

Chapter 1

Dear Sadira,

I feel like I need to come clean. My heart and mind are telling me to strip myself of all suppressed feelings. The truth is I don't want you to leave. No one has been able to penetrate my soul like you. Since we've known each other, I've had revelation after revelation. Forget the nonsense of me holding on to my pride; I need you.

I can't change the course of this lifetime, nor can I go back and make right what I know I did wrong in the past. Moreover, I'm not asking you to make me a priority over someone you love or even give me a second chance because honestly I don't deserve one. I just want to continue to experience and to love you in any way that you will allow me to. I just need you as my friend. That is all.

I've had moments with you stored deep within me that transcend any night or moment of passion. You made love to my mind and climaxed inside my soul. I feel like there are tiny pieces of you all over and inside of me. Maybe that's why it's so difficult to let you go. You are in me, and I can still feel you.

*I will always wonder what could have been if I had only done it all differently. And I'll always have love for you. All I ask is that you stay close to me, at least as a friend, until our next lifetime where we can perhaps **just be**.*

Until we see each other again, let us continue to look at ourselves.

Love always,

Jessie

Jessie's last words played over and over as I reflected on our relationship before falling asleep. After all we'd been through, we seemed to be back to square one. In the morning, a loud chatter of voices streamed through my clock radio, waking me up. After yawning and blankly looking around my new apartment, I sat back and thought about the turns my life had taken. From New York to Miami to Atlanta, and then back to New York again, I'd been up, down, and around, all in search of love and happiness. But I wanted to get out, to disentangle myself from the exhausting search entirely. The chaos started three years ago when I met Jessie. I was 25 years old at the time.

It was a cool Friday morning in August when I stepped outside. I walked three blocks up to the 116th Street subway station observing my neighborhood that was simultaneously comical and sad, as if both were needed for it to function properly. I lived in a basement apartment of a brownstone in Harlem, New York, and everyone had an "I'm going to get mine" mentality. *Mine* could mean anything from getting their kids into college to selling \$500 worth of Newport cigarettes on the street or vending incense sticks in front of The Disney Store on 125th Street. I lived in a hub of hustlers.

At the subway entrance, I descended into the lower level of the city where life was just as fluid as above ground. A man was playing steel drums, and farther down the subway platform, a homeless person was shouting biblical verses at the top of his lungs. He pleaded for everyone to accept God before it was too late. "We're in the end times!" he yelled as the B train pulled into the station. I secured my bag on my shoulder and stepped aboard. I worked the morning shift as an audio engineer at WSOL, a radio station in midtown.

The day went by quickly, and I left early to pick up my twin sister, Khedara, from La Guardia Airport. Her flight had been delayed twice.

“My flight’s definitely leaving soon, so make sure you’re there because I’m exhausted.”

“Yeah, yeah, I’ll be there,” I told her. “I’m getting on a train right now. I’ll call you back.”

“All right, bye.”

During the ride, my eyes met a beautiful woman nodding off to sleep diagonally across from me. She had a slim build and a small pendant hanging from a necklace that dipped into her cleavage. Usually I wasn’t good at picking up women, but she was so striking I felt I had to say something to her. I told myself that if she were single, I would do whatever it took to make her mine. Looking at her, I saw my future, period.

Her flawless complexion reminded me of a honey graham just waiting to be devoured. I tried to be inconspicuous as I watched her rouse herself and remove her jacket, hoping that her blue-gray eyes would not meet mine as I took in everything from her black high-heels to her neat dreadlocks pulled back just enough to reveal her smooth shoulders. *Damn*, I thought as my eyes passed over her well-toned arms. I tried to be discreet, but I could not keep myself from staring at her bosom classily encased in a tan corset top. Her leather pants hugged her in places I had no business thinking about, and when I noticed the rainbow bracelet on her wrist, I prayed it wasn’t just a fashion statement, because in my mind rainbow bracelet meant gay or at least bisexual. She closed her eyes again.

