gwen had told her. Why hadn’t he mentioned it? Did it mean *anything* to him? Had there been real feelings between them, or was it

just as insignificant as Gwen had claimed? The questions circled in her mind, making it impossible to focus on anything else.

“Savannah! *What’s the order?*”

Helena’s voice snapped her back to reality. She blinked, realizing she had been staring out the car window, completely lost in thought.

“Huh? What?” Savannah turned to face Gwen’s godmother, who was eyeing her with curiosity from the driver’s seat.

“The food order, girl! We’re at the drive-thru,” Helena said, shaking her head. “You’ve been zoned out since we left.”

“Oh, right.” Savannah quickly glanced at the menu, barely registering the options. “Um... just get me a burger and fries.”

Helena gave her a look. “Okay... now, spill. What’s got you looking like you just saw a ghost?”

Savannah sighed, gripping her phone tightly as she finally let it all out, explaining to Helena what had been bothering her. Gwen, sitting beside her, chimed in with another round of apologies, her voice filled with guilt.

“I swear, Savannah, I didn’t mean to keep it from you for this long. It wasn’t anything serious between me and Trevor, and I just—I don’t know. I should have told you sooner.”

Savannah exhaled slowly, staring down at her lap. “I know, Gwen. I’m not mad at you. I just... don’t know how to feel about it.”

Helena glanced at her from the driver’s seat, her tone gentle but firm. “That’s exactly why I told Gwen to tell you. You and Trevor are solid, but friendships don’t work if there are secrets between y’all. Now that it’s out in the open, you can decide how you feel about it instead of letting it eat you up inside.”

Savannah nodded, appreciating Helena’s wisdom even if it didn’t immediately ease the knot in her stomach.

Helena grabbed the food from the drive-thru window and pulled off, switching the conversation to something lighter. But Savannah’s

mind remained tangled in thoughts, already bracing herself for the conversation she was about to have with Trevor.

As Savannah and Gwen settled in at Trevor's house later that evening, the tension in Savannah's chest hadn't eased. She was happy to be spending time with him, but the weight of what Gwen had told her lingered like an unanswered question.

Trevor was all smiles when he opened the door, pulling her into a warm hug the second she stepped inside. "I missed you," he murmured against her hair.

Savannah hugged him back, inhaling his familiar scent, but she couldn't shake the unease bubbling beneath the surface. She wanted to enjoy the night, to be excited about spending time together, but the words sat on the tip of her tongue.

They all gathered in the living room, laughing at a movie while Gwen and Trevor's brother whispered back and forth, lost in their own world. Savannah leaned into Trevor, but even as she rested her head against his shoulder, her mind raced.

Finally, as the night winded down and everyone went to their respective rooms, Savannah knew she couldn't keep it in any longer. She sat on the edge of Trevor's bed, watching as he pulled off his hoodie and tossed it aside.

"Trevor," she said softly, her voice carrying the weight of her thoughts.

He turned to face her, concern flickering across his face. "What's wrong, baby?"

She hesitated, then took a deep breath. "Gwen told me about you two... about how y'all used to date."

Trevor's expression darkened as he ran a hand down his face, then sat beside her. "Savannah, that was before I even knew you. She doesn't mean anything to me now. Yeah, I loved her once, but if she ever felt the same, she wouldn't have moved on with my brother."

Savannah swallowed, her heart pounding as she searched his face. “Then why didn’t you ever tell me? You’ve known for months that Gwen is my best friend.”

Trevor exhaled heavily and reached for her hand. “Because it didn’t matter. I didn’t want to bring up something that had no place in our relationship. There’s nothing between us—hasn’t been for a long time. You are the only one I want, Savannah. I need you to believe that.”

She studied him, searching for any trace of doubt, but all she saw was honesty. The weight pressing against her chest slowly began to ease.

She let out a soft breath and nodded. “I believe you... I just wish I had heard it from you first.”

Trevor gently tilted her chin up, his gaze locking onto hers. “I should’ve told you. I’m sorry, baby. But I love you, and I refuse to let the past mess up what we have.”

Savannah held his gaze for a long moment before finally letting herself relax. She gave him a small nod, and Trevor leaned in, pressing a tender kiss to her forehead.

“Now,” he murmured, his voice softer, “can we enjoy our night together?”

Savannah managed a smile. “Yeah... let’s just focus on us.”

And as she curled into him, she let go of the past, choosing instead to hold on to the love they shared in the present.



## Chapter 10: Whispers of Doubt & Unexpected Encounters

Thanksgiving came and went, leaving behind beautiful memories for Savannah and Trevor, even with the unexpected news she had to process. They spent two days together before the holiday, meeting each other's families and indulging in endless plates of food. It was perfect, until it wasn't.

That weekend, Trevor made the reckless decision to sneak Savannah into his room so they could sleep together, not in a scandalous way, just to be close. But Mrs. Lewis caught them, and Trevor paid the price. His punishment? No visits, no going out, and no seeing Savannah until further notice. The next day, they were back in school, but things between them felt... different.

Two weeks passed, and they hadn't seen each other. Trevor was still grounded, and though they talked on the phone, the distance was starting to take its toll. Guilt weighed heavy on him. Keeping his past with Gwen a secret had hurt Savannah, and now, no matter how many times he reassured her that she was the only one he wanted, he could feel her slipping away.

So, he did what he could, buying her little gifts to remind her how much she meant to him. Her favorite snacks, a teddy bear, and a heartfelt card. But deep down, he knew no amount of presents could fix broken trust. She had become distant, and he feared their love was drifting out of his reach.

Meanwhile, Savannah was undergoing her own transformation—not just emotionally, but physically too. She had reconnected with her old best friend, Teresa, who encouraged her to step out of her comfort zone. A new hairstyle, a fresh wardrobe, Savannah was evolving into someone new, someone who saw things more clearly.

