

**I'M NOT
DYING
WITH
YOU
TONIGHT**

**KIMBERLY JONES
GILLY SEGAL**

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Published by Sourcebooks Fire, an imprint of Sourcebooks
P.O. Box 4410, Naperville, Illinois 60567-4410
(630) 961-3900
sourcebooks.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Jones, Kimberly (Kimberly Latrice), author | Segal, Gilly, author.
Title: I'm not dying with you tonight / Kimberly Jones, Gilly Segal.
Other titles: I am not dying with you tonight
Description: Naperville, IL : Sourcebooks Fire, [2019] | Summary: Told from two viewpoints, Atlanta high school seniors Lena and Campbell, one black, one white, must rely on each other to survive after a football rivalry escalates into a riot.
Identifiers: LCCN 2019008892 | (hardcover : alk. paper)
Subjects: | CYAC: Race relations--Fiction. | Riots--Fiction. | African Americans--Fiction. | Atlanta (Ga.)--Fiction.
Classification: LCC PZ7.1.S3386 Im 2019 | DDC [Fic]--dc23
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019008892>

Printed and bound in the United States of America.
WOZ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Drake.

—K. J.

For Kate, who knows why.

—G. S.

“We didn’t understand that the riots had begun...”

—*Bart Bartholomew, New York Times photographer and only professional journalist in South Central Los Angeles when rioting broke out following the Rodney King verdict*

I'm
not
dying
with
you
tonight

PART I

MASS

DIS

TUR

BANCE

1

LENA

McPherson High School

“Waiting for Black is on your agenda, not mine,” LaShunda barks as we leave the building.

I ain’t think she was gonna wait, no way, that ain’t what I was anticipating. *I* know she’s got responsibilities at home, but *she* knows I hate sitting out here by myself. If you ask me, this is really about her hating on Black. As usual.

“It don’t cost you nothin’ to walk away,” I snap back.

LaShunda cackles. “Can your grandfather stop speaking through your body?”

“I don’t know what you talkin’ about.” I flip my hair over my shoulder, but she got me laughing like she always does. “Pops got all the best sayings.”

She shakes her head and then looks down at my feet. “Anyway, I see you got them.”

A big smile takes over my face. LaShunda never misses

anything I do. She knows me, like, really knows me, and she knew that statement would perk up both our moods.

“They cute, right?”

“Lady, you know they better than cute—they are fire, best friend. If I thought I could cram my size tens into them, I’d be trying to borrow them ASAP,” LaShunda says.

“I saw some size tens in a different style as cute as these. Let me turn a few more checks, and I’m going to hook you up.”

“Go, best friend. That’s my best friend,” she sings, and we both laugh. Her granny, Miss Ann, house is really her house. Miss Ann works two jobs and drives for Uber. LaShunda does all the laundry, cooking, and watching of her three bad, little cousins. Even though she works real hard, she’s not able to have an after-school job or anything. That’s why I love splurging on a pair of fly shoes for her when I can. I like being that person in her life who gives her the little extras. “So are we going to this game-slash-fund-raiser-slash-turnup-slash-piped-up litation?”

“Yes, ma’am, you know if we don’t see the Dolls dance at halftime, they will kill us.”

“You ain’t never lied.” LaShunda winks. “NaNa, let me get out of here before Gram kills me.”

“Okay, but don’t flake tonight.”

Anyway, it’s okay she has to go. Some days you just want to be alone with your man, and for me, this is one of

those days. I've been missing him. He's been grinding so hard lately that we never get to see each other. He always smells good enough to eat. He puts aftershave right on his neck too, because he knows I like to rest my head on his shoulder and just breathe him in. Ooh, that man does something to me. He makes my head spin. I'm so caught up thinking about his fine self that I don't notice LaShunda walking away until she yells back at me.

"Love you later."

"Love you later," I shout. She hates goodbye. That's the last thing her mom said to her before she passed away from a heroin overdose. She's never said the word *goodbye* to anyone since.