I wanted to strike up a conversation badly, but I didn’t know what to say. Luckily I had a flyer for a gay event on me, so I decided to use it as a conversation starter. I waited for her to open her eyes

so I could make contact, but she only adjusted herself in her seat without opening them. A few moments later she opened them and locked them on mine. I froze. She smiled at me before closing her eyes again. I appreciated the smile and hoped it was an invitation to approach her. I nervously tried to get my pick-up line together in my head. *I'm no good at this. What if she rejects me?* Seconds later she opened her eyes and began looking around to see if her stop was coming up. *Oh, just say something, quickly.* Finally I found the courage to get up and sit next to this beautiful woman.

“Excuse me?” I said.

“Yes?”

“Um, I just wanted to give you this flyer.” As she read it I added, “By the way, I like your bracelet.” *That was corny,* I thought to myself as I got up to return to my seat.

“Thank you,” she replied and smiled. She read over the flyer some more before looking up at me. She stared at me and then smiled again. I smiled back and nodded for her to come over, and she did.

“I feel like I know you from somewhere,” she began.

“I don't know, maybe. What's your name?”

“Jessie.” She extended her hand.

As I shook her hand, I noticed how soft and well manicured it was. “Hmm, well, it's nice to meet you. My name is Sadira, and maybe I just have ‘one of those faces’.” I smiled at her and she smiled back.

There was an uncomfortable silence for a moment as the train approached my stop. “Um, I have to get off here, but I’d like to stay in contact with you. May I have your e-mail address?” She looked surprised, probably because I asked for her e-mail address instead of her phone number, but she gave it to me anyway.

“Yeah, sure,” she said, reaching in her purse and handing me her business card. “My contact info is all there.” After I got off the train and it continued on its way, I watched the small view of Jessie in the window disappear.

I arrived on time to pick up Khedara. She looked different. Her hair was longer than the identical cut we both used to wear, and she’d gained a little weight. We greeted each other and chatted a bit. I told her about Jessie. Later we went to Times Square and hung out. We had an early dinner at Applebee’s before going to the famed Nuyorican Poets Café on the lower east side of Manhattan.

From Chapter 11

It was a hard drive. I was so tired. When I pulled up in front of the radio station, the parking lot was almost empty except for a couple of cars.

Steve came out. “Hey, Sadira. I tried to call your cell phone after you left, but I got a fast busy signal.” He handed me the bottle of pills.

“Oh, I don’t know what happened, but thanks anyway.”

“You don’t look so good. Let me get you some water.” He headed off to the cooler.

Intimate Chaos – Cheril N. Clarke

I opened the bottle and took two pills out. When he returned, I took them with a swallow of water from the small cup he brought. I told him, “I’m not feeling well.”

“What’s wrong?” I heard someone ask. I turned to see that it was Danielle, and a wave of anger surged through me.

“Are you crazy?” I yelled at her. “What are you talking to me for?” I lunged at her, but Steve grabbed me.

“I was just...” she said weakly.

“I wonder how you ever got into college because you are *not* the sharpest fucking pencil. Now back the fuck up!”

Steve had me in a grip of death, so I couldn’t move.

“Leave,” he told to her. “Leave!”

When she turned to go, I broke down and sobbed. I buried my face in Steve’s chest. My burst of energy was gone, and now I felt only pain. As Danielle walked away, Steve’s hold turned into a consoling hug.

“Don’t worry,” he said, “things are going to work out for you. Jessie just needs time to cool down, that’s all.”

I couldn’t talk. All I could do was cry. I’d worked so hard to patch things up at home, and in an instant it all crumbled, taking my job with it. Now I had to go back home.

As I got back in my car, Steve said, “Sadira, why don’t you call someone to pick you up? I don’t think you should drive.”

Intimate Chaos – Cheril N. Clarke

“I don’t have anyone else,” I said, wiping tears from my face.

“Not even Jessie?”

“No, she won’t even talk to me.”

“Well, stay here with me until you get yourself together.”

“I’ll be okay.”