She still loved Trevor, deeply, but doubt lingered. If he had hidden something as big as his past with Gwen for so long, what else was he capable of keeping from her? And then there was Katrina—always lurking, always watching, showing up at the worst times. Was she just another ghost of Trevor's past... or something more?

Savannah wasn't sure about a lot of things anymore. But one thing she did know was she couldn't let love blind her again.

Trevor was supposed to get off punishment this weekend, or at least that's what he had been telling her. She was looking forward to seeing him again it had been three long weeks since they last laid eyes on each other. Maybe things would feel normal again. Maybe the distance had given them both time to reflect.

But while Trevor had been absent, she hadn't exactly been invisible. Savannah had always had a few admirers at school—guys who were clearly crushing on her but were too scared to make a move. Well, except for one.

Johnnie.

They had known each other since elementary school, back when he used to pull her hair just to get her attention and always found a way to sit behind her, silently admiring her. But they weren't kids anymore. And now that he had recently transferred to her high school, all those old feelings seemed to have rushed back for him.

"Hey, Savannah, can I walk you to class?" Johnnie's voice came from behind her, smooth and confident.

Before she could answer, her friend Kimmie rolled her eyes and scoffed. "Get away from us."

Johnnie smirked, unfazed. "I wasn't talking to you, Kimmie."

Kimmie folded her arms, giving him a sharp look. "Yeah, but I'm talking to you. Bye."

Savannah sighed, holding back a laugh. "Kimmie, relax." She turned to Johnnie, curiosity in her eyes. "You really wanna walk me to class?"

Johnnie nodded. "Yeah. Unless that's a problem?"

Savannah hesitated. Was it a problem?

She was with Trevor—there was no question about that. But was letting another guy walk her to class really cheating? Or was it just an innocent act? A harmless conversation between old friends?

Still, after everything that had happened, doubt crept into her mind. Trevor had kept a secret from her for months. And then there was Katrina—always lingering, always watching. If Trevor could keep things from her, what else was he capable of?

Maybe she was overthinking it. Maybe she was just trying to protect her heart.

Johnnie raised an eyebrow at her silence. "It's just a walk, Savannah. I'm not proposing or anything."

Kimmie sucked her teeth. "Ugh, whatever. Do what you want." She flipped her hair and strutted off ahead of them.

Savannah exhaled and finally gave Johnnie a small smile. "Alright, let's go."

As they walked side by side, she couldn't help but wonder—was this really as innocent as she wanted it to be? Or was she stepping into dangerous territory?

"What's been going on with you?" Johnnie asked, his smile wide and full of excitement. His eyes sparkled with something warm—something that told Savannah he really liked her. But no matter how much she appreciated his attention, she wasn't about to cheat on Trevor.

"Oh, not much. Just cheering and drowning in homework," she replied casually, keeping her tone light. She didn't want to give him the wrong idea. "How about you?"

"Trouble." He chuckled, shaking his head. "I kept getting into fights at my old school, so my mom decided to transfer me here."

Savannah raised an eyebrow. "Fights? You? Mr. Good Guy? I never would've guessed."

Johnnie smirked. "Yeah, well... people push the wrong buttons sometimes."

They had reached her classroom door, and he shifted slightly, looking like he didn't want the conversation to end. "What's your lunch period? I know it's probably gonna be a minute before we get to talk again."

"I have B lunch, but if my class isn't doing anything, I sometimes swing by C lunch to grab a snack," she said, adjusting the strap of her backpack.

Johnnie grinned. "Perfect. Mine's B too. Guess I'll see you then."

"Alright," she said with a small smile. "And thanks for walking me to class."

"Anytime." He winked before turning away, leaving Savannah watching after him for just a second longer than she meant to.

As she stepped into the classroom, she exhaled deeply. She wasn't doing anything wrong... right?

Back at Trevor's School

Trevor sat in class, his thoughts far from the lesson as he stared out the window, watching birds' flit across the sky. His mind was tangled with the thoughts of Savannah, how distant she had been, how much he missed her, and how badly he wanted to fix things.

He exhaled, running a hand over his head. He had tried ignoring the nagging doubt creeping in, but it was getting harder by the day.

Then, the classroom door creaked open.

Trevor's focus snapped back to the present as Katrina strolled in, instantly shattering his thoughts of Savannah. His jaw tightened. Not today.

"Hi, Mrs. Dorothy," Katrina said sweetly. "Can I speak with Trevor for a second? It's really important."

Mrs. Dorothy, a seasoned teacher who knew Katrina all too well, lifted an unimpressed brow. "Can it wait until after class? He's in the middle of a lesson."

Katrina pressed a hand to her chest, her expression shifting to something pained and urgent. "I just found out my grandmother passed away... and since she and Trevor were really close, I wanted to tell him personally."

Trevor's stomach dropped. He hadn't spoken to Katrina's grandmother in years, but that didn't mean he wanted to hear bad news about her like this.

Mrs. Dorothy sighed, looking between them. "Make it quick," she said, motioning for Trevor to step outside.

Trevor hesitated, glancing at Katrina warily. Something felt... off.

Trevor sighed, pushing back his chair and standing up. He followed Katrina into the hallway, arms crossed over his chest.

As soon as the door closed behind them, he studied her face. There were no tears, no real sorrow, just that same manipulative glint he'd come to recognize all too well.

"Katrina, what do you really want?" His voice was flat, unamused.

Katrina gasped, placing a hand over her heart. "What? You don't believe me?"

"No, I don't," he said bluntly. "You'd lie about anything just to get my attention."

She huffed, rolling her eyes. "Okay, fine. My grandma is alive and well, but you weren't gonna talk to me any other way."

Trevor clenched his jaw. "That's because I don't want to talk to you."

