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Jaw Jackin'

*"You ain't saying nothin' homie/
You ain't fresh azimiz."*

-LIL' BOW WOW

On our way back to Compton Sunday evening, my mom and I have a chance to talk about my date with Jeremy. I'm glad too because I've been itching to tell someone about it and Nellie and Mickey aren't answering their phones.

"So, how was the party last night?" my mom asks as we merge from the 105 freeway to the 91. She drives like a race car driver in her little Mazda. I hope she teaches me how to drive before my test at the DMV in a couple of months. If I play it right, I can have my license by Thanksgiving. I'm saving up for a car, even though my dad promised he'd help me to get one when the time comes. But, I don't know about trusting him to get the kind of car I need. That's why I put a small portion of my paycheck away in the bank every month. But I will have to remember to ask my dad about my car situation next weekend when I see him.

"We didn't actually make it to the party. We ended up having coffee and hangin' out by the beach with some of his friends instead," I say.

"Really? And that was okay with you?"

"It was better than okay. I had enough drama at school all week long. I didn't need any more from the same haters while trying to get to know Jeremy. I didn't expect him to be

such a gentleman. But last night gave me a good insight into his character. And, so far so good,” I say, smiling like the Kool-Aid man. “When he dropped me off last night, he didn’t even attempt to kiss me or feel me up. “Is that right,” my mom says, not completely convinced of Jeremy’s chivalry.

“Yes, it is. He just walked me up the stairs and gave me a big hug,” I say, defending my man.

“A gentleman, huh,” my mom says, glancing at me from the corner of her eye and giving a sly smile. “What’s your definition of a gentleman?”

“Well, someone who opens the door for me, gives me compliments, and who doesn’t pressure me about sex from jump street,” I answer, realizing I’m comparing Jeremy to KJ. Not that KJ didn’t open a door for me once or twice. But, being complimentary ain’t his thang, and neither is waiting for the cookies. KJ tried to jump my bones the first time we kicked it during summer school and would do it now, if he had the chance.

“Well, men who act the gentleman can also be control freaks. Your father was a gentleman, and look at us now,” she says as we exit onto Central Boulevard, only a few minutes away from Mama’s house. “Jeremy’s nothing like my dad,” I say, hurt my mom would even make such a comparison after all the mess my dad put her through. “All I’m saying is be careful, Jayd. Take your time with this one and make sure he stays a gentleman. Once you give up your opinion, cookies, or whatever else they can take, all the gentleman shit goes out the door.”

When I get home, Mama and Daddy’s yelling can be heard all the way outside. They have the best fights. Mama gets to talking to Daddy while he gets dressed to go out with the church members, all of whom happen to be women, for Sunday night dinner. Mama knows more than dinner’s going

on and always tries to get him to tell the truth.

“Look, Lynn Mae, I ain’t got to lie to you. I’m a grown man. Good, Christian, and God-fearing, unlike yourself. If you want to come to dinner, come. You’re always welcome back in the church,” Daddy says, knowing good and well Mama ain’t going nowhere near them church folks.

“You’re such a lying ass. You don’t even know when you’re telling a lie anymore. Church dinner my ass. Who is it this time, huh, Ray? One of them little young heffas, or did you have a taste for some old cat tonight?” Mama can get raw when she’s pushed.

“If I wanted some old cat, I’d stay home.” And that was checkmate. Daddy left, and Mama went outside to work in her spirit room. She said she was working on a potion for one of her clients, but I think she was working on one to use on Daddy.

After the house drama, I don’t bother telling Mama about my in-house suspension tomorrow. I’m sure they’ll send a letter home tomorrow, on which I’ll promptly forge my mom’s signature and turn back in Tuesday morning. They never check, and my mom doesn’t want to be bothered with menial stuff like that. I’m not looking forward to suspension, but I am looking forward to seeing Jeremy tomorrow. I’m still buzzing from our date last night. I didn’t get home until 2 A.M. and barely stayed awake at work. All I want to do now is sleep and hope tomorrow goes by fast.

