

Chapter 7

“Keep her infatuation a secret”

It was moving day. While gathering her clothes, Sharon could do nothing but think of Kenny. As much as she cared for Z, lately, she began reconsidering the relationship. The problem was that Z had done nothing wrong. He was a great boyfriend. She recalled when they met. Tiffany had introduced them when she was moving into her apartment building, the very place that she would now occupy. At first, she thought Z and Tiff would be a couple, but Marcus was back on the scene from California and Z seemed to be interested in *her*.

Sharon’s plan was to stop seeing Kenneth socially after dinner the other night, but then he had to go and make sure she got home safely, *and* he offered to help her move. “Who could say no to an extra set of moving hands? Matter of fact, who could say no to a talented artist with smarts and swag?” she asked. Sharon wondered if his plan was to get to know her romantically or if he was just being kind? Whatever it was, it was working. He was someone she was interested in getting to know as *more* than a friend. Not only was she moving to a new location, so was her heart.

Sharon checked the time; he would be arriving soon. She only glanced in the mirror; thought she would let Kenneth see

her in all her naturalness. She kept on her sweats, left her hair in a ponytail and didn't apply cosmetics.

When he arrived, he came ready to work, as if he were one of the moving guys. He instantly took leather gloves from his back pocket and started to put them on.

"Thank you for coming, can I get you anything," she asked.

"No, I'm cool," he said and grabbed a box marked kitchen.

"You know I wasn't expecting you to help me. I told you I had movers coming," Sharon reminded.

"And by my watch, it seems they're late. I'll start taking these boxes downstairs," he said. He was all business. Kenneth was in jeans, work boots and a t-shirt with the sleeves cut off. Sharon had no idea of the rippling muscles hidden under his sports jacket.

"Okay, I'll just finish getting my clothes and shoes," she said.

"In that case, we might be here all day," he said.

"What are you trying to say?"

"Why do women need 20 pairs of black shoes?" Kenneth asked.

"Different shoes go with different outfits; and black happens to be my favorite color," she said.

"Okay," he said, as if he didn't buy her rationale.

When Kenneth came back upstairs, Sharon was ready to hand off her bagged clothes on hangers. "These go in my car," she said and handed him her car keys.

"Wait, hold up." He looked at his watch again. "Give me the number to the movers," he asked.

Sharon draped her clothes over the couch and gave him the card.

“Hi, this is Mr. Mueller calling regarding a moving service appointment that was supposed to start 30 minutes ago.” Kenneth gave the address. “The nature of my call is that they’re late,” he said in an aggressive tone. “Well, a courtesy call would have been the professional way to handle it,” he said into his phone. “Okay, I understand. I’d like you to knock the first hour off our bill for the inconvenience.”

“What did they say?” Sharon asked.

“They should be pulling up any minute, they had a flat tire,” he relayed.

“Oh, I suppose you feel a little bad for going off on them?”

“No, I don’t. It would have been different had they called and let us know what was up. The way I see it, they didn’t respect our time, which is why I had to go there,” he said.

“Well, calm down, dude. We’ll get to the apartment in plenty of time. I just need to get my stuff over there; I can take my time unpacking.”

“I hope you don’t think I was mean; just direct about the situation,” he said, his tone had calmed.

“So, I guess I can assume being late is one of your pet peeves?”

“Definitely.”

When the movers came up, Kenneth was large and in charge. He directed the move as if he was the foreman. “Be careful with that,” he said. “Watch that corner,” he reminded. “Where are the clothes racks?” he asked one of the movers.

“She didn’t request racks.”

“Didn’t she tell you she was moving a one-bedroom apartment?”

“Yes,” the mover said.

“So, didn’t you think she would have clothes?” Kenneth asked.

“Hey, I didn’t take the order, I just move the stuff,” the mover said.

“Do you have racks on the truck?”

“Yeah, we have them, but it’s extra.”

“Man go get the racks,” Kenneth said. “We’re going to need them to stay with our time schedule since you guys were late.”

Kenneth turned to Sharon, “If you want to go ahead and take the stuff in your car to apartment, you can. I got this over here,” he said.

Sharon agreed. His take charge attitude was unexpected, but she could not lie, she liked it. Z was too passive; she had never seen him raise his voice; everything was easy going with him. Z would have handled the movers in an entirely different way, but he still would have gotten it done. She saw a distinct difference in their personalities. It was what she needed to make comparisons and choose based on preference. She would keep her infatuation with Kenneth a secret, she knew that no one would understand what she was trying to accomplish.

A couple of hours had passed, and Kenneth and the movers still had not arrived at her new place. While she waited, she decided to call Z. She wanted him to know everything was taken

care of *and* she wanted to make sure he didn't call while Kenneth was there.