Katrina ignored his frustration, stepping closer. "Trevor, why are you acting like we don't have history? You know we were good together. Why are you wasting your time with her?"

Trevor took a step back, shaking his head. "Because she's not you. And that's a good thing."

Katrina's eyes flashed with irritation. "So, what? You're done with me forever? Just like that?"

"I've been done, Katrina." He turned to walk away but paused. "And lying to get my attention?" "That's exactly why."

Without another word, he opened the door and walked back into class, leaving Katrina standing in the hallway—angry, embarrassed, and still refusing to accept the truth.

Back at Savannah's school, the final bell rang, signaling the end of the day. She walked toward the front doors alongside Gwen and Kimmie, the cool afternoon air brushing against her skin. Just as they stepped outside, Johnnie appeared, his bright smile beaming as he approached.

"Oh, not you again," Kimmie groaned, rolling her eyes dramatically. "In case you didn't get the memo, she has a boyfriend. So, no—she still doesn't want to date you, Johnnie boy."

Savannah sighed, shaking her head at her friend's bluntness. "Kimmie, chill."

Johnnie chuckled, unfazed. "I never said anything about dating. Can't a guy just say hello?"

Savannah glanced at him, noting the playful glint in his eyes. "Hey, Johnnie," she greeted with a small smile. "What's up?"

Johnnie laughed, shaking his head. "Man, you really don't let up, do you?" He turned his attention back to Savannah, ignoring Kimmie's relentless jabs. "Anyway, I just wanted to come say hey since I didn't get a chance to talk to you at lunch because they were blocking your attention from me."

"They?" Savannah raised an eyebrow. "I didn't have anything to do with that."

Gwen smirked, holding up her hands. "Don't look at me. I stay out of it."

Johnnie chuckled. "Well, Kimmie, then. Gwen chills, but Kimmie? She's a straight-up hater." He paused before adding with a teasing grin, "She used to date my cousin. You remember Chris, don't you, Kimmie?"

Kimmie rolled her eyes, flipping her hair over her shoulder. "Oh, I remember him. And for your information, he still calls me from time to time." She shot him a pointed look. "So, while you're trying to be funny, let me remind you—my best friend Savannah still doesn't want you."

Savannah sighed, shaking her head at their playful bickering. "Y'all are too much."

Johnnie only grinned wider. "I'll take that as a challenge."

Savannah couldn't help but laugh at Johnnie's persistence. "There's no challenge, Johnnie. I have a boyfriend."

Johnnie shrugged, stuffing his hands in his pockets. "Yeah, I know. But that doesn't mean we can't be friends, right?"

Kimmie scoffed. "Boy, please. We all know what that 'just friends' mess really means."

Johnnie smirked but kept his eyes on Savannah. "I'm serious, though. I ain't trying to mess up your relationship, just catching up with an old friend."

Savannah hesitated for a second, but before she could respond, Gwen nudged her. "It's harmless, Sav. He's been crushing on you since elementary school. Let him have his little moment."

Johnnie grinned. "See? Gwen gets it."

Kimmie rolled her eyes. "Gwen is also a little too friendly sometimes."

Savannah exhaled, shaking her head with amusement. "Alright, Johnnie. We can be cool, but don't go getting any ideas."

Johnnie held up his hands. "No ideas, no pressure. Just catching up."

Savannah nodded. "Good. Now, if you'll excuse us, we have to get going."

Johnnie took a step back. "I hear you. But I'll see you around, Savannah."

As the girls walked away, Gwen whispered, "You do know Trevor is going to lose it if he finds out Johnnie is sniffing around, right?"

Savannah sighed, unsure of how to feel. "Yeah, I know."

That evening, Savannah lay across her bed, staring at the ceiling while twirling a strand of her hair between her fingers. Her mind was restless. Trevor was still on punishment, which meant their phone calls were limited. And now, Johnnie had waltzed back into her life with his smooth charm and old memories, stirring up thoughts she wasn't sure she wanted to entertain.

Her phone vibrated beside her, and she snatched it up quickly, hoping it was Trevor.

Trevor: Hey, baby. I miss you.

A small smile tugged at her lips. Despite everything, she did miss him.

Savannah: I miss you too. How was your day?

Trevor: Long. And my mom is still on my case. I swear I feel like a prisoner.

Savannah chuckled softly.

Savannah: Well, you did sneak me into your room. What did you expect?

Trevor: I expected us to get away with it!

She could almost hear his laugh through the phone, and it made her heart ache a little.

Trevor: What about you? What'd you do today?

Savannah hesitated. She wasn't hiding anything, but she also wasn't sure if she wanted to bring up Johnnie. She decided to keep it simple.

Savannah: Same old, same old. Just trying to survive school.

Trevor: Wish I could've been there to walk you to class and hold your hand.

The mention of walking to class made her stomach twist.

Savannah: I know. Soon though, right?



Trevor: Yeah. My mom says I should be off punishment this weekend.

Savannah bit her lip. She had been looking forward to seeing him again, but after everything with Gwen's revelation and her own doubts, she wasn't sure where they stood anymore.

Trevor: Savannah?

Savannah: Yeah?

Trevor: You still love me, right?

The question caught her off guard.

Savannah: Of course I do, Trevor.

But even as she typed the words, a lingering uncertainty sat heavy in her chest.

—

The weekend came faster than Savannah expected. Trevor was finally off punishment, and she was supposed to be excited to see him. But as she stood in front of her mirror, adjusting her new outfit—one Teresa had picked out for her—she realized she felt different.

The soft curls in her hair framed her face in a way that made her look older, and the fitted top hugged her figure just enough to show her growth. She wasn't the same girl who blindly believed in love anymore.

Her phone chimed, pulling her out of her thoughts.

Trevor: I'm on my way to see you. Can't wait.