When I get to campus, I immediately report to the main office to serve my time. Nellie and Mickey are waiting for me by the principal’s office, which is next to the conference room. I’ve never been suspended before, so I don’t really know how this works. But, Mickey was suspended last year for fighting Misty, so she knows the ropes.

I’m still pissed KJ didn’t get in-house with us. Being an

athlete has too many perks. And, not to mention he's still harassing me. He's texted me three times already this morning and left me several messages last night, mostly wanting to know where I was Saturday night and if I was hangin' out alone. He's on my jock hard now, just like he should be. I feel like I'm serving time for my man while he's on vacation with another woman. This ain't my ideal romantic situation, and KJ's got his nerve trying to get back with me now.

"Hey, y'all," I say, trying to sound chipper, even though I'm really not looking forward to this part of my day. "Ready for Alcatraz?"

"Jayd, it's not that bad," Mickey says as she and Nellie take a seat on the benches outside the principal's office. I walk up to Mrs. Cole's desk and lean up against the side, waiting for her to return and lead us to the conference room.

"Speak for yourself, Mickey," Nellie says, flipping her perfectly straightened hair over her shoulders and rolling her eyes in disgust. "I'm way too cute to be on lockdown like some criminal. I have a reputation to uphold."

"You have a reputation of being a tight-ass, and I doubt it'll be tarnished by this little episode," Mickey retorts. "Besides, this might be good for your reputation. Everybody needs a little bad girl in them, right, Jayd?"

"I have enough bad girl in me. I could do without the school's intervention," I say, anxiously eyeing the busy office. The warning bell just rang, and students and teachers alike are buzzing around hurrying off to class.

"We missed you at the party," Nellie says, sounding disappointed. "We dressed alike and everything. All eyes were on the two cute Black girls when there should have been three." Oh, here we go again. This girl gets salty at the drop of a dime. But, I know it's all in love.

"Nellie, you know I wouldn't have missed the party if it was in my control. Also, I had enough of Misty and KJ during

the week. I really didn't want to deal with their energy on the weekend too," I say. I hope she understands my decision. "I would have been cool with you ditching me to get to know a guy who could be your soul mate." I'm still high off Jeremy from Saturday night. I can only imagine how our first kiss is going to feel.

"Energy, soul mate? What the hell happened to you on Saturday, Jayd?" Mickey asks, mocking my vibe.

"So you did get my messages," I say, nudging her in the shoulder with my elbow. "Why you didn't call me back? I'm crushed."

"Oh, shut up, girl. You know you couldn't care less about me returning your call. We had to recuperate from Saturday night," she says, returning my nudge.

"Yeah, girl, it was heavy up in Byron's house. Shrimp, caviar, chocolate soufflé, you name it. I had niggeritis all day Sunday." Mickey is crazy.

"I'm quite sure that's politically incorrect," Nellie says, looking offended.

"Whatever. You know I'm right," Mickey says, rolling her eyes at Nellie. "So, Jayd, how's the White boy?"

"He's real cool," I say, ready to drop the details of our date. But the killjoy arrives right on cue. I bet she was listening to our entire conversation on the low.

"What's up?" Misty says as she enters through the double doors connecting the main hall to the office. No this girl isn't talking to us after all the shit she's put us through in only the first week of school.

"Did you hear something?" Mickey says, looking around the office as if she doesn't know it's Misty talking.

"No, I didn't," Nellie responds, playing along. "I thought I heard a rat, but it couldn't have been. The administration would send an exterminator immediately if there were any pest control problems on campus."

“Not if the pest’s mother worked here,” Mickey says with a giggle. She and Nellie can be so rude sometimes. But, I do agree. The school would be better off without Misty around.

“Again, I try to be friendly and this is how I’m treated,” Misty says, feigning hurt. She could really care less if Mickey or Nellie speak to her; she just gets pleasure out of their reactions. “Cat got your tongue, Jayd,” she says, noting my silence.

“I have nothing to say to you, Misty.”

She shoots me a look of pure hatred. I wish she would say something slick to me, ’cause this morning I’m not in the mood and I will snap back at her.

“If Mrs. Cole asks, tell her I went to the ladies’ room,” Misty says, walking back through the doors leading to the main hall.

