

## Chapter 1

“I’m sorry, we’re closed!”

I yelled at the three men slowly approaching the back doors of the coffee shop. I know they heard me the first time because one of them gave me thumbs up as if he was verifying the information that I said to him. I heard a crash come from the back of the store as if glass was being broken into. As I ran to the commotion, two of the people seized me and the other gradually walked up to my face. The light shone directly onto his eyes...

“Jason?!” I screamed.

He stopped suddenly and stared at me for a few moments obviously surprised.

“Rain? Is that you?” Jason replied taken aback.

“YES! What the hell are you doing?!” “Let me go!” I fiercely yelled at his “henchmen”.

“I’m so sorry, let her go. I didn’t know this was your shop.”

I looked up at him in anger from the floor where the men had dropped me.

“What are you even doing? What are you thinking? You can’t just break into people’s businesses like this!”

“I know, I know. I apologize it’s just...can we talk? Privately?”

“I don’t think talking in private with you would be a good move. First you leave me heartbroken and bitter without any explanation whatsoever and now here you are five years later breaking into my store what the hell is wrong with you?”

“I already told you I apologize. I didn’t know. Look, can we just step outside and talk for a minute? This is really important.”

“Fine! Ten minutes! Fake ass wanna’ be burglar witcha’ damn sidekicks Bozo and Harry! Lets go!” I angrily stepped outside the back doors of my coffee shop, *Bean*.

Jason clearly had something heavy on his mind. I knew that look when I saw it. We were together for 3 years straight until he decided that he was ready to leave me and move to Texas. I thought for sure a horse and carriage would come next but wishful thinking I guess. I don’t even know what he’s doing back here. I told him I never wanted to see him again unless it was in a pine box. I know, that was kind of harsh but I was a woman scorned. I was in love with this guy and he left me without so much as an explanation to how come. How was I supposed to take that? Does he have any idea how long it took me to get over him? Selfish. Just like he’s always been...

“Well?” I stated with more hate than I had intended after seeing the look in his eyes.

“Well...the truth is, I just wanted to see you.”

“Bullshit. I don’t have time for this Jason. I’m so through with this whole thing.” I replied turning my back to walk into my shop.

“No Rain wait! Alright dammit! I have no place to go and I’m completely broke. I left Austin because I couldn’t upkeep my “lavish lifestyle” that I had created for myself.”

I must’ve looked pretty annoyed because he finally decided to get serious without me saying a word.

“I’m down and out basically. I have nothing or no one. The company I worked for let me go and I got laid off...permanently.”

“Mhm.” I mumbled under my breath. “So now what? You’re going around breaking into people’s places of business in order to get back on your feet? Yeah, real smart Jason. You’ll land yourself a free trip to prison going that route. Good luck.”

“Rain you don’t understand what its like to be out in the cold with nothing. Not shit. You’ve always had your own everything. Never had to depend on anybody. I used to be that way but its hard times for me right now. I don’t know how else to do this shit. THIS is what I know. My brothers pitched this bullshit idea and I don’t know any other way.”

“Jason, you are so much smarter than this. Why? Just find another job!”

“ITS NOT THAT SIMPLE RAIN! God don’t you get it!”

I stared at him in disbelief. Here he was again. Giving all these excuses with no reason as to why they were happening or why he couldn’t just get back on his feet. He was always so good at making a living for himself. He did it when he went off to Texas why couldn’t he do it again? Predictable. But still, he looked pretty pathetic and I started feeling sorry for him a little. Call me soft hearted but, I could see the old Jason in there somewhere under this other person. The vulnerable one.

“Okay, I’m going to pitch this idea to you and you can either accept my offer or deny it...how would you like to stay at my place, ON THE COUCH, until you get your shit together?”

Jason looked up at me from his face of shame and discouragement.

“You would do that for me? Do you think that would be a good idea though Rain I mean we haven’t shared a roof together since...”

“I know. I know what it sounds like but I’m only trying to be nice. I see someone in need and I feel obligated to help. You can crash at my place for three months. You should be able to find work and a place to stay by then. Do you accept it or not?”

“Uh...I accept. Hey thanks for this. You know I would’ve done the same for you right?”

“Jesus.” I mumbled walking away. “Tell your backup they can take a walk if you’re riding with me.”

Jason quickly walks back into the store where his boys are standing and tells them whatever information robbers and burglars tell one another when their services are no longer needed. Just sad. He had better not make me regret my decision. Thinking about it is making me regret the whole thing. Fuck, what was I thinking?!