She exhaled and grabbed her purse.

Tonight, she would see Trevor for the first time in weeks.

But for the first time... she wasn't sure how she felt about it.

## Chapter 11: The Morning After

An hour later, as the orange sunset stretched across the city sky, Trevor found himself standing in front of Savannah's house. His heartbeat like a drumline in his chest. He texted her:

"I'm outside."

The door opened within seconds, like she'd been waiting the entire time. Savannah stepped out, eyes locking with his instantly. Trevor looked tired. Nervous. Hopeful.

"Hey," he said softly, walking toward her.

"Hey," she replied, arms crossed.

They stood in silence for a bit before Savannah asked, "Wanna go to the park?"

Trevor nodded and they walked back to Gensis's car. The silence felt loud on the way to the park. Too loud.

"I miss you," Trevor finally said, his voice low.

Savannah looked down at her fingers. "I miss you too... but that's not enough to fix everything."

"I know," he said quickly. "That's why I wanted to talk. To be real with you. I never should've kept Gwen and me a secret. I wasn't trying to be shady—I just didn't think it mattered anymore."

"But it did," she said, eyes sharp now. "Because when I found out from someone else, it felt like betrayal. Like I didn't really know you."

Trevor ran his hand through his curls. "You do know me, Vannah. That's why I've been trying so hard to make things right. I love you. I've never felt this way about anyone else—not Gwen, not Katrina, nobody."

Savannah paused, letting his words sink in.

Savannah searched his eyes for the truth—and this time, she saw it. The honesty. The frustration. The tiredness from being pulled in every direction.

“I’m just tired of feeling like I don’t know what’s real,” she said. “I love you, Trevor. I do. But I also love myself, and I can’t keep doing this if it’s going to keep breaking me.”

Trevor leaned in, his voice trembling now. “Then let me show you what’s real. No more hiding. No more secrets. Just us.”

Savannah looked at him, tears glistening in her eyes. “Then show me.”

He nodded, determination settling into his jaw. “I will.”

And for the first time in weeks, the tension between them cracked just slightly allowing the first breath of hope to sneak back in.

They arrived at the park just as the sun began to dip below the trees, casting everything in a soft golden hue. Trevor parked the car and looked over at Savannah, unsure if he should reach for her hand or give her space.

She made the choice for him.

“C’mon,” she said, hopping out of the car and heading toward their favorite bench by the fountain.

They sat side by side, a little distance between them but the air felt less heavy now. The silence returned—but this time, it wasn’t so loud.

Savannah glanced at Trevor, then smirked. “Remember that time you tried to impress me with your ‘freestyle skills’ and rhymed ‘love’ with ‘dove’ like six times in a row?”

Trevor covered his face with a groan, then laughed. “Man, you promised you’d never bring that up again.”

“Well, you said you were going to win me over with bars,” she teased, nudging his arm. “But I was genuinely concerned for your rap career.”

They both burst into laughter, the kind that felt like a deep exhale after holding your breath too long.

Trevor grinned, eyes softer now. “You still stayed on the phone with me for three hours that night.”

“I did,” Savannah smiled. “Because despite your terrible lyrics, I kinda liked you.”

He looked over at her, the edges of his heart lifting. “You more than kinda liked me.”

She rolled her eyes, but her smile didn’t fade. “Maybe.”

The laughter faded into a comfortable silence. This time, when Trevor reached for her hand, she didn’t pull away.

“Thank you,” he said quietly. “For giving me this chance to talk. To laugh again.”

Savannah nodded, her thumb brushing lightly against his. “Just don’t mess it up this time.”

“I won’t,” he said. “Not ever again.”

And under the setting sun, surrounded by quiet winds and fading light, two hearts slowly began to remember what it felt like to beat in rhythm again.

The next couple of weeks, they found their way back to each other. Their natural rhythm returned like it had never left—midnight phone calls, weekend dates, ice cream runs, and endless teasing that ended in laughter. They weren’t perfect, but they were trying. Together.

Christmas break came like a welcome pause. No school, no teachers, just time. Time to do nothing. Time to do everything.

Savannah had spent the last two nights at Trevor’s house. Mrs. Lewis had finally softened up—slightly—after all Trevor’s chores had been done and his grades stayed up. The two of them spent most of their time cuddled under blankets, watching movies, eating junk food, and talking about everything... and lately, that everything included something serious.

Their conversations about taking things to the next level had started slow and innocent.

At first, it was just wondering out loud. Then it became more direct.

“What would it be like?”

“Would it hurt?”

“Would we still be the same?”

Savannah was nervous, even scared. It wasn't that she didn't trust Trevor—she did—but the thought of giving herself to someone so fully was overwhelming.

Trevor, on the other hand, was nervous. But not because he wasn't taking it seriously—he just... had already been there before.

He hadn't told Savannah. He didn't know how. Every time he thought about it, his chest tightened. Not because he regretted it—but because of who it had been with.

Gwen and Katrina.

He didn't want Savannah to feel like she was third. He didn't want her to question how special she was to him. And he especially didn't want Katrina's or Gwen's name to come between them again.

But each day it got harder to hide.

That night, as Savannah rested her head on his chest, playing with the edge of his t-shirt, she whispered, “Do you think we're ready?”

Trevor hesitated. His hand brushed her back gently.

“I do,” he said softly. “But only if you are. There's no pressure.”

She nodded, thoughtful. “I want it to be with you. But... I want to know everything. I don't want any surprises, Trev.”

Her voice was quiet, but her words held weight.

Trevor closed his eyes. He knew what he had to say—but he also knew the risk.

“Vannah,” he started slowly, “there's something I've been meaning to tell you...” He started to tell her the truth but then she said.

“Before you finish,” Savannah said, her voice barely above a whisper, “is it going to break my heart?”