"How much did they charge you?" Z asked.

"\$525," she told. They continued to talk and then she heard a ping on her phone; Z had Zelled the money.

"I told you it wasn't necessary!"

"Your move was my responsibility. I took care of it," he said.

Suddenly Sharon felt a lump in her throat. Any other time she would have appreciated the help, but instead of feeling grateful, she felt guilty. It wasn't unusual for Z to buy her things, but this was different, he sent over five-hundred dollars like it was nothing. Her guilt was mounting regarding Kenneth, who she could see pulling up to the apartment with the movers closely following.

"Thank you, Z, but I need to get off the phone. The movers just got here. I should get out there," she said. "I'll see you when you get back tomorrow."

"Okay. Love you, boo."

She paused. "Love you too."

Sharon had already showered, let her hair down, sprayed *Juicy Couture* and ordered food. She even set up a table on the biggest box draped with a tablecloth and she used the dishes Tiff left instead of paper plates. She was grateful for all the help and wanted to show her appreciation, she reasoned. "Had she done too much?" she asked.

Kenneth knew he had made an impression. Sharon looked good, was scented with perfume and he smelled food. "You've been busy," he said matter-of-factly.

“Yeah, I thought you’d be hungry,” she said.

“And you thought I’d want to see you looking fine and smelling good too.”

“Oh, you thought...no, I had to get ready, remember I have a showing tonight.”

“Okay, if you don’t want to admit you did all this for me, then I’m okay with that. I just thought you liked keeping it real,” he said. “Can I wash up in the bathroom?”

“Sure, it’s down the hall.” He had called her out on what was so obvious. Yes, she had gone too far. She could have kicked herself for putting herself out there like that. Treating him like he was her man. “Where are the moving guys?” she called to him.

“They said you only paid for them to load and bring your stuff here. I didn’t know what the deal was,” he said coming out of the restroom drying his hands with a paper towel.

“They’re supposed to bring everything in!” she said, obviously upset. “So, they just left the truck? How did they leave?”

“One of them followed me in his car,” Kenneth said.

“This is crazy if that’s what I wanted I could have rented a U-Haul. I need to call them back!” Now she was really frustrated.

“Don’t worry. I’ll call them.”

“I can handle it myself,” she said, implying he was wrong for letting them leave. Sharon retrieved her phone from her back pocket. After a conversation with the mover’s office, she learned that the money she paid, rather Z paid, only covered loading and

moving to the location, not moving her things in. The company was scheduled to pick up the truck in 24 hours. Disappointed, she checked Google to see if she could hire someone to bring her stuff upstairs. “It seems that every company I called does the entire job, not finishing what someone else started.” Sharon was upset.

“I think we can move the stuff ourselves. The biggest thing is the couch. Good thing your sister left the appliances here,” Kenneth said. “But you’ll need to change clothes.”

“Okay.”

“But, after lunch. What we got?” he asked.

“Soul food. Help yourself.”

“It looks good. Aren’t you going to join me?” he asked.

“I’ll be over in a minute,” she said, still brooding.

“Do me a favor, please. Sit down, eat your macaroni, we got this,” he assured.

She did as instructed.

When she was sitting comfortably, he said, “Now, let’s talk about what’s really bothering you.”

She felt her heart began to pound. Was he really going to make her admit that she was feeling him *while* she was in a relationship? “What do you mean?” she asked.

“Sharon, I don’t like mind games. I keep it one hundred. Talk to me, what’s the real problem?”

She swallowed and put her fork down. “Okay, I am struggling with something.”

“Go on,” he encouraged as he bit into baked chicken.

“I, I, like you a lot, and you know, Z and I, well, we are a thing, and I just feel confused right now. I don’t understand how I could be thinking about you, while I have him. And don’t get me wrong, I love Z. He’s the only boyfriend I’ve had and I, I...”

“Take your time. You can talk to me.”

“I feel guilty for being your friend, for wanting to get to know you better, knowing he would not approve. I feel as though I have crossed the good-girlfriend line and I really don’t know what to do,” she admitted.

“Well, first of all, I’m glad you decided to be honest with me; that’s another one of my pet peeves. You say you love him, but is it true love or is it the idea that he was your first and he’s all you’ve known?” Kenneth asked.

“I’m sure that plays a big part. I’ve thought about moving on, even before you, but I just can’t bear hurting him. I mean, it’s not like we are having any problems. If I broke it off, it would be out of the blue without provocation.”

“No, that’s not true. The relationship has become stagnant, right?”

“Sort of. But, telling him I want to explore my options is really saying I don’t want to be with him anymore.”