Jason was being eerily quiet in the car ride back to my apartment. I kept glancing over at him from time to time out of the corner of my eye. Something was obviously on his mind that he was not outwardly speaking on.

“So...what’s been going on with you?” I asked in lieu of trying to break the silence that filled the car.

“What? Oh. Nothing much...” He answered as if he was being awakened from this trance. Like I interrupted him in deep thought or something.

“Something serious *must* be going on in the life of Jason for you to be going store to store breaking into windows with two retards to make a living.”

“Rain, give me a break please. My life is shitty as it is, I don’t need you rubbing my shortcomings in you were always good at that. We know this already.”

I felt crappy after hearing him say that. Was I really the one always rubbing the bad shit in? He was looking straight ahead out of the windshield at the nasty weather. It must’ve been raining cats and dogs out there. I looked over at him once more...admiring his sharp chin and pointed nose. Those were always my favorite features on him. I started daydreaming about the past. When the two of us were happy and deeply in love. We were strolling along the boardwalk holding hands and laughing about something. People around us thought we were crazy because we were laughing so hard but we didn’t care. We were in love. Nothing mattered and nothing could tear us apart. Or so I thought...

“Honestly though Rain I thought about you many times while I was in Texas. I know my way of exiting your life was not the best. It was cowardly and I hurt you really bad and I’m really sorry. For everything. And I wanted to tell you all this much sooner but I was afraid you wouldn’t even want to talk to me, let alone hear me out for an apology. You deserve that much.”

He smiled at me in a way that was begging for my forgiveness.

“I forgive you Jason.” I replied reluctantly.

“I forgave you a long time ago. If I hadn’t, I wouldn’t have even thought about giving you the offer I gave you. It took me some time. Some serious time but eventually I realized that I had to stop blaming just you and take responsibility for me too you know?”

“I mean I guess.” Jason shrugged. “I still say I was 100% in the wrong either way.”

“Yeah well, let’s just agree to disagree ok?” I smiled warmly.

“Okay.” Jason smiled back.

My apartment complex is quiet...for the most part. I do not stay on the best side of town but I do not stay on the worst either. Jason and I arrived around one in the morning. Tired, reminiscing, and apologetic to say the least.

“Wow! This is so much like you.” Jason blurted.

“What do you mean by that?” I asked confused as hell.

“Its um...nothing never mind.” He was doing a smile/laugh with his mouth. I didn’t like it nor did I think it was funny.

“Anyway!” I responded with great annoyance. “Follow me upstairs I’m on the second floor. I’ll get you pillows and blankets whatever you need. There are also rules!”

“Oh my god, are you serious?” Jason whined.

“Yes, very serious. You’re still not off the hook with me Jason.”

“Fine, what are the rules Rain?”

“When we get inside I’ll let you know.”

I swing the door open to my six hundred square foot apartment. There were unopened bills on my small dining table and a throw blanket laying on the sofa from earlier when I was watching *Scarface* before work. Don’t ask, it’s a classic.

“This is nice. I like it. Like I said it suits you. Looks like you’ve been doing good for yourself Rain. Really good.”

“Thank you. I decorated everything myself. Its not much but I can always make something out of nothing. But you already knew that. Sorry for the slight mess I didn’t think I’d have any company over so...yeah.”

Jason looked at me like I was delusional, “What the hell are you talking about? This place isn’t messy at all. You’re just a damn neat freak. Like you’ve always been.”

Jason flops down onto the couch like he’s about to fall asleep right then and there.

“Thanks?” I replied with a sarcastic smirk. “I have two pillows here for you and one blanket and a sheet. Make do with what you have because its all you’re getting. We’ll go over house rules tomorrow morning before I leave for work.”

“Thanks a lot. You’re too kind.”

“Whatever.” I started trudging towards the hallway to my bedroom.

“Rain?” Jason interrupted.

“Yes?”

“Thank you for all of this. I really appreciate it. I had nowhere else to go and you’re literally my only hope. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome Jason. I know you would have done the same for me. Goodnight.”

I’m glad he couldn’t see the smile on my face as I walked back to my room.

It was huge.

The next morning, everything that happened the night prior felt like a dream. Did my coffee shop really get broken into? Was Jason, my ex-boyfriend that left me over a year ago, without so much as an explanation, the actual culprit? Was he really sleeping on my burgundy sofa right this moment? All of those answers were yes. Yes, it was actually happening. I sat on my bedside for a moment to gather my thoughts. My bathroom was so unorganized; I could just hear my mother screaming at me.