She looked him directly in the eyes—steady, searching, bracing herself.

Trevor swallowed hard, guilt tugging at his chest. “I really hope not,” he said honestly. “I just... wanted to tell you that Katrina showed up to my class. She lied to my teacher just to get me pulled out.”

Savannah’s eyebrows lifted slightly, but she didn’t speak.

“It happened the same day I came to see you,” Trevor continued, trying to explain it right. “I didn’t tell you then because... we were finally back on good terms after everything. I didn’t want to ruin that.”

She stayed quiet, the silence making his heart pound even harder.

“I told her to stop playing games,” he added quickly. “To stop lying just to get close to me, and to leave me alone. Then I went back in class like nothing happened.”

He exhaled, eyes dropping from hers. He hated that it wasn’t the full truth. That part of him still carried a secret he wasn’t ready to say out loud.

Savannah’s fingers froze, still curled lightly in the fabric of his shirt. She didn’t blink. Didn’t speak. Just stared at him.

“That’s it?” she finally said, voice low.

Trevor nodded slowly. “Yeah. That’s it. I just didn’t want you finding out some other way and thinking I was hiding something again.”

She studied his face for a moment longer, searching for the truth beneath the words. And while her gut twisted, something about his eyes made her pause.

“You sure that’s all, Trevor?” she asked softly, still holding his gaze. “Because the only thing worse than a lie is a half-truth. And I already told you—I love you, but I love myself more.”

Trevor looked away. Guilt creeping into the corners of his heart like fog rolling in over the coast. He hated this. Hated the weight of it. But he also couldn’t bear the thought of losing her—not again.

“I promise you,” he said, barely above a whisper. “That’s all that happened.”

Savannah sighed and laid her head back on his chest, her voice muffled now. "Okay. I'll take your word for it."

But her mind wasn't quiet.

She didn't want to keep questioning him. She didn't want to wonder if Katrina was still orbiting their world, trying to pull Trevor's attention away. She wanted peace. Truth. Something solid.

Yet, in that moment, wrapped in his arms, the warmth of his heartbeat beneath her ear, she decided to let it go. For now.

"Let's just stay like this," she whispered. "No lies, no drama, no nothing. Just us."

Trevor kissed the top of her head. "Just us," he repeated.

And for a while, they laid there, holding onto the hope that maybe love could quiet the noise.

Then their lips met again, and soon the room was thick with warmth and emotion. The air shifted between them—soft, slow, and charged. Savannah's heart raced, but not from fear. This time, she felt ready. She wanted to take their relationship to the next level—right now, in this moment, with him.

Their eyes locked, and it felt like their souls were having a conversation of their own—silent, deep, and knowing. Without a single word, they slowly laid down beside each other, wrapped in a quiet understanding.

Trevor gently pulled away and got up to grab a condom from his dresser drawer. Savannah watched him silently as he locked his bedroom door and slipped it on. No need to rush—his parents were out Christmas shopping, and the house was unusually calm without his siblings around. He wanted this moment to be uninterrupted, just for them.

He laid back down next to her, and their kisses picked up again—tender at first, then deeper. And then, it happened.

It hurt at first. Savannah winced, but Trevor held her gently, his touch reassuring. As the initial pain faded, she found herself adjusting,

letting go. It felt strange, unfamiliar—but not wrong. Awkward, yes. But also, safe.

She was finally experiencing something she had only heard whispered in locker rooms and sleepovers. And it wasn't just with anyone, it was with someone she truly loved. Someone she imagined a future with.

But even in that closeness, something inside her whispered a quiet unease. A subtle shift in energy she couldn't quite explain. She brushed it off—for now.

Trevor lay there, staring up at the ceiling, Savannah curled into his side. Her soft breathing brushed against his chest, but his thoughts were anything but calm.

He should've felt completely at peace—he'd just shared something beautiful with the girl he loved. But deep down, a knot tightened in his stomach.

Savannah had given him her everything tonight. She'd trusted him with her heart, her body, her future. And yet, all he could think about was the one thing he hadn't told her.

The truth.

He'd lied.

Not about loving her, he was sure about that more than anything. But about Katrina. About what really happened that day she showed up at his classroom. He didn't just tell her to leave—she'd kissed him. Quick, desperate, and unexpected. He pulled away, angry, but the damage had already been done. And instead of telling Savannah the whole truth, he buried it. Deep.

He thought ignoring it would make it disappear, but now, lying here with Savannah in his arms, it felt like it was screaming at him.

He looked down at her, peaceful and soft, her fingers loosely tangled in his. She deserved better than a half-truth. She deserved everything.

But how could he tell her now?



Would she hate him? Would she walk away?

He tightened his hold on her, brushing a kiss across her forehead. "I love you," he whispered, barely audible.

Because he did.

Even if he didn't know how to be completely honest yet... he wanted to learn. For her.

The morning sun peeked through the blinds, casting soft golden lines across Trevor's bedroom walls. Savannah slowly opened her eyes, her body still nestled under the warm sheets, tangled with his.

For a moment, she didn't move.

His arms were wrapped around her like a promise, and his chest rose and fell in the soft rhythm of sleep. She could feel his heartbeat against her back, steady and strong. Safe.

But inside her, everything felt the opposite.

She stared at the wall in silence, letting the weight of the night settle. Her first time. A moment she had always imagined would feel magical, secure, full of certainty.

And while there was love, while she did feel connected to him—there was something else too.

Emptiness.

Not because of the act itself. But because something in her heart felt unsettled. And no matter how tightly Trevor held her, it wasn't enough to silence the voice in her head.

Do you really know him?

She turned slowly, watching him sleep. He looked so peaceful, like he had no idea the storm quietly forming inside her.

"I love you," she whispered.

And she meant it. God, she did.