I think about texting Black but that will only aggravate him. I know he's coming, and he always says what's understood doesn't need to be said. Not a minute later, he pulls up, bumping the new Kelechi album loud as he can. He has such amazing taste in music. He can't stand trap music and only listens to real emcees who don't do all that cursing and hating on women.

"Did somebody request an Uber?" He smiles, leaning toward the passenger window.

"I did. I hit the button for cute, so I wasn't expecting fine. Is it the same fee?"

"Uber Black is usually a little more, but I lower the rate when the rider is fine too."

We both laugh, and I get in. I lean over to hug him, and he smells as good as I expected. I almost don't want to let go. I lift my face for him to kiss me and melt into him. His soft lips press against mine, and it feels like sun rays warming my skin.

I gently pull away. "I need to go home and get myself together to be cute at the football game tonight."

"The game?" He starts the car and pulls out. "Since when is that something you do?"

"My girls doing the halftime, and I'm a good friend, jerk." I push his shoulder playfully. "But you know, I don't plan on staying longer than their show. So I'll have some free time left before curfew."

"Okay, well, Imma see how I'm movin' tonight, and you know, I'll let you know what I'm doing."

"So, that's a no?" I say, feeling my mouth twist up.

"I didn't say no."

"You didn't have to," I say. "I guess we'll see, won't we?" We pull up a few doors from my house, and I let him kiss me goodbye. "Bye, Black."

"Later, beautiful."

I roll my eyes as I get out of the car. I walk in my house and head to the kitchen for a snack.

"What you doing?" Pops asks, not looking up from the sink as he washes the plates. I have no idea why my grandfather won't use the dishwasher. I refuse to hand-wash dishes, my nails too delicious to be ruined by Palmolive.

“Just making a snack before I get ready for the game.”
I sigh. Black usually leaves me in the most amazing mood, except for when he plays like he Hansel, leaving me crumbs.

“What’s got you down in the mouth?”

“Pops, you ain’t even looked at me.”

“Don’t need to. I can hear it. I reckon it’s ’cuz of that little knucklehead you just got out the car with.”

“Pops, I didn’t—”

He interrupts, “Go to lying and the only game you gon’ see tonight is *Wheel of Fortune* on the Game Show Network. If you had a nice boy, there would never be a need to lie.”

No, if you gave him a chance, I’d have no need to lie. If I said that out loud, he’d pop me in the mouth. “Am I excused?”

“Go on, little liar on the prairie.”

I don’t care what Pops says as long as he don’t say I can’t go to the game. Imma try to hook up with Black later. I think tonight can end better than we just left it in the car.

2

CAMPBELL

*McPherson High School
Football Field*

My dad's truck rumbles into the school parking lot at the same time as the bus carrying the opposing team. We squeeze into a space at the very end of a row.

"It's good you're doing this, Campbell," Dad says, as the bus empties and a long line of beefy football guys in tracksuits lumber out.

Is it? I stay in my seat, remain buckled. I wonder why he thinks it matters if I work the concession stand for one game at this school. I'll only be here a year—my senior year. Where does he think this one night is going to lead?

While the players head through a gate in the chain-link fence toward the locker rooms, another bus pulls up and hems us in. This one lets out a load of cheerleaders, a dance team, and some boosters. The Panthers and their entourage

fill the parking lot. According to what our principal said on the morning announcements, Jonesville is McPherson's biggest rival, ranked one beneath us in the standings. Or something. I guess they would bus in a big crowd for such an important game.

The only people around seem to be Jonesville fans. You'd think McPherson fans would've shown up by now to cheer on the home team at the most important game of the season. Then again, the principal made a big deal about expecting extra security and demanding we all be on our best behavior tonight, so I'm guessing the rivalry gets intense. Maybe it's better if the Jonesville superfans are settled on the visitor side of the stadium before the home crowd shows.

I look around for people I might know, then realize that's ridiculous. I don't know anybody here.

The human throng before us parts, allowing a tall woman with waist-length braids to make her way through. She struggles to push a dolly in front of her with one hand and drag a battered, red wagon behind her with the other. Both are heaped with cardboard boxes.