“Today is a new day and there are new challenges to face. You are beautiful, intelligent, and headstrong. You can handle it.” I said to myself in the mirror. This is a chant that I do every morning before facing my day. It really helps if you are feeling discouraged. I applied my *MAC Ruby Woo* lipstick in the color, “Bombshell” and a little bit of mascara. I’ve always admired my looks. I’m a brown, caramel complexion with dark black natural curly hair. I’m more so on the slim side with an ounce of thickness if you will. According to Fabolous, that would be “slim thick”. Today was going to be hectic for me and I knew that off hand. Instead of running and crawling back into bed to avoid it all like I *wanted* to do, I slipped on my dark rinse jeans and a white t-shirt. I was ready for whatever in these pants...even an old flame.

I slowly opened the door to my bedroom and walked down the hall to where Jason was soundly asleep on the living room couch.

“Jason.”

He didn’t budge.

“Jason...”

“JASON!”

“Huh? What?!”

He awoke alarmed, wide eyed, and bushy tailed. Not to mention the small amount of saliva seeping from his lips that left a questionable stain on the arm of my sofa.

“First of all, why is my Jergens and a roll of tissue sitting on my coffee table? You know what, never mind, I don’t even want to know. Sorry I asked.” I threw my hands up in surrender.

“We need to discuss the rules of living in Rain’s apartment when you’re not contributing to any bills. First rule; DO NOT lay a finger my Greek yogurt. I will cut off your arms at the elbows.

“But I love yogu—“ Jason interjected.

“Second! If you use the bathroom, put the toilet seat down and clean up after yourself. I don’t want to see any pee spots on my toilet seat got it?”

“Rain, I’m a grown ass man now I—“

“Third! If you want to squeeze your weasel, make sure you get rid of the evidence so it at least *looks* as though you give a damn.” I said glaring heavily at my coffee table with the assortment of tissues and lotion.

“Wait a minute, this isn’t fair can I make some rules here too?”

I hated when Jason started to whine. It reminded me of the time he couldn’t get the car he wanted at the dealership we went to because of his credit score. Or should I say no credit?

“You know what Jason, sure, what are *your* rules?” I reluctantly gave in crossing my arms against my chest.

“Well, I get to sleep in a BED, like an actual human being instead of having to act as a contortionist on this love seat. I’m not flexible. You know that.”

I giggled a little. He gave me a serious glare.

“Okay, in all seriousness, I know the sofa is a bit uncomfortable to sleep on every night, even though you’ve only been here for a total of one day, but this is what it has to be until you find your own place to stay.”

“I would rather sleep in an alleyway than on this thing.”

“Hey! Don’t talk bad about my furniture; I worked very hard for it! Besides, if the alleyway is more appealing to you then be my guest.” I replied while shrugging my shoulders.

“Alright you know what, fine. I’ll just have to endure it. This isn’t my house, we have to set boundaries because of whatever situation we had previously and I respect you and your decision. I will be out looking for work and putting in job applications as soon as I’m dressed. Scout’s honor.”

He smiled at me. The “sexy smirk” is what he called it. I was surprised that he agreed so easily. It allowed me to look at him in a whole new light. I had a new respect for him. He had actually matured while he was away. A year isn’t much time but I could see the change still. Going from a selfish individual that just wants what he wants when he wants it, to an actual person that understands. I immediately looked away in feeling awkward and arose from my chair.

“Alrighty then! I’m headed to my shoppe I will be back around 5:30 or so. I’m pretty sure it still looks like hell around there so, yeah.”

“I’m really sorry Rain. I’m sorry for everything. I really am. I promise you once I get back on my feet I’ll pay you back every dime for the damages. I can promise you that.”

He sounded sincere. But I knew better.

“We’ll see. See you later!”

I quickly stated while I walked out of the door grabbing my purse and keys. My heart was beating way too fast for my liking.

Fort Lauderdale, Florida is home and always has been home for me. It was Jason’s home too, as a matter of fact. We were born here. Our parent’s parents were born here. So I never left. I established my business in Fort Lauderdale to keep an eye on my mother and father really. Not that they’re holding me back from moving or anything. I just really like being here. I know everyone and I know where everything is located. I’m comfortable. The weather is also a plus so I thought, why leave? Still, sometimes I wonder what it would be like to venture out and try a new city. Maybe Atlanta or Los Angeles...

A fire truck speeding past me interrupts my daydream. I immediately maneuvered to the side of the road out of the way.

“What the hell is going on?” I said to no one in particular under my breath.

The cops were swarming around my place of business upon my arrival. There was broken glass and shit everywhere you looked. I finally turned my cell phone on to find multiple calls from neighboring stores and the police station. After sitting in my car for almost a good fifteen minutes watching the “investigation” take place, I took off my seatbelt and proceeded to open my car door. When they noticed me, I was immediately tackled with a news crew and police officers.