But the kind of love she felt scared her—because it felt like too much. Like if he walked away, she wouldn't just miss him... she'd forget how to breathe. Like her heart lived inside his chest, not her own.

She swallowed hard, blinking back the pressure behind her eyes.

You can't love someone so much that you forget who you are.  
And yet, here she was.

Wanting to climb into his skin just to stay close. Wanting to disappear inside his world so she didn't have to deal with the confusion inside her own.

But love shouldn't feel like losing yourself.

She quietly slipped out of bed, careful not to wake him. She needed a minute. Maybe even a mile.

Just to remember what it felt like to be Savannah on her own.

Trevor stirred, eyes fluttering open to the soft hum of morning. The warmth beside him was gone. He blinked, stretching out his hand to the spot where Savannah had been—still faintly warm, but empty.

He sat up slowly, rubbing his eyes as the quiet of the house hit him. Too quiet. The kind of silence that made your chest tighten.

"Vannah?" he called softly.

No answer.

He looked toward the cracked bathroom door—no light on. He swung his legs off the bed, slipping on a hoodie as he walked out of his room. The hallway was still. His siblings hadn't come back. His parents weren't home yet.

But Savannah wasn't there.

He walked into the living room and saw the front door slightly ajar, just enough to let the cold in. His heart did a small flip as he walked over and looked out.

She was sitting on the porch steps in her pajamas, arms wrapped around herself, staring out at nothing in particular.

Trevor stepped outside, barefoot but not caring.

"Savannah," he said gently.

She didn't flinch. Didn't turn. Just whispered, "I needed air."

He stood behind her, unsure of what to do with his hands. "Are you okay?"

She nodded slowly, then shook her head. "I don't know."

Trevor lowered himself beside her. "Did I do something wrong?"

"No," she whispered. "You didn't do anything. That's the problem. You did everything right."

Trevor looked at her, confused.

Savannah turned to him with eyes that looked like they were holding back the sea. "I just... I feel like I gave you everything last night. And somewhere in that, I forgot to hold onto a little piece of myself."

Trevor's face fell.

"I love you, Trevor. But I don't ever want to wake up feeling like I've lost me."

He reached for her hand, gently lacing his fingers with hers. "Then let's find her together. I don't want to love you in a way that makes you disappear."

Savannah exhaled, a soft, heavy breath that fogged in the cold air.

And as they sat in the stillness of morning, neither of them said another word—but somehow, the silence felt less loud.

This time, it held space.

And maybe that was the beginning of something real.

## Chapter 12: Between the Program and the Truth

Savannah was back at home, curled up in her bed, yet her thoughts kept drifting to Trevor. They had been apart for three days, and Trevor's anxiety was through the roof he couldn't wait to see her tonight at church.

They both had roles in the Christmas program at his church, something they quietly took pride in. Savannah had practically become part of the church family herself attending Bible studies, joining choir rehearsals, and even staying behind to help with events. Sometimes she went with Gwen, other times with Trevor and his family, but no matter who she walked in with, everyone greeted her like she belonged.

That kind of welcome was rare. And Savannah didn't take it for granted.

Still, beneath all the excitement swirling around her, something else tugged at Savannah's peace, something she couldn't quite ignore. Last night after rehearsal, a girl named Sabrina, the preacher's daughter, had been a little too playful with Trevor. She tossed flirty glances his way, lingering nearby, and laughing at everything he said.

Sabrina was beautiful, always had been. And she'd always been kind to Savannah, which made things more complicated. But from the beginning, Savannah had noticed how easily Sabrina gravitated toward Trevor—how she'd find ways to talk to him, touch his arm, or draw out conversations even when they weren't necessary.

As Savannah lay in bed, waiting for Trevor to call her back, her thoughts drifted to the first time she started going to church with Gwen. Was there something she had overlooked? Something she didn't want to see.

She picked up her phone and dialed Gwen's number.

"Hey, Vannah!" Gwen answered cheerfully. "What are you doing? Are you ready for tonight?"

“Yes, girl. I’m ready,” Savannah replied with a small smile. “Not doing much right now. Just lying in bed. You at home?”

“Yup, me too. I can’t wait to see my baby! We went to the movies and out to eat last night—it was so fun. We’re heading over to his house tonight. You wanna come?”

“Oh, okay, that’s cute. I’m glad y’all had a good night,” Savannah said. “Sure, I’ll come. I don’t have plans tonight anyway.”

She hesitated for a second, then shifted her tone. “But hey... I wanted to ask you something.”

Gwen’s voice softened, sensing the change. “Yeah? What’s up?”

Savannah sat up slightly, chewing the inside of her cheek. “It’s about Sabrina.”

“Oh Lord,” Gwen said, drawing the words out playfully but curiously. “What about her?”

Savannah hesitated. “You ever notice how she be acting around Trevor? Like... last night, she was all up in his face, laughing and play-hitting him and stuff. And it’s not the first time.”

Gwen was quiet for a second before responding. “Girl, I thought you peeped that a long time ago.”

Savannah blinked. “Wait—so I’m not trippin’?”

“Nope,” Gwen said with a sigh. “She’s been doing that since forever. I think she likes him, but she’s never said anything. And Trevor don’t ever act like he’s into it, so I figured it wasn’t worth bringing up.”

Savannah exhaled slowly. “It’s just... I don’t wanna be the jealous girlfriend, but I don’t like it.”

“You’re not wrong for how you feel,” Gwen said gently. “I’d feel the same way. But if it really bothers you, talk to Trevor. He’ll either shut it down or show you something you need to see.”

Savannah nodded to herself, her heart beating a little steadier. “Yeah... you right.”

Gwen hummed knowingly. “You always been chill, Vannah. But sometimes being quiet makes people think you don’t notice stuff. You see everything—you just don’t always say it.”

