

## Chapter One

### **Grown Folks Business – Chapter One**

“There’s no other way to say this. Sheridan, I’m in love with someone else.”

Quentin’s words made Sheridan pause at the arch that separated the hallway from the kitchen. She glanced at the front door, where she had just kissed their children, Christopher and Tori, good-bye before they rushed to their school vans, eager to meet up with friends they hadn’t seen during the Christmas holiday.

Sheridan stared at her husband before she twisted around to see if there was anyone behind her. Then her eyes rested on the television sitting on the kitchen counter, continuing the search for the source that delivered those words. Surely they hadn’t come from her husband. She moved toward the dining table where Quentin sat with his hands crossed in front of him, his head lowered, and his eyes away from her.

“What did you say?” she asked, feeling as if she’d walked into the middle of a conversation.

With effort, Quentin raised his head. But when he looked at her, his eyes spoke before he did. “I didn’t mean to blurt it out that way,” he continued, and then returned his stare to the table top. “I should have waited, for a better time, a better place. But...I needed to tell you.”

“Quentin,” she started, then paused surprised by her outside steadiness that didn’t match her inside shaking. “What are you talking about?”

“I’ve been trying to find a way to tell you.”

She shook her head, needing to clear all thoughts – anything that could be blocking her – interrupting her brain waves from making a direct connection with her mind. She couldn't be hearing this.

He stood, faced her, and now there was strength behind his eyes. “Sheridan, I don't want to hurt you. I really....”

“Did you say you were in love with someone else?”

His Adam's apple leapt before he nodded. “I didn't want this.” He paused, but his eyes continued talking, begging her for help. When she said nothing, his voice softened. “I don't want to hurt you. I....”

Her mind's cobwebs cleared and his words made a clear path to her consciousness. She held up her hands, stopping him. “You never wanted to hurt me? Oh, yes, you did,” she said, pushing away from him. “What you just said could only hurt.” She took a deep breath. “So, you're in love...with someone else.” She shoved the words through her throat. “When....” She paused, not sure she wanted to ask questions that would provide answers – the facts she wasn't ready to hear. But there was something she had to know.

“Who is she?” Sheridan whipped toward him, her hands contracting into fists. She imagined the fight. How she would beat the woman down. Then turn her rage onto Quentin.

“We should sit down.” Quentin held out his hand to escort her to the table.

She ignored his gesture. “Who is she?”

He hesitated before he returned to where he'd been sitting and wiped his hands together. “First, Sheridan, please know this is not about you. I'm the one at fault.”

Sheridan thought of a million retorts, but she held the curses inside.

Quentin said, “You have no idea how long I’ve wanted to tell you.”

She held up her hand. “How long has this been going on? How long have you been seeing her?”

“It’s not like that. It’s not like I’ve been doing anything behind your back.”

She almost laughed. “Something’s been going on behind my back.”

“I haven’t had an affair, at least, not the way you’re thinking.”

She looked at him as if he were speaking Portuguese. “How many ways are there to think about an affair, Quentin?”

“What I mean is that this is not about sex. That’s why I know it’s real.”

It sounded like double-talk to her. “So let me get this straight.” Sheridan paced across the tile floor. “You’re in love, but you haven’t been having sex. At least not the way I would define it. But you’re in love and you needed to tell me because....” She stopped, wanting him to finish.

“I thought you’d want to know,” he said. “I’ve wanted to be honest with you for so long.”

“Now’s your chance.”

Quentin took a deep breath as if he thought it might be his last. “I wasn’t looking for anyone. I wasn’t sneaking around. This just happened. It was out of my control.”

He paused. “Sheridan, I’ve been fighting feelings for a long time, and I’ve finally faced the truth of what’s been growing inside me. Something I thought was dead is very much alive.”

Her headache was instant and the throbbing squeezed life from her. She wanted to listen, to understand, but only a few of his words pierced through her thoughts.

*What just happened?*

An hour ago, they were having breakfast with their children, talking about Christmas, and New Year's and the days in between. An hour ago, they were the Harts living the normalcy of family.

"I always wanted to be honest about this," he said.

*What's going to happen to us?* her thoughts continued.

"It was not being honest that was destroying me and our life together."

*What's our life going to be like?*

"I was miserable."

*What am I going to do?*

"I tried to break it, deny it. But nothing worked."

"You know what?" Sheridan began. She hadn't heard too many of her husband's words. Her own questions overwhelmed her. "I don't want to hear any more."

Quentin stood as Sheridan rushed by him. "Honey, wait."

His words felt like a punch in her belly. She turned in slow motion. "What did you say?" Before he could answer, she continued, "you have the nerve to call me 'honey'? After just telling me you're in love with another woman, you call me 'honey'?"

"It's not another woman."

"How could you call me 'honey'? What does...." She stopped. Even her heartbeat had ceased.

Finally she took short, slow steps toward the man she'd married seventeen years before. He stood stoically as if he really meant what he'd said.

"What did you say?" The question squeaked from her.

It was the first time he looked straight into her eyes. "I am in love, but not with a woman. I'm in love with a man. I've fallen in love with Jett Jennings."

She wondered if he could hear the rumbling. The rumbling that began in her soles and rushed through her, filling her with the absurdity of it all. The cruelty of the news. The brutality of its suddenness. Sheridan raised her hand, and with the motion she'd practiced for a year in kickboxing, she served Quentin an upper right cut to his chin, then watched him wither to the floor.

She stared for only a moment before she stepped over him and stomped from the room.