"That's Ms. Marino," I say. She coaches the dance team, teaches my English class, and invited me to work the concession stand tonight. I unbuckle my seat belt and hop out of the car to help her. To my surprise, my dad jumps out too.

“Campbell!” she exclaims. “So glad you decided to come.”

I can't think why I did. Ms. Marino explained that this year, the proceeds from concession stand sales will be used to fund renovations to upgrade the rest of the athletic facilities so they'll be as nice as the fancy new football field. The only catch is, the teams have to man the stand. Of course, as the athletes are too busy during games to work the booth, they've been asking for volunteers. I didn't raise my hand when Ms. Marino asked, believe me. No one did, even though she practically begged for help every single day this week. The entire class dodged her. The awkward silences that followed her more and more desperate requests made me squirm. That's probably why, when she caught me as the bell rang this morning and asked if I'd ever run concessions before, the word *yes* came out faster than an excuse.

My dad takes the dolly, I hoist a couple of boxes off the top of the wagon, and we follow her toward the main gate. She leads us past two dance team members raising a glittery SUPPORT FIELD RENOVATIONS banner up to the top of the fence.

“Good job, girls,” she calls. “Finish hanging that, and I'll meet you in the locker room in ten minutes for warm-ups.”

The familiar ring of a coach giving orders makes me flinch. Words like those reverberated through my nights and weekends once. Back when I used to be on a team.

I look quickly away from the girls and their mascot-logo warm-up suits, and scurry after my dad and Ms. Marino.

The huge concrete stadium looms above us, casting a shadow over the concession stand, which is a relief. There's a good couple of hours of daylight left, and this wooden booth will be enough of a sauna without sitting in the middle of a sunbeam. The shade is the only thing to get excited about. Otherwise, the concession stand is a disaster—a rickety box built of plywood and two-by-fours, with big windows on one side covered by a rolling metal security grill, and below them, a lip of wood that juts out and is probably supposed to be the service counter. Ms. Marino dials the combination of a padlock hooked onto a hasp near the top of the door, slides it off, then yanks the door open, the knob wobbling loosely in her hands. With her, my dad, me, and the dolly, the booth is crowded to capacity. A third of the boxes and the wagon are still outside.

How is this going to work?

I don't point that out, though. I just help ferry the boxes.

My dad stays long enough to help cram all the supplies into the concession stand. "Okay," he says, when the last of the packages have been shoved into cabinets. "I'll see you after the game, Campbell. Pick you up right outside the gate."

"You know," Ms. Marino says. "The dance team always celebrates at Mr. Souvlaki's after home games. I think, after

working the booth for us tonight, you've earned honorary team member status. You should come with us."

I'm stunned. "I don't really know any of the girls."

She smiles gently. "This is how you get to know them."

"Mr. Souvlaki's?" Dad's frown lines cut deep into his face as he considers this invite. "That Greek place up on Woodland Street?"

"Yes," Ms. Marino says. "Pizza's perfect, Cokes are cold, and they're both cheap! And I'll be there, as will both of our team moms. Plenty of adult supervision, if that's what you're worried about."

"Campbell, I was planning on heading up to the cabin right after the game. I'm not thrilled about getting up there that late," says Dad. He sets a hand on my shoulder, like his trip is breaking news to me. Like I'm disappointed and need comforting.

"You're going out of town?" Ms. Marino asks, deflating.

"Just him. But he's my ride home, so." I feel a strange mix of regret and relief churning around in my stomach. "Maybe another time."

"Oh," she says, her smile back and beaming. "That's no problem. I can drive you home after dinner."

What? No, no, no. As if being the new girl isn't pathetic enough. Now Ms. Marino is my ride?

Dad says slowly, "That could work. If I leave now, I'll reach the cabin before it gets too dark."