“No, I think you should hang around until you feel better.”

“I’ll be fine. I just need to go to the bathroom and fix myself up.”

“Okay,” he sighed.

When I went in to the bathroom, I could hear the music down the hall from the midnight love segment. I didn’t even want to be in the station, but I felt I needed something to make me more alert. I splashed cold water on my face and popped another two pills. *Oh shit, why did I do that?* I reprimanded myself before trying to throw them back up, but I couldn’t. I had already taken two when Steve brought me water from the cooler. *God, please protect me*, I thought. Then I heard sniffing from one of the stalls.

“Are you all right in there?” No answer. “Hello? Are you all right in there?” I asked again.

The door opened, and it was Danielle. “Damn, I can’t get rid of you.”

She looked hurt. “I’m sorry, Sadira. I really am sorry.”

“Yeah, well, you should be! What the hell is wrong with you? What were you thinking?”

“I was thinking that I know you how you feel.”

I sighed. “I don’t know why I’m even talking to you. Goodbye.”

Intimate Chaos – Cheril N. Clarke

“Because you’re in pain, and as usual Jessie isn’t here for you, that’s why.”

“What are you saying, girl?” My mind told me to leave, but my heart told me to stay and listen.

“I’m saying I know you’ve been hurting on the inside because I see a reflection of myself in you.”

I remained silent.

“I don’t know all the facts, but I’m assuming Jessie is leaving a void in you. She’s so wrapped up in herself that she doesn’t see the good in you.”

“Don’t talk about her like that.” I was fatigued and felt nauseous.

“You know it’s true.”

I ignored her and walked toward the door, but she stepped in front of me.

“All you want is to be noticed, to be appreciated, to have your back rubbed after a long day, to have someone who loves you back the way you love them.”

I wanted to avoid what she was saying, but she was directly in front of me. I didn’t have enough energy to fight with her either.

“What you need is someone who values you.”

“Move, Danielle,” I told her, but she didn’t. She was so close that you probably couldn’t slide a sheet of paper between us. I could literally feel her breath.

“She left you crying and hurt. You shouldn’t be crying. You’re a good woman. You need someone like me who can give you what you deserve.” She leaned forward and kissed me on my cheek.

“Move out of my way.” *Damn, I’m tired.*

Intimate Chaos – Cheril N. Clarke

“Sadira,” she whispered in my ear. “I won’t do you like she did.” When Danielle tried to kiss my lips, I snapped out of the trance she was putting me in and backed up.

No, this is wrong, I thought.

“She probably already assumed we slept together anyway, Sadira,” she said, leaning closer. “I won’t treat you the way she does.” Her tongue grazed my bottom lip.

“No! I can’t do this. Jessie is still my girl. No! This is wrong and it’s all your fucking fault, so move!” I pushed her aside and walked out.

I waved goodbye to Steve and left the building. When I got in my car, the first thing I did was call Khedara, but she didn’t answer her home or cell. Because I felt so physically drained, I made sure to put on my seat belt before heading home on I-95. Soon my chest tightened and my breathing became labored. I slowed down and reached in my glove compartment for my inhaler, hoping it would help.

My phone rang. The caller ID said it was my sister.

“Hey, Khedara.”

“Hey, girl, what’s up?”

“Sis, my whole life is falling apart.” I wiped my sweaty hands on my pants.

“What?”

“I’ll tell you all about it when I get home, but Jessie and I had a huge fight. I can’t even get into my own bedroom *and* I lost my job.”

“What the hell happened?”

Intimate Chaos – Cheril N. Clarke

“Too much, but I’m tired right now so just stay on the phone with me. As a matter of fact, hold on, let me use my earpiece instead.”

My hands started shaking, my vision blurred, and I heard a loud horn blow. “Sadira!” was the last thing I heard from my sister. The phone fell from my hands as my car spun out of control. I felt hard thumps all around me. Shattered windshield glass pierced my skin. The airbag came out, and I heard the pounding of my own heartbeat before everything went coal black.