

A Twist of Fate

Ashela was relaxing amidst a whirl of bubbles and soothing jetstreams listening to the mellow sounds of Jeane Carne blowing in the background. Kyliah and every other problem she may have had was a million miles away. She lifted her muscled calf and watched as the soapy suds cascaded downward.

“Just let me get to know you, before you break my heart . . .”

Ashela’s head bobbed and her neck craned from side to side and she whispered along with the song.

The soft ring of the phone was an unwelcome intrusion. Ashela reached for the cordless.

“Yes.” Ashela’s voice was as silky as the water she was soaking in.

There was a pause before a deep voice said, “You don’t sound like a woman who’s tired, drained, and empty to me.”

Ashela’s breath caught in her throat. “Sam?”

“Were you expecting someone else?” A laid back and somewhat provocative quality edged his voice.

“I . . .” Caught off guard, she replied, “Actually, I wasn’t expecting anyone at all.” How had he gotten her number? *That Kyliah . . .*

“I just had some disturbing news. It’s most unfortunate that you can’t join me this evening. But dinner at your place later this week sounds most enticing.” There was an obvious, seductive web to his tone.

“Excuse me?” Ashela could only imagine what Kyliah had said to the man.

“Oh, I spoke to Ms. Reed and she informed me of what a gourmet cook you were. But then, I shouldn’t be surprised. You see, I’m learning that you’re full of small wonders, Ashela.”

Something in his voice was causing her stomach muscles to knot. Maybe it was the way he was pronouncing her name. As though he were whispering it into her ear. Ashela said haltingly, “Sam, I have no idea what Kyliah . . .”

“Say my name again. I like the way you say it.” Sam had taken a seat by his office window. He could hear the soft sway of the water around her. The image of her naked in a pool of water was too enticing to resist.

In that instant, the shift was made from a business relationship and that of a much more intimate one evolved.

“No.” Ashela laughed softly. But in spite of herself, her nipples hardened and her toes curled in the water.

Sam leaned forward and slowly passed his hand over his chin. “No, what?”

“Sam, are you cra . . .”

“That’s it.” Sam spoke ever so softly. “Say it one more time.”

Tingling sensations crawled up the sides of Ashela’s stomach and her nails automatically scraped the side of the tub as she shifted her position. “I’m taking the fifth, Mr. Ross. Mainly because I have no clue as to what you’re talking about. What do you mean about being invited to dinner? I don’t recall ever asking you.” Still, her voice was soft and intimate.

“No, but your trusted Advisor explained that I needed to go very slow with you because it’s been a long time since you’ve allowed yourself to be swept away.” Kyliah actually had said no such thing but he wanted to gauge her response.

Ashela gasped, as he had hoped she would. “I’m going to kill her,” was all she could manage to say.

“Ashela, why are you fighting me? All I want is to have dinner with you. I promise you I’ll not ask a thing more of you than you’re capable of giving. How’s that?”

Ashela was still trying to close her mouth. She couldn’t say anything.

Encouraged by her silence, Sam added even more softly, “I can’t remember the last time I’ve had to beg so hard just to get a woman to go out with me. Woman, what must I do?” The tone of his voice indicated he would do anything she asked.

Ashela was trying to collect her scattered thoughts. *What was happening to her?* “Sam . . .”

The way she pronounced his name was music to his ears. He could hear her take a deep breath.

“I . . . I guess I should inform you that I don’t date the people that I work with.” It sounded lame even as she said it.

“That’s okay. I just want you to have dinner with me. We can work out all the other tactical differences at a later date. When are you free? Tonight?”

Ashela laughed. The man just didn’t give up. “Sam, even if I wanted to, tonight is out . . .”

“What about tomorrow?”

“. . . And as for the rest of the week, I . . .”

“The day after that. The week after that. How about the next lifetime?” Sam’s persistent patience was admirable.

Ashela laughed because he wouldn’t let her get a word in edgewise.

“Sam, you and I both know that there aren’t many women who would resist the opportunity to have dinner with you. I’m sure that I’m sure that I’m sure that your rolodex must be filled with women just waiting longingly by their phone hoping for you to call. You’re doing them a grave disservice by pursuing someone who’s not even in their league. You should stick to the Sam Ross groupies.”

“I didn’t know that such a legion of women existed. What does one have to do to become a member? I want to induct you.”

Ashela’s senses were still reeling from the sensuous quality of his voice. *Did he just say “induct” her, or . . .*

“Well, from what I hear, membership has its privileges. It’s also hard to come by. First, you need to be tall and willowy and you have to be one of the top models in the industry.”

“Ahhh, Ms. Jordan. I’m wounded. In reality, I like my women about 5’5”, of medium build, sweltering hips, short hair and knock-’em-dead dimples. There’s something special about a woman who gives the appearance of being demure, when she’s actually just tempering her aggression. And a woman’s who’s hard to get just sends me to the moon. Did I peg you right?”

“Sam, do you realize you’re going to be late for the opera?” Anything to change the subject.

“Since my date is standing me up, my tickets are just going to be wasted.”

Ashela lifted herself from the tub. On the other end, Sam swallowed a deep intake of breath and silently shook his head as he envisioned her naked.

“Sam Ross. You are incorrigible. If I didn’t have to go check on my dinner . . . Let’s just say that I’m letting you off the hook this time.” Ashela patted herself dry.

“I’ll let *you* off the hook this time. But know this, Ashela Jordan. You can run, but you can’t hide.”

“Sam, did you know that I was once a long distance runner? I’ve been known to elude even the best of them.”

“Baby, you’ve never come up against Sam Ross before either. That’s a warning.” With a smile in his voice, Sam said, “Expect to hear from me very, very soon.”

“Ta taaaaa,” Ashela chimed before disconnecting him. But she was still trying to recover from the masculine and sexy way he’d called her “baby.” *Wait until I get my hands on that Kyliah!* Ashela thought. *She was toast!*