

ONE

I FIRST HEARD OF LeShard West through Terrell Bly, a former roommate of my play brother from Atlanta, Ryan Carswell. Terrell had just graduated from Southern Texas A&M. He was riding high on his academic achievement, and he had met the man of his dreams. He wanted me to meet LeShard and give my honest opinion about him.

Terrell had sent me pictures of LeShard. And while they say a picture is worth a thousand words, LeShard's picture did not tell me much other than he wasn't a *mugless-fugless* creation. So Terrell had one point in his piggy bank.

They agreed to come visit me at my home in Atlanta during an extended weekend. I had been milling around my place since returning from church, transforming my place from a messy bachelor's pad to a pleasant meeting place. Not being the most patient person ever known, I became agitated that Terrell and LeShard still were no shows.

"These Negroes better hurry up," I huffed. "I mean, goddamn! How long does it take to drive one hundred fucking miles?" I continued pacing my living room carpet for the next ten minutes or so before I heard the doorbell ringing.

Of all days that I would entertain guests, I was not looking my usual corporate clean cut, button-down self smelling of Platinum Egoiste by Channel, and wearing French cuffs, a monogrammed dress shirt, and matching silk tie. I needed a shave badly, and I wore a Perry Ellis pajama suit that covered me from neck to toe. I was thug-ragged-bandana down and I did not really care if I made a great impression in the looks department.

Rather than rush to the door, I took a casual stroll just for drama's sake. I opened the door in my coolest of movements.

"What's going on, man?" I said, pulling Terrell towards me in an embrace. I did the same thing to LeShard, although not as tight. "What is the real deal?"

Terrell was of average build, maybe five-eight and one hundred and forty pounds. He wore his hair short, and he dressed on the preppy side. It was his way of trying to fit into the mainstream.

"I'm good, nothing to complain about. I'm just glad we made it," Terrell answered. "Hell, I forgot how far it was from your old apartment, and I made a couple of wrong turns."

LeShard, who took a seat in my director's chair next to the kitchen, gave a seductive yet aloof look. He chimed into the conversation, giggling.

"A couple of wrong ones?" he said, rolling his eyes. "Can you say a lot of wrong turns? But, hey, I don't know where I am, so I'm going to be quiet."

Not attempting to take sides, I tipped off into the kitchen and treated them to some southern charm and hospitality. I was quick to warm up some barbecue pork chops with green beans and garlic mashed potatoes and sweet tea.

"Oh LeShard, my bad . . . Let me introduce Ja'Quan Jones to you." He nodded his head, adjusting himself in the chair. I peeped out from the kitchen, telling LeShard that he was welcome to make himself at home.

When I returned with their plates, I got a closer look at Le-

Shard He was definitely easy on the eyes—probably too easy. He stood about five-eleven. He had smooth, bright caramel skin; he had a sparkling white smile and a solid frame which held up those pants well. He also wore a white button-down dress shirt, which I consider a turn-on if worn correctly. The way LeShard's shirt pressed against his frame took me to a deserted island, and I found myself lost in thought for a moment. It was clear he wasn't wearing a t-shirt; I noticed a little mass underneath the thin button-down. The energy LeShard gave off was stupidly crazy, yet inviting.

We got into an easy conversation about Terrell looking to attend graduate school. LeShard mentioned that he was in the technical field for a company in Anniston, Alabama, which had several government contracts. We also got into current events like the poor state of gas prices and the political election year with Barack Obama earning the Democratic Party's presidential nomination.

I watched the interaction between Terrell and LeShard. Terrell was full of glee, and for good reason considering the last dude that he'd been involved with took him on a hellish emotional rollercoaster. I knew Terrell was bitter about it, but it appeared that he'd gotten past it. Meanwhile, I tried my best to make as little eye contact as possible with LeShard. I did not want Terrell picking up on anything out of the ordinary. I found LeShard to be well-versed, and I loved men that can hold a good conversation and were self-assured in any given environment.

After an hour or so of socializing, Terrell announced it was time for them to get back on the road. A thunderstorm had already passed through the area, and there was the possibility for more storms later in the evening.

I got up to let them out. Before opening the door, I turned around to embrace Terrell. "I think you have a winner," I whispered in his ear. He smiled and walked to his car. I also gave LeShard an embrace, but I put more into my hug this time. I

inhaled his cologne—I've always prided myself being able to discern what a person wears at all times even after eight hours of wear and sweat.

"Hummer, P.E. Reserve, Lolita Lempicka . . . Curve?" I inquired, knowing I was dead wrong.

He chuckled. "It's Creed Green Irish Tweed."

I had heard of Creed, but I was not big on it especially once I found out that shit ran more than \$90 a bottle. I loved fine cologne, but I never paid full price for any.

I was slow at releasing my embrace. LeShard revealed a devilishly cute smile and laughed again at my odd attempt at cologne associations.



In the ensuing weeks, I found myself having conversations with LeShard through Terrell. I became as much of a relationship counselor for him as I had been for Terrell. I always knew there was more to Terrell than what met the eye. There were attributes about him that made him seem bitchy, overbearing, and quite childish.

That began to frustrate LeShard and, by default, I became his shoulder to lean on. Terrell had no idea that we talked damned near every day. I gave him advice about how to mend things between him and Terrell, but all along I was getting close to LeShard. My feelings for him grew, and not in a brotherly fashion.

The chemistry between LeShard and me started as a slow simmer, and it increased to boiling. Our text messages and emails were playful and provocative. I usually had to fix my wood in my pants because of the thoughts that ran through my mind.

I'd already sensed that LeShard was more of a bottom guy during sex, although he portrayed himself as one that thrived fucking from the top. As for me, I'd always been more of the aggressive type, yet my versatility enabled me to explore new ter-

ritory, if necessary. Hell, it was all about when the lights went out, and it never mattered as long as you got what you wanted and both parties were happy.

One night, while exchanging text messages, I asked LeShard about his feelings for Terrell. I knew that he'd been at his wit's end with him, stemming from the constant bickering back and forth over nothing.

I did not expect the response that I received.

I want you, and I want to see you now.

I thought he was fucking with me just to see how far I would take it, so I did not respond. Twenty minutes later, he called me. I answered with some apprehension.

"Nigga, why you're quiet now?" he asked.

I remained silent.

He said, "Look, you know I'm feeling awful and I need comfort right now. You know how your dick is about hard as a brick, and you need me as much as I need you. So let's stop fucking around and make this happen."

Although I had been dreaming about it for months, I knew I had to make a fast and furious decision. And I knew if I acted on LeShard's invitation that I'd risked losing a friend. Hell, two over having some meaningless sex just to get my rocks off. Then I'd be placed in a position of acting as if nothing happened the next day.

Nevertheless, I took a deep breath, replying, "I'm on my way."