I protest, but in vain. My teacher and my father lock down my Friday night plans, he happily heads off to his fishing cabin, and before I even make sense of how it happened, I'm escorting Ms. Marino as she goes to get more supplies. We head toward her portable classroom, which is housed in a big square trailer on cinder blocks between the main building and the football field. The portables were probably meant to be temporary, housing overflow classes until the district could add on to the building, but as far as I can tell, they look like they've been there for about thirty years. Ms. Marino chatters on about wanting to have the best sales records tonight of any other team that's taken a turn running concessions, telling me the rules of running the booth. They're nothing new—take this seriously, give accurate cash back, blah blah—but everything else here is. Her words wash over me as I wipe the sweat from my forehead and let my mind wander to what might be happening back home in Haverford. Which I shouldn't think of as home anymore, since I probably won't ever live there again.

“This fund-raiser,” Ms. Marino says. “It's partly about raising money to renovate the concession stand. It's such a disgrace compared to the new stadium. All kinds of donations welcome—construction supplies, for example.”

Ah, there's the ulterior motive that isn't related to my popularity status. She knows my dad owns Carlson's Hardware down in the commercial district on Seventh

Avenue. She can't have ever been in the place, though, if she's hoping he's got anything extra to donate. I smile blankly back at her, pretending not to get the hint.

She doesn't seem to take it personally. She shrugs and hands me a small, metal lockbox, preloaded with quarters and singles, and the key to the room. "Here you go. Since your fellow salespeople haven't shown yet, you go ahead and take this down to the stand. You're in charge of it. I'll send them along soon. Meet me back here after the game so we can go to Mr. Souvlaki's! Wait inside, though. Don't stay out there with the cash box."

An hour and a half later, I'm still sweating my butt off inside the concession stand. It's not quite halftime yet in what has to be the longest game ever recorded. There have been so many penalties and stoppages in play I've lost count.

Ms. Marino came by a few minutes ago, took one look at the inside of this stand, and blew her top. "Y'all," she said, her voice snapping like a brittle twig. "You been having a food fight up in here? Get this place cleaned up. Now. I'll be back in the second half, and it better be as clean as the Board of Health."

"I'm gonna get supplies." Keisha swings her purse over her shoulder and heads for the concession stand door. "You stay here, New Girl, and start cleaning up."

"It's Campbell," I say. I told her that earlier, but she doesn't remember. Or maybe doesn't want to remember.

“Uh-huh, New Girl.”

These are the first and only words Keisha has said to me all night.

That leaves me and Caleb in the booth, and he’s no help. He only looks up from his phone to talk to a parade of friends, who, for some reason, keep stopping by the door, instead of the customer service window.

“Hey, dude,” Caleb says, hopping down from the counter as another of his friends sticks his head in the door.

So here I am, the new girl, basically alone, cleaning up a catastrophic mess by myself.

People leaving me behind is quite the trend lately.

Somewhere overhead, people start cheering, and the band strikes up a song totally unlike the marching songs played at my old school. No John Philip Sousa here. Everything the McPherson band has played so far tonight could be on the radio. It’s kind of awesome, and I wish I could be in the bleachers to watch, but I’m not supposed to leave the stand.

I glance from the pile of napkins scattered across the floor to the massive, old-fashioned soda fountain that’s been jammed up and working erratically most of the night.

“What am I doing here?” I mutter.

None of the answers that pop into my head seem like good ones anymore. Yes, I worked concessions at Haverford, before my mom chased a job to Venezuela

and dumped me with my dad for my last year of school. Yes, the idea of working concessions and going out with friends afterward was the first thing that felt familiar since I moved to Atlanta. I imagine, for a second, an alternate universe Friday night in a similar booth with bright lights shining on the carefully tended turf of a football field. But those are the only similarities. All the rest of McPherson is so far away and so different, it might as well be another planet. In Haverford, October is already chilly. I'd be wearing my varsity track jacket, and I wouldn't be afraid to sneak out to watch the game. I'd be counting cash into a real cash register, instead of a metal lockbox, with people who were actually my friends. Almost half my track team, including my best friends, Lindsey and Megan, had been going directly from track practice to football games since freshman year. I'd be Instagramming pics of the architectural wonders we always built from candy bars when the game was boring.