“Can you tell us what happened here at your very own business Rain?”

“How do you feel about all this?”

“What do you have to say to the person or people who may have done this?”

And I had absolutely nothing to say. Because I know who it was that broke into my windows and grabbed me. He was sleeping on my \$400 loveseat that I got on sale at a bedding and furniture store right at this very moment. Of course, they didn’t know that.

“Uh...no comment.” I responded swiftly. I didn’t want any unnecessary suspicions or assumptions drawn. A male officer pulled me aside from all the chaos and madness.

“Rain. My name is officer Keaton. We need to speak privately with you on this matter. Burglary is a serious offense. We do have a few questions to ask.”

He was so stern and serious.

I looked at him wide-eyed. I was so captivated by how beautiful he was I couldn't make my mouth form words without sounding like a complete jackass. A clear-cut comparison to Morris Chestnut. Mocha brown skin with eyes that smiled even when his mouth wasn't.

"Uh...um...yeah that's fine. I don't have a lot of time though I need to see about getting my shop fixed for normal business as soon as possible." I stuttered.

"Yeah, yeah of course it'll be quick though nothing too extensive." He smiled.

Oh god! He was a charmer too...

After a full assessment of my store, and how much all the bullshit damage would cost thanks to Jason, I drove home to find the culprit laying on my couch in the exact same spot I left him. There was something about seeing him relaxing and sipping a soda while I was at my store all day trying to figure out how to clean up *his* shit struck a nerve deep down in my soul.

"What the hell Jason! You're in the same spot I left you?! I thought I said specifically three months! You are lounging around *my* apartment like you have all the time in the world!"

"You have *no* idea how many job applications I've filled out already nor how many phone calls I've made to business offices. No one wants to give me a chance Rain! Nobody!"

I stood there staring at him. I was not moved one bit by Jason's story. It actually would have been a lot more believable had he been dressed and looked like he did what he said he was doing. But no, he had on the same clothes from yesterday except they were filthier from ketchup and mustard stains that fell from a hotdog and grape soda spills. I could not even deal so I trucked it to my room instead of furthering the argument.

"Rain I know you said three months only and I am really am trying but its not as easy as you may think!", he yelled while following me to my bedroom.

"Jason do not come any further."

"Why?! You act as if we've never shared a bed together or shared our bodies with one another at some point in time."



He smirked. I, however, was not in the slightest bit amused.

“Jason, it’s not that kind of party anymore. You and I we had our past and differences and that is all that it was. It was a lesson learned for sure. Nevertheless, I am not going back to that place in my life. Not even for you.”

I tried to turn and walk away before bursting into tears when he grabbed my arm. We ended up face-to-face looking straight into each other’s eyes.

“Jason, let me go are you crazy?!” I yelled before forcefully pulling away from him.

“You know you feel it. Stop trying to fight it.”

“Feel what?! A stinky, dirty, unemployed grown ass man with a hard on, sleeping on my sofa? Because that is exactly what’s going on here! You didn’t even bother showering!”

I was so disgusted just looking at him. He was nothing like this 3 years ago when I met him. Jason was so well put together. Now he just looks to me like a homeless bum on the street. Technically speaking, I guess he is but he doesn’t have to look it.

“We haven’t had any communication at all while I was gone and yes, I had my share of women but you were always in the forefront of my mind Rain believe it or not.”

Jason was calm saying this, but I couldn’t help but notice the stern look on his face. In fact, I *almost* believed him. Almost.

“Jason” I took a deep breath. “This is looking like it is not going to work. We have a past we know this. You and I know this. But in order for us to coexist and live under the same roof, there are some lines that must be drawn and—“

“I never told you why I left.” Jason interrupted me mid sentence.

It was quiet. Eerily quiet. We stared at each other in complete, jaw dropping silence for a maximum of ten seconds. This was the moment of truth. It was the moment I had been waiting for. I stayed up not getting any sleep in the days following his absence wondering what it could have been. And now, the answer was being revealed. Jason leaned forward as if to tell me something and kissed me. He kissed me. And I don’t know what it was but I kissed him back. After 3 seconds I pulled away, fearing the consequences if it were to go any further.

“Stop. Just stop it.” I stated.

“Its okay Rain I know you want to. Why do you fight it? Ever since last night you wanted to. I even noticed this morning before you left. I know you.”

He was right dammit. But I was not going to give him that satisfaction.

“No, we can’t okay just stop. I’m going to my room.”