“That bitch has got some nerve, greeting us like we’re homies. She’s lucky we ain’t in Compton right about now because I’d whip her ass,” Mickey says.

“Good morning, ladies,” Mrs. Cole says as she walks toward her desk from the principal’s office carrying two DVDs and a set of keys. “Nellie and Mickey, you’ll be in the small conference room adjacent to the principal’s office. Misty and Jayd will be in the large conference room, next to me.” How Misty and I got placed in the same room for in-house suspension is beyond me. Doesn’t she know she’s the reason the fight happened in the first place?

“Can I please be in the same room with Nellie and Mickey?” I ask in my nicest voice possible. I’m liable to smack Misty eventually, and that will only get me into more trouble.

“I’m afraid not, Miss Jackson. Rules are rules. Where is Misty anyway? The bell rang five minutes ago,” Mrs. Cole says as she walks toward the small conference room and unlocks the door to let Nellie and Mickey in. Not one of us answers.

“That girl’s habitually late,” Mrs. Cole says in response to our silence. “You girls are on first lunch; Jayd and Misty will be on second.” Damn. I don’t even get to talk to my girls at lunch? This is punishment for real. “Jayd, why don’t you go into the large conference room; the door’s already open. I’ll be there in a second.”

“See you later, Jayd,” Nellie says as she follows Mrs. Cole into the small conference room.

“Yeah, you and Misty have fun,” Mickey says sarcastically.

The conference room reminds me of the one on *The Apprentice*. There’s a large, marble table in the center and ten plush leather chairs around it, which take up the majority of the space. At the head of the room is a large white board, and a television and DVD player stand in the corner. There’s a large window on the other side of the room, where there’s also a sink and small refrigerator.

I choose a seat at the far end of the table, farthest from the door. I can’t believe my girls get to kick it with each other all day while I have to sit in this room with my nemesis. What did I do to deserve this? Speak of the devil, there’s Misty’s loud voice announcing her return. As she enters the room, the scent of her cheap perfume fills the space, nearly choking me.

“Damn, Misty. What are you trying to cover up with all that perfume?”

“Don’t hate. You’re just pissed because your precious reputation has been tainted by this little visit,” she says as she seats her wide behind into the chair across the table from me.

“Excuse me, ladies. There’s no talking. This is suspension, not vacation,” Mrs. Cole says as she enters the room to cue the DVD player to our disciplinary video. “This three-hour presentation will show you the consequences of being a problematic student. After the video, you will be excused to

lunch. When you return, you must complete your regular class work and a multiple choice quiz about the video before leaving for the day.”

“A quiz? I thought this was suspension, not an extra class,” Misty says. Mrs. Cole makes an ugly face at Misty. Not even five minutes and already Misty has managed to irritate her.

“Again, this isn’t a vacation, Miss Truewell,” Mrs. Cole says. “And, being an office aide, you should really know better than to be in this predicament in the first place. I’ll have to talk to your mother about your status when she gets here,” she says, looking at the clock on the wall. Misty’s mom is late, as usual. “Mr. Adelezi will be in to talk to you girls about the incident later. Now, again, there’s absolutely no talking. If I hear any voices, we’ll have to extend the suspension for another day.”

I don’t know about Misty, but I’d rather be in class than sitting in the office all day. I want to see Jeremy and talk to my girls. At least they let us out for lunch. I’ll just have to catch up with him then.

“So, Jayd, we missed you at the party Saturday night. Your girls were there. Where were you?” Misty asks, ignoring Mrs. Cole’s warning. Does she listen to anyone?

“Misty, haven’t you caused enough trouble? Do you really want to be in here for another day?” I whisper, trying not to get caught talking. Mrs. Cole left the door cracked, and I don’t want her to hear my voice. If anyone gets caught jaw jackin’, it should be Misty.

“Mrs. Cole can’t hear us. She keeps that stupid radio on all day long, listening to boring classical music. So, we can catch up, like old friends.” Misty must be on something if she thinks I’m going to confide in her.