“You don’t? Why is it so hard for you to own your truth?”

Sharon could not answer that question.

“You are a young woman. You haven’t even begun to experience all that life and relationships have to offer.”

“The other thing is that I don’t know you well enough to risk my relationship with Z...you said be honest.”

“I did and you have a point. And, if I’m being honest, if you were my girl, I would not want you to be having this conversation with another man while you’re deciding on whether to keep me or cut me loose. No man wants to feel that his woman isn’t all in. My best advice would be to chill on our friendship until you know for sure that you’re ready to move on,” Kenneth said.

“Maybe I’m just thinking the grass is greener on the other side and should probably keep what I have,” she said.

“Are you telling me that you are willing to spend the rest of your life with this man because he was your first?”

“Wait, when you say first, I hope we are talking about the same thing here. He is my first *boyfriend*, not my first *lover*,” Sharon said.

“So, there were others?”

“No! Just the opposite, there have been no lovers,” she said thinking she gave up way too much information.

“Oh, I see.”

She thought she caught a sparkle in Kenneth’s eye realizing that she was pure.

“He must be a real good dude. Most men would have gotten to you by now. How long have you dated?”

“Three years.”

“Wow...that’s heavy. I give bro props on that,” he said and then stuffed cornbread in his mouth.

“Now you see why I can’t just dump him. Besides, I don’t think I would find another man patient enough to wait for marriage?”

“Oh, you don’t think I’m that type?”

“Since we’re being honest, no. Well, you might be the type, but the attraction is so strong; I might want to throw all my morals out the window,” she said with a giggle.

He smiled, was flattered. “I wouldn’t let you do that.”

They locked eyes. Chills ran through her body. “Look at the time, we better finish lunch so we can get my stuff off the truck,” she said.

“What happened to your honesty?” he asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Getting your stuff is not why you ended this special moment. You didn’t want to allow yourself to feel your true emotions and I understand that with the way things are, I just want you to be true to yourself.”

“And you know why I can’t, Kenny!”

“Oh, that’s cute,” he said, referring to how she addressed him. He got up from the box table. “You’re right, I’m going to start on the truck. I told you I have that thing at 6:00. I need to get back in time to get cleaned up and take a nap.”

“Okay, I’ll get changed.”

“Maybe you should get someone else to teach the art lessons to the kids, under the circumstances, you know,” he said.

She was quiet.

After they had gotten the last of her furnishings from the truck, they rested side by side on her red couch. “Whew, that was work!” Sharon said.

“It was nothing,” he said.

“Easy for you to say with all those muscles.”

He didn't comment on her compliment, just smiled and then drank the last of his water. She watched as he chugalugged the water, like an athlete who had just won a sporting event. Then he grabbed his keys and headed for the door. She walked him there.

"I'll see you around," he said, looking deeply into her eyes, challenging her to keep their gaze. He wanted her to pick him over Z and in that moment, she did. Waves of tingles rushed through her body. They were vulnerable in the moment, without words, deciding if they would move past the friendship zone. And then a knock on the door broke their concentration.

Sharon peeped through the door hole with wide eyes, tried to compose herself.

"Open up, babe," Z said, still knocking.

Kenneth nodded, giving her permission to let Z in. When she opened the door, Kenneth was standing right behind her.

"Hi babe, what a surprise!" she said nervously. "Z this is Kenneth, I think I told you about him, the artist I hired at *The Gallery*."

"I don't recall. What's up?" Z said.

"How you doing?" Kenneth replied.

"No, I mean, what's up, on the real? What you doing here?"

"I was helping your lady move, since *you* weren't here," Kenneth said.

"What?" Z moved toward Kenneth.

Kenneth stepped forward too, "You need to stand down, big guy," he showed no fear. He just had a two-hour warm up, adrenaline was still coursing through his veins.

“Wait, wait, hold up, ain’t nothing happened here Z, just calm down. Like he said, he helped me move in, that’s it, that’s all. He was just leaving, so let him pass Z,” Sharon instructed.

The men stared each other down and sized one another up. “Well, come on out then,” Z demanded.

“Thanks again, Kenneth,” Sharon said as they were parting ways.

Without a word, Kenneth slowly passed Z, prepared to go to blows if necessary.

Z watched as his rival drove away before he went into the apartment. When he stepped in, he observed the layout and said, “So, I see y’all had a nice lunch and everything; didn’t seem like no moving man to me!”

“I ordered lunch because he did all that work for free. I had to feed him,” Sharon defended.

“You didn’t have to. What happened to the movers I paid for?”

“They only drove the stuff here. For all that money you paid, I thought they would have at least unloaded.”

“So, he just happened to be passing by and decided to help? I mean when did y’all come up with this plan?”