Savannah chuckled lightly. “That’s true. I just... I really love him, Gwen. And I don’t want nothing—or nobody—getting in the way.”

“I know you do, and y’all are good together,” Gwen reassured her. “Just remember, if something don’t feel right, it’s okay to speak up. Love isn’t supposed to leave you confused.”

Savannah smiled softly. “Thanks, Gwen. I needed that.”

“Anytime, girl. Now go fix your hair or something so you don’t answer Trevor’s call looking like somebody auntie,” Gwen teased.

Savannah laughed for real this time. “Whatever! Bye, girl.”

“Bye!”

Just as Savannah ended the call and tossed her phone beside her, it vibrated again, Trevor’s name lit up the screen.

She didn’t hesitate.

“Hey,” she said, trying to sound casual but failing a little.

“Hey beautiful,” Trevor’s voice came through warm and soft. “Sorry I didn’t call back sooner. I was helping my mom with something and lost track of time.”

“It’s okay,” she replied. “I was just talking to Gwen.”

“Oh yeah? What y’all talk about?”

Savannah paused, her fingers fidgeting with the edge of her blanket. “Just girl stuff.”

Trevor chuckled. “You sure you’re, okay? You sound... off.”

She hesitated for a moment. “Can I ask you something?”

“Of course,” he said, his tone immediately serious. “What’s on your mind?”

Savannah drew in a breath. “It’s about Sabrina.”

There was a brief silence on the other end.

“What about her?” he finally asked, his voice careful.

"I noticed how much you two play around and how she acts around you," Savannah said slowly. "Is there something I need to know about?"

Trevor sighed on the other end, his voice was steady but cautious. "No, Vannah. I swear, there's nothing going on."

"Because it doesn't feel like nothing."

"I get it," he said, pausing for a beat. "She had a crush on me when I first started going to the church. But that was a long time ago. You do know she's like two years younger than me... and she's the pastor's daughter."

Savannah sat up slightly in her bed. "So, nothing ever happened between you two?"

"No," Trevor replied firmly. "Not even close. I've always kept it friendly, but I guess she never fully let it go."

"She was staring at us last night. Laughing extra hard at your jokes. Doing little things I couldn't ignore."

Trevor let out a breath. "I didn't even notice all that. Maybe I should've, but I didn't. Vannah, I only want you. And if she's doing too much, I'll check it. You just gotta tell me when something's bothering you—I'm not trying to have anything or anyone coming between us again."

Savannah was quiet for a moment, then said softly, "Okay... thank you."

"I mean that," he said. "I'll talk to her if you want. I'm not keeping anyone around that's gonna make you feel less than secure."

Savannah smiled faintly.

After the call, Savannah felt a little more at ease. She appreciated how Trevor didn't get defensive, how he actually listened. That mattered.

By early evening, the sky had dipped into a wintery blue and lights shimmered along the edges of houses and trees. Savannah bundled up in her coat and met Gwen outside her house so they could ride togeth-

er. The drive was filled with music, soft carols humming through the speakers as they chatted about everything except Sabrina.

When they pulled into the church parking lot, it was already buzzing with people arriving for the Christmas program. The lot sparkled with string lights, and the front doors were wide open, warmth spilling out with the sounds of laughter, instruments tuning, and the faint aroma of hot cocoa and peppermint.

Inside, Trevor stood near the entrance dressed in black slacks and a burgundy button-up, looking more grown than Savannah remembered. When his eyes found her, they lit up. He made his way through the crowd and pulled her into a hug, long and quiet.

"I missed you," he whispered into her hair.

"I missed you more," she whispered back.

Gwen gave them a playful eye roll. "Y'all are gonna make somebody catch cavities."

Trevor chuckled and looked at Gwen. "Thanks for bringing her."

"No problem, but y'all better focus now—we have roles to slay tonight."

They all laughed, and the tension from earlier melted into the warmth of the moment. As they made their way toward the choir room to get ready, Sabrina walked past, smiling sweetly.

"Hey, Trevor. Hey Savannah," she said politely, her gaze lingering on Trevor for just a second too long.

Savannah caught it. Trevor did too.

He gently reached for Savannah's hand, lacing their fingers together without saying a word. It was a quiet gesture, but loud enough for anyone paying attention.

Savannah smiled to herself.

Tonight was going to be about love, light, and truth. And for the first time in a while, she felt like she had all three.

The program went well—better than any of them had expected. The sanctuary had been filled with warmth, laughter, and the soft glow



of twinkling lights. When it was over, Trevor, Savannah, Gwen, and a few others lingered in the lobby, caught in that familiar after-event buzz, talking and laughing while people trickled out the doors.

Trevor leaned closer to his mom and asked quietly, "Can Savannah come over after this?"

His mom smiled. "Of course. She's always welcome."

But Gwen, standing close enough to catch every word, piped up with a grin, "Oh, she's coming with us tonight. We'll bring her over after we leave the place we're going."

Trevor's brows furrowed. "Where are y'all going?"

Gwen shrugged, but didn't answer. Before he could press her again, Helena strolled past, swinging her keys in hand and headed to the car.

"We're grown," she tossed over her shoulder. "We're going somewhere. We'll have her over before midnight." She opened her car door, then turned with a teasing smirk. "Why you are acting like her daddy?"

"I'm not acting like her dad," Trevor called out, half-laughing but clearly serious. "She's my girl, and I just want to make sure she's safe."

"I'll make sure she's safe," Helena said, sliding into the driver's seat. "Ain't nobody getting to her on my watch."

Gwen rolled her eyes, kissed Ralph goodbye, and linked arms with Savannah. "Come on, lovebird. Your man will survive for a couple of hours."

Savannah gave Trevor a reassuring look. "I'll see you later, baby." She hugged him tight, whispering in his ear, "I promise."