“Misty, I’m not interested in catching up with you about anything,” I say, reaching into my backpack to retrieve my notebook and pen.

“Ah, come on, Jayd. You can tell me all about your little date with Jeremy,” she says, smiling like she knows something, but she doesn’t. This is how she gets her information—by tricking her subjects into divulging their info because they think she already knows, but not me. I know her too well.

“Shut up, Misty, and watch the movie. I’ve really had it with you. First, you start all this BS with Trecee, and then you have the nerve to call me and apologize like we’re in kindergarten. Please know I want to kick your ass, but you’re not worth it. So, don’t mistake my calm for forgiveness because there’s none where you’re concerned.”

Misty looks genuinely hurt, which makes me feel a little bad, but not much. She deserves all the lip I can give her under the circumstances.

“Well damn, Jayd, a sistah can’t make a mistake?” she says as she reaches into her backpack sitting in the seat next to her.

“Yes, a sistah can. But you sure as hell ain’t a sistah of mine. And for the record, I’ve forgiven you several times only for you to repeatedly stab me in the back. No more chances for you to hurt me, Misty. From now on, you don’t exist to me.”

“Are you sure, Jayd? I’m pretty hard to ignore,” she says, smiling. That’s probably the truest statement she’s ever made. Her presence is so powerful there should be a hurricane named after her.

“Ladies, I said no talking,” Mrs. Cole says from her desk. “Not another peep, you two.” And, with that last warning, Misty and I watch the DVD in silence.

When the bell rings for second lunch, Misty rushes out before I even have a chance to get my backpack closed. I guess she can’t wait to get to South Central’s area in the quad and

hear or spread the latest gossip, whatever that may be. I haven't seen Jeremy all day, and I'm jonesing for a hug. I grab my backpack and walk through the main hall doorway to find him waiting by the entrance, ready to satisfy my craving.

"How's my little jailbird?" he says, taking my backpack from my shoulder and slipping it onto his before hugging me. God, his arms feel good around my body, and he smells so sweet.

"That's not funny. It's boring as hell sitting in there with Misty all day. At least I don't have to talk to her. But the movie we're being forced to watch is so slow," I say as we walk arm in arm down the crowded hall toward the quad.

"Yeah, the movie's totally outdated," he says like an expert critic.

"How many times have you seen it?" I ask.

"Oh, enough to know it doesn't work. Hungry?" he asks as we approach the snack stand. I'm really hungry, especially since we weren't allowed outside for break and I never bring a snack to school.

"Starved. What's on the menu today?" Before he can answer, I notice Misty's across the yard pointing and staring at me. She's already made up some story to spread since I wouldn't tell her anything about our date, I'm sure. Being alone in a room with her all day and not being able to punch her is pure torture.

"Well, there's pizza, corn dogs and French fries. The usual. Interested?" Jeremy asks, totally oblivious to the looming drama across the yard. Misty has KJ, Del, C Money, Tony, and Shae looking our way. But I'm not going to let her get to me.

"I'll have a slice of pizza. What are you having?"

"I'm having three of the same," he says. "I'll get our food. Why don't you grab us a bench before they're all gone." Jeremy walks over to the long line, leaving me to seethe alone. I wonder what BS Misty's spreading now. That girl can

talk up a storm. I wish I could vibe with Nellie and Mickey right about now. I'll have to catch them right after school before I catch the bus home and ask if they know what Misty's up to now.

Lunch with Jeremy was fun, even though Misty and crew watched us the whole time, making up the sound track to my conversation with Jeremy, I'm sure. When I got out of in-house detention, Nellie and Mickey were still in the conference room as the bell rang. I knew they couldn't keep their mouths closed the entire day. I would be in there with them if I had a choice in the matter.

When I get home, Mama and Daddy are both out, although I'm sure not together. My uncles, as usual, are in the streets somewhere and won't be home until well after dark. Jay and Bryan are in their room playing chess, which leaves me to start dinner if I want to eat. I wish Mama was home because I need to talk. I'm so tired all I can think about is finishing my homework and going straight to bed. I guess I'll just have to wait until tomorrow to get advice from Mama. She always knows what to do.