I swing the door to the soda machine shut and think for a second about constructing a candy bar Golden Gate Bridge to post. There are enough Snickers bars to do it, but there's no one I could ask for help. Caleb's friend is gone, but Caleb has returned to sitting on the back counter, face glued to his phone. Anyway, I wouldn't want people in Haverford seeing this place in the background. Cellophane trails down the counter like enormous, shiny spiderwebs.

Trash litters the ground, including an entire stack of popcorn cups Caleb knocked over. They lay half crushed and blackened beneath our feet. A disgusting work of red-and-yellow abstract art, done in generic condiments, smears the customer counter. Ugh.

“Hey, Caleb. Do you think you could—”

Three knocks on the side of the concession stand.

“Hold that thought, dude,” Caleb says. He jumps down from his perch and wrenches open the door, slapping hands with the guy on the other side.

I hold my breath for a second, trying to control the impulse to roll my eyes. And then, I bend down and start cleaning up. Not that I really want to. I don't want to be here at all anymore, but I can't leave. Anyway, my dad already left town for the weekend. There's no one waiting for me, even if I did take off.

Caleb hauls himself back onto the cabinet and pulls his phone into its usual position: in front of his face. His thumb scrolls and his eyes follow. Totally absorbed. I wish I had a snarky comment that would get him off his butt to help, but as usual, my mind's blank. I can only ever think of good retorts when it's way too late. Besides, I'm a little nervous to take a dig. I'm not sure how people here would react, and I am not about to risk starting trouble.

With a sigh, I start picking up dirty napkins and tossing them into a trash bag, keeping one eye on the kids

outside the window. There's a few people hanging around, and I don't recognize a single one of them.

Except wait. There's Lena James. I know her—sort of. We have a class together, though she's never spoken to me. I recognize her friend too, the one Lena's always hanging out with. I can't remember her name. They're laughing as they wander over. Lena gives her friend a shoulder-shove, the girl shoves back, and then Lena swats at her with a Louis Vuitton purse. I look closer and see the leather is a little worn and the bottom is scuffed up, but I'm pretty sure that bag is not a fake. Wow. I wonder where she got a real LV.

Lena's forehead is beaded with sweat, and her makeup has started to cake. Surprising, since she usually catwalks the halls looking like she stepped out of a music video. Her long, wavy hair flows over her shoulders, and I wonder how she can stand the heat. Maybe she's compensating with her shorts, which are so short they've got to be a dress code violation.

I catch her friend eyeing me and realize I'm staring like a creeper. Whoops. I drop behind the counter, hiding from the girl's gaze.

3

LENA

*McPherson High School
Football Field*

The Dancing Dolls finish their routine, and everybody is going wild. My girl Aaliyah is the captain, and she was out front, crushing it. Next to me, LaShunda is Milly Rocking. I wave at Aaliyah from my seat as they're leaving the stadium. Then I grab LaShunda's elbow and pull her up.

"Come on, let's go before everybody else does."

"I still wanna see the band," she says. "They got one more song."

"You seen that tired-ass band before."

"You a hater," Shun says, but she follows me anyway.

Once we get done stepping over people and get to the bottom, a bass thumping hip-hop song makes just enough noise to be heard over the roar of the football stadium. The sound creeps through the leather of my favorite Louis

purse—the one I searched for months to find—that special ringtone alerting me Black is calling.

He got his nickname from his family because his skin is darker than anyone else, but also because he was so dark and calm like a lake. The calm got lost when he got older, but he kept the name. If he was a girl, that rich sable tint would've gotten him made fun of, and for sure no one would have been checkin' for him to be a bae or boo. But being a dude, it made him a lady's man.

“Hey,” I say, making it sound like I don't care at all that he called. I don't want him to think my world revolves around him. I mean, it does a little, but he don't need to know that.

“Hey,” he says back, without the softness every girl wants to hear from her boyfriend—that tone in a guy's voice he uses only for you.

“Whatchu doin'?” I ask, trying to draw him, like I usually can.

“Hangin' out.”