Trevor kissed her cheek. "Alright. Be careful."

Savannah and Gwen jogged over, waving one last time before hopping in. As Helena pulled off, she glanced in the rearview mirror.

"You really had to reassure him you weren't about to see another boy," Helena said, half-laughing. "I told Gwen—he is possessive."

"He's just protective," Savannah said softly, though part of her agreed. Trevor's attention could be sweet, but sometimes it teetered close to suffocating.

Within a few minutes, they pulled up to Helena's place. The house was dark on the outside but glowing warm from the inside, wreaths on the door and the smell of cinnamon spilling out as they walked in.

"Alright, let's change real quick," Gwen said, heading to the guest room. "We're supposed to be spending the night anyway so we can go to church in the morning."

Savannah followed, still holding onto that sliver of unease that hadn't left her since the program ended. Something in Trevor's eyes before she left—possessive, protective, or something else entirely—lingered in her mind.

She shook it off and headed to the bedroom to change.

Tonight wasn't about doubt. It was about freedom... and maybe discovering something she didn't know she needed to see.

They rushed out the door and climbed into Helena's car, the cold air nipping at their skin. Helena was already on the phone, laughing and talking about food, her voice echoing through the car's Bluetooth speakers.

"Yeah, we'll need extra wings and a pan of mac and cheese. Don't forget the peach cobbler either—Savannah gon' want some of that," she said, glancing back with a wink.

Savannah gave a weak smile, her stomach growling in response. That's when it hit her—she hadn't eaten anything all day except for breakfast. Between the nerves of the Christmas program and rehearsals, food had completely slipped her mind.

Her hunger faded slightly when they pulled up to the house, a stunning two-story home draped in glowing lights. Wreaths hung from every window, and soft jazz music could be heard as they approached. Savannah's eyes widened slightly, impressed by the warmth and elegance radiating from the place.

Then she noticed him.

Carl, the boy from church, was standing at the front door, hands stuffed in his pockets, looking a little too comfortable. He grinned when he saw them, and Gwen's whole face lit up in response.

Savannah raised an eyebrow but said nothing.

Gwen leaned over and whispered, "Don't look like that. He cute and he funny. Besides, I'm not married."

Helena laughed as she rang the doorbell. "Girl, you are messy."

"I'm honest," Gwen shot back, smoothing her edges in the reflection of her phone screen.

The door swung open, and the smell of fried chicken, sweet rolls, and something cheesy floated out. Carl held the door with a smirk. "Took y'all long enough."

"You lucky I came at all," Gwen teased, walking past him with a playful shove.

Savannah followed quietly, her eyes scanning the house. It was full—laughter, music, people talking in every room. But something about the air felt different. She couldn't tell if it was just the hunger or if she was stepping into a space that was hiding more than it was showing.

Helena headed straight to the kitchen, still on her phone, while Gwen disappeared with Carl toward the back of the house.

Savannah was left in the foyer, uncertain.

After a few seconds, she stepped into the kitchen behind Helena, the warmth from the oven immediately wrapping around her. The room was buzzing pots clanged, someone was laughing loud over a story about burnt cornbread, and the scent of baked beans and smoked turkey filled the air.

Helena had found her place at the counter, scooping a plate like she'd been there a hundred times before.

Carl's aunt, a tall woman with short red curls and long lashes, smiled at Savannah. "You must be the quiet one," she said, handing her

a napkin and a cup. "I'm Carl's aunt. I go to the church too. I'm very quiet myself but I'm always sitting at the back of the church. You did good tonight?"

Savannah nodded politely. "Yes, ma'am. Okay, I do remember seeing you sitting in the back of the church. Thank you."

"You're welcome. We love having y'all young people around here. I know you are hungry, eat as much as you want. The drinks are over there in the cooler and there is ice in the freezer."

Savannah smiled, grateful, and filled her plate. She was halfway through a forkful of baked mac and cheese when a sudden loud gagging noise came from down the hall.

Then—chaos.

"Oh my God, Gwen!" someone yelled.

Savannah stood up and rushed toward the commotion, only to stop short in the living room. Gwen, now barefoot and mascara-smudged, had just vomited all over Carl's shirt. He stood there frozen, his arms out, looking like he'd just been slimed.

Helena appeared seconds later with a towel, bursting into laughter as she tried to clean Carl off. "Girl, you said one shot!" she barked at Gwen, who just giggled and stumbled backward into the couch.

"I was thirsty!" Gwen slurred, her voice echoing off the walls.

"No, you were being extra," Helena snapped.

Carl, now completely grossed out, muttered, "Yo, she gotta go."

"Yeah, yeah, she is going," Helena replied, already pulling Gwen to her feet. "Savannah, grab your stuff. We are droppin' you at Trevor's and I'm taking little miss, hard head home."

Gwen protested for them not to leave, but then she falls and hurt her elbow so Helena rushed us out of the house.

---

### **Ten minutes later...**

Helena's car eased into the driveway of Trevor's house, still smelling faintly of alcohol and lemon-scented wipes from Gwen's cleanup attempt.

Trevor was already outside, pacing with his hands in his hoodie pocket. The second Savannah stepped out of the car, his shoulders relaxed.

“You good?” he asked, walking up to meet her.

She nodded, whispering a quick thanks to Helena, who waved them off and pulled away with Gwen passed out in the passenger seat.

---

### **Later that night...**

Savannah changed into one of Trevor’s oversized hoodies and a fresh pair of socks. She curled up next to him on the bed, finally full, finally warm, finally...with the love of her life.

They didn’t do much—just held each other. Talked softly about their Christmas play, about how weird the night had been, about nothing at all. At some point, Trevor drifted to sleep with his arm wrapped around her waist, and Savannah lay there, staring at the ceiling, her heart finally calm.