“The other day.”

“Alright, so you neglected to tell me this when I asked you who was helping, am I right?”

Sharon was shaking from nervousness. “I didn’t say anything because I didn’t want to have to deal with this right here.”

“No, you didn’t tell me because you and dude got something going, that’s why you lied to me.”

“I didn’t lie to you.”

“Omission is lying Sharon and you know it. Look at you, got your face all painted and smelling good on moving day for another man?”

“You are the one who lied. You said you would be back tomorrow. I know you didn’t fly here since we last spoke!”

“To surprise you. But I guess I’m the one who got the surprise. You know what, I’m outta here.”

“Please, don’t leave, Z,” Sharon pleaded. “This is just a misunderstanding.”

“You right about that, cause I don’t understand how you could do me like this.”

“I didn’t do anything, I swear. We only talked and moved my stuff.”

“What did y’all talk about?” he inquired.

“Just things...”

“Like what? Tell me?”

“You know what, I don’t like being interrogated, you act like you don’t trust me,” Sharon said.

“You just avoided a simple question. That tells me a lot. I’m done!” He left the apartment in a huff and slammed the door behind him.

Tears began to flow. She got busted and she knew it. She had never seen Z man-up the way he did. She thought he was a softie, but he was willing to go to battle for her. First, he paid the cost to be the boss and then he tried to defend her honor. Z showed a

side that she had never seen and now it was too late. Kenneth wasn't a chump either. Z may have been bigger, but he was all muscles and looked as if he knew what to do with them. He made her tell the truth about her feelings, he listened, he understood and gave good advice. Most of all, he kept it real.

Sharon found the box of toiletries and wiped her nose. Her heart was beating right through her chest. She messed up. She was so upset that she could not happily organize her new place and then she got a text from Kenneth.

Everything cool over there?

Z left

You alright?

Heck no!

Anything I can do?

Nope. Gotta deal on my own. I think he broke up with me.

You think?

I'm sure. I'll TTYL

K 😞

She was glad to know Kenneth was concerned about her. He didn't know Z and wanted to make sure he hadn't gone crazy on her. He scored a point for that.

"Hey." Sharon had called her sister.

"Hey yourself, what's up?"

"Z just broke up with me, Tiff," she said with sniffles.

"What happened?" she was concerned.

"I had a guy friend over here helping me move in because Z was out of town and then he showed up here just when the guy

was leaving and blew up. They had words and then my friend left. We argued afterward and then Z broke it off,” Sharon told.

“Who is the guy?”

“An artist that teaches the kids at the gallery.”

“Did you too have anything romantic going?”

“No, not really, I mean we like each other, but we’ve never done anything, not even a kiss.”

“You put yourself in a dangerous situation, Sharon. If you know you have feelings, why would you take the chance of being alone together? Z is a good guy and now you’ve hurt him by cheating on him,” Tiffany said.

“How is that cheating? We didn’t do anything!” Sharon defended.

“Oh, yes you did. The Bible says if it’s in your heart to do that thing, you have already done it.”

“I didn’t call for a lecture, Tiff.”

“No, you called for sympathy and you won’t get it from me. Z was a decent human being; he didn’t deserve to find out you were digging on somebody else that way. You should have been honest and told him.”

“And risk losing him without even knowing if Kenneth is right for me?” Sharon said.

“So, you were just going to play him until you made up your mind.”

“I’m not married to Z. I have the right to date if I want to. Even Mom used to say we should date to see who is right for us. Just because you and Marie married the first man that came along doesn’t mean I should!”

“Oh, so tell me how you really feel,” Tiffany said.

“That didn’t come out right.”

“You said exactly what was on your mind. And for your information, Marie and I were loyal to the ones we loved. We didn’t play them by shopping around like they were items instead of people!”

“I can’t talk to you right now,” Sharon said and disconnected the line from her sister. More tears flowed. She was hurting, feeling guilty and misunderstood.

Another text came through...*You are invited to witness the nuptials between Janet Johnson and Peter Deeds*...the message went on with the date, time and the where-abouts. It also said the reception would be at their new home with the address. She just received a message about love and happiness when her love and happiness had just walked out the door. She needed to pull herself together, she had not argued with her sister in years and it was a first with Z.

Time was flying and Sharon needed to get ready for *The Gallery*. She thought of calling Marie to get her take on the situation but decided to pray instead. She asked the Lord to forgive her for hurting Z, for insulting her sister, and for lusting after Kenneth. Even though she had impure thoughts, she didn’t think wanting to get to know him better was a bad thing. Sure, she could have talked it over with Z, told him what was in her heart. But deep down, she knew none of it mattered, because after three years, he was not her soul