“Who with?”

“You not still yellin' 'bout Tamika? She ain't even here.” He definitely ain't sounding soft and sweet now.

That groupie who was all over him at the studio last weekend still causing trouble. He mad I said somethin'. But what was I supposed to do, let it go? Uh-uh. Anyway, that was days ago.

“I’m not.”

The quiet is not good.

“What you doing later, shawty?” he asks, sounding like it’s inconvenient to ask me.

“Tryna see you,” I say with a hint of humor. I don’t want to come off as thirsty. Everybody in our neighborhood recognizes Black, his box Chevy with the custom candy-purple paint, and his J’s. I been wanting him, and now I got him and I plan to keep him, although it’s work. Like keeping his age a secret at home. He’s twenty. Pops don’t know that. If he found out, I’d never leave the house again.

I wait to see what Black says, hoping he wants to see me too. I already miss the way he smells and the way he wraps his arms around me when he kisses me. I know I saw him earlier, but it was only a few minutes. I’m not trippin’ though. He’s been busy in the studio. His beats is fire. He’s not gonna be a bum like the rest of these clowns who think they can rap. He says he’ll do whatever to get rich. I believe him too.

I sigh a little when he teases back, “Aw, I feel special.”

It’s all right now. He ain’t mad no more, and I can breathe easy. By the time we hang up, he’s agreed to pick me up after the game. He’s gonna get a new tattoo to celebrate almost finishing the new album, and I’m gonna hang with him and his boys while he gets inked. I hang up and can’t stop smiling. LaShunda hits me on the shoulder and

knocks me out of the trance I've been in since I heard his ringtone.

"Girrrrrrl," LaShunda almost sings. "That must have been Black's annoying behind."

"Yup, so I don't need a ride home from you, friend."

We both laugh. I hope one day LaShunda finds a bae. I don't like candy, but I don't need it, because LaShunda is my sugar. She takes care of everybody from her baby cousins to me and anybody else who needs her. She thinks nothing of it. I see how amazing she is, but she doesn't.

I look over at her. "You comin' with me to meet him?"

LaShunda hesitates for a second. "Nah, I won't wanna hang around with them."

"Come on. A girl is only as cute as the cute chicks around her, and I need you to bring me up a few notches."

LaShunda shakes her head, like she don't think that's true at all. But of course, she jokes back. "Don't use me for my beauty. I have a brain."

"It ain't your brain I'm into," I say, and we both laugh, because most of the time, LaShunda is all about the brain. "Hey, remember that one time Black and his boys wanted to go to Stone Mountain, and we got on the kayaks, and the paddles got stuck, and you told 'em they had to row us back with their shoes?" I'm laughing so hard thinking about it. "Big Baby actually did it!"

"Yeah, okay. That was fun," LaShunda says. I can tell

she likes that memory as much as I do, and she wants to make me happy. She's smiling, but she's shaking her head. "I'm not comin' tonight, NaNa."

"Why? You do have fun with them. Come with me, and let's count how many times Wink flashes you that smile of his."

"He need to stop doin' that."

I grin, because I think Wink likes her a little bit and she kinda likes him too. "Don't front. You like that chocolate morsel."

"He a'ight."

"That smile is moonlight!"

"You mean sunshine. No girl wants that smile comin' at her at night," she says, nudging my shoulder and smiling for a second before her face gets serious again. "No. Uh-uh. Other than Wink, Black's friends are hella rude to me. You should say somethin' to your man when they talk to me like that."

Ugh. She right, and it ain't the first time she said it to me. I don't normally allow people to talk to me like that, but LaShunda's been my best friend since we was too small to know what best friends is. And she has a way of thinking that makes sense. She's always worth listening to. Black's friends might not treat her real kind, and Pops would comment on what that says about them if he knew. But I can't admit that to her.

I glance away and cross my arms. “Black just thinks you should have that kinda conversation in private, Shun. He don’t want me frontin’ on him with his boys.”

“Well, as long as you ain’t saying somethin’, I ain’t gonna come hang around his friends. You and me can find some other time to chill.”

