

An Excerpt  
from

It's Simple

If, I, b, j, e

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To say Tia was nervous was an understatement. Thankfully, Gabriella was no longer focusing on her, but staring at the television screen as intently as she was. There he was. Hair pulled back in a ponytail, waving to a fan in the stands. Chase was known for being gracious to his fans, all of them, almost to a fault ... almost.

She noticed the smirk on his face as he turned around to say something to his teammates. Knowing Chase, he made some smart-alecky comment. Tia laughed, imagining it to be a mix of wit and arrogance. She'd find out later exactly what was said, but for now she settled in to enjoy the game with Gabriella.

After the Lakers' blowout victory, the girls immediately called it a night. Those west coast games started too darn late for an east coaster to watch. After hugging Gabriella and watching her walk off to the guest room, Tia turned off the lights and headed to her bedroom. She stopped at her window and gazed out at the New York City skyline. *I'm missing you something wicked*, she thought.

Pulling back the covers and snuggling into bed, Tia thought about what Gabriella had asked her earlier, wanting to know what happened during the week of her wedding and why she was so reluctant to share any information? *Oh Ella, if you only knew. Some things are better left between the two who share the moments ...*

She had heard him before she saw him.

"Maddison!"

"Daniels!"

Waiting for Tia in the baggage claim area fresh off her flight from Connecticut was the man who made her smile with the least amount of effort. Taking him in, Tia checked him out as she approached him. No longer was the signature hairstyle the free flowing curls he had worn in high school. He had changed his appearance by electing to wear his mane in a ponytail and sporting a goatee. Facial hair definitely suited him, made him appear rough and rugged.

Rocking a bluish grey Nike tracksuit with matching kicks, it appeared as if he came dressed for practice and not the rehearsal dinner scheduled for later that evening.

They embraced and, as always, their hugs left both wanting more.

“How was your flight?” Chase asked.

“Uneventful. Exactly how I like it.”

“You look ...”

Chase pulled back, sizing up Tia through narrowed eyes as he tried to find the right word to describe what he was thinking.

Decked out in a cream pantsuit, vintage studs, her hair in a playfully tossed bun, Tia looked good and knew it.

“You look like ...,” Chase tilted his head to the side. Judging from the smirk that played across his mouth, he found it.

Tia pursed her lips and braced herself for what would come next.

“A Kit Kat,” he finally said while staring at her mouth, briefly biting his bottom lip. “I wanna eat you like a cookie when I see you walk.” Chase rapped out the lyrics to an old LL Cool J jam.

Tia smiled and shook her head as he referred to her as his favorite candy bar. “You never stop, do you?” she asked.

“Never,” he answered with a hint of mischief beneath the single word response. “How about you break me off a piece?”

She laughed, still shaking her head. “Well, you, my friend, look like you’ve been hitting the gym regularly.”

“Yeah. Half of it is for remaining fit and the other is from,” he paused for the briefest of moments before adding, “necessity.”

Grabbing one of her three suitcases from the conveyor belt, Tia glanced over at Chase, who was watching another one as it travelled farther away from them on the baggage carousel.

“Necessity?” she asked, only slightly worried. Funny, he had never mentioned anything being physically wrong with him during any of their chats.

This had been their first physical encounter since they said their goodbyes and headed off to college almost two summers ago, agreeing to downgrade their

relationship to best friend status. However, weekly phone conversations and daily text messages became a part of their normal routine. Severing all ties with each other due to distance seemed silly and like best friends do, they shared everything.

“Yeah. Void filled,” he said, smiling. Implication received loud and clear.

“So what’s on the agenda?” Tia asked. She refused to engage him in this game as they began making their way to his car.

“For you and me?”

“Daniels,” she stressed.

“Maddison,” he countered.

“The wedding. The reason we’re here. That agenda.”

“Too much, if you ask me,” Chase grunted while hoisting Tia’s suitcases into the trunk of his black coupé. “If I didn’t know any better, I would say these suitcases belonged to Shennel.”

“Daniels, not funny,” she responded, placing her hands on her hips for effect. Chase comparing her to their high-school friend, affectionately dubbed the spoiled, high-maintenance drama diva was a low blow and a ridiculously long stretch from the truth. “I only packed the essentials. Nothing else.”

“Essentials, huh?” Brushing past her before opening the passenger door, he leaned in and whispered, “Then you didn’t need to pack anything, did you?”

*So you want to play, Daniels?* Tia thought.

The game was officially on. Tia wasn’t usually one to play games, but in this moment she felt wickedly playful. She felt the sudden urge to let Chase know just what he was working with. Perhaps he had forgotten. A little reminder might do him some good.

Tia’s 5’3” petite form was a sight to behold from any angle; front, side, back and yes, even from below or above. She was blessed with a voluptuous body, full lips and sass that most women would go into debt to acquire. Difference between them and her, she was the real thing. Tia was also the type of woman who was not overly desirous of designer fashions, yet was known to rock any article of clothing and make it look like a Roberto Cavalli original. It was simple really; clothes don’t make the woman, the woman makes the clothes.

Knowing the effect her smile had on him, Tia cast a seductive one his way. Her caramel complexion shone beautifully under the setting New Mexico sun and

her almond shaped brown eyes twinkled with elements of allure. Although she was indeed eye candy for men and women alike, Tia understood her sexiness was a deadly combination of both beauty and intellect. The impact was stinging.

Walking towards the car door slowly and deliberately, with just the right amount of bounce, she gazed up and locked eyes with Chase. Slowly she licked her lips as he dared her to continue this dance through narrowed eyes. Tia tilted her head back a little and laughed. Her version of laughter anyway, before descending inside the cavity of the car and pulling the door shut. Tia smiled, recalling the effect that her short sashay had on him, and wondering just what he was thinking.

Watching Tia walk towards him, Chase thought, *I find myself completely unable to focus on anything but her. It's like no time has passed and yet too much has. How is it possible that she can still affect me so deeply?* A quick reel of their history played before him and he knew why. He never met another girl like her; unique and so amazing in every way.

As Chase walked around the front of the car, he peered at Tia while putting on his shades. And all Tia could think was, *Lord Jesus help me.*