That hurts my feelings a little, but I would never say that out loud. Even to LaShunda. Anyway, I want to see my bae. That’s what’s keeping me going. Most people don’t understand why I’m so pressed to spend time with Black. Everything about our relationship seems wrong on the outside, but it’s our quiet moments alone that count.

“You should be glad I found someone that makes me feel beautiful,” I say. “He tells me stories he don’t talk about with anyone else. I know his dreams. Believe me when I tell you, ain’t no one else get that out of him. He don’t make a move without talking to me.”

“Girl, Black do what he want,” LaShunda says. “Anyway, that’s what you offer him. What does he offer you?”

I roll my eyes. She thinks she has him figured out, but what she sees on the surface ain’t what’s really going on, and I don’t gotta prove nothing to her.

“He’s the one who noticed how good my style was. He’s always telling me he’s gonna put me to work being a stylist for him when he blows up.” And he’s right too. You give me fifty bucks and two hours at LaRue’s consignment

shop, and I'll have anyone looking red-carpet ready but unique. "When I told him about that cosmetology school me and Pops went to check out for me to maybe go to next year, he thought that was cool but said I could for sure do more. That's why I found the Art Institute. I've got a lot of style and a lot of opinion, and I need to put it to work."

"Well, he right about that."

I give her a little shove. "His boys call me the pretty bandit. I'm the first one to steal his heart."

"I think he did the stealing."

I grin. "I mean, I love him so much."

But LaShunda in serious mode. Unlike Black, I can never talk her out of being real when she in that mindset. "I don't know, Lena. Don't seem like he's there for you."

"He can be a little distant—"

"A little distant? Or are you a little clingy?"

"Excuse me, Lena James clings to no one."

"Me, Black, none of us can keep up with your demands."

I hate when she claps back at me like this. Especially saying that. She knew saying that would sting because a few times Black has stated it's hard for him to keep up with the schedule I request of him. I mean, I understand him. When he gets caught up at the studio, he in the creative zone. I get that. It's a little embarrassing, though, when LaShunda agrees with him.

“Just saying sometimes even I feel sorry for the boy. You’re a lot,” LaShunda says.

I glare at her. I don’t like that response, and I don’t like her making me sound like a thirst bot. “You are my friend. My friend, my side.”

LaShunda lets out a long sigh. “I stand on the side of truth, and the truth is, you can be a gnat.”

“Rude.” I’m kinda surprised to see LaShunda being all Team Black. That part is not so bad, but I’m annoyed by all of it, so I need to get out of this conversation. The concession stand is right nearby. “I need a Coke.”

“Whatever, NaNa.” LaShunda flicks her hand and heads toward the stands.

I’m fine she walked off, though. Tomorrow we’ll be laughing on the phone again.

The concession stand ain’t exactly a 7-Eleven, but at least there’s fountain Cokes. Except tonight, I damn near have to crawl over the nasty-ass counter to get the attention of the chick hanging out back there. She all crouched down for some reason.

“What you doin’ down there?” I ask, staring at her.

When she finally looks up, she has the nerve to ask the dude, who clearly doesn’t plan on working, to help her. I don’t give a damn who gets my Coke, somebody just needs to get it.

“Coke,” I say again.

Her ass is still moving slow!

“And don’t take all night neither.”

She finally gives me my drink, and I feel kinda bad for throwing my dollar at her and watching it fall in a bunch of ketchup. When I’m at work, people always rushing us to get their orders, and the owner, Dollie, is always sending me to calm people down. She don’t like no kinda arguments, but she know I’m a boss and people love me. But even though I understand, this Coke is still nasty as hell.

“Ugh!” I slam the cup down on the counter. “What did you do to that?”

“Sorry,” she says. “The machine isn’t—here, let me get you another.”

“No, gimme my dollar back. I don’t want that nasty sh—”

That loud horn goes off, and I can’t hear what ol’ girl is talkin’ about. It’s a whole bunch of noise after that. People leaving the bleachers, cheering, all that. The band must be done.

