

BLURB

When trust is broken, can it ever be repaired?

At one time, Terrence “T-Murder” Burrell had it all—a wife, three kids, and an extravagant lifestyle as one of the most popular rappers in the industry. Because of his cheating, he lost his family and knew his life would never be the same. But one night with his ex-wife changes his outlook, and he sees a chance not only to redeem himself, but reclaim the life he once took for granted.

Charisse Burrell divorced Terrence after he broke her heart one too many times. In a moment of weakness she gives in to her desires and makes a mistake that she soon regrets. Now Terrence wants her to believe that not only has he changed, they should try again. Her brain says she shouldn’t trust him, but will her heart give him another chance?

Without You by Delaney Diamond

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Chapter 1

Looking at the monitor in the kitchen, Charisse Burrell saw when her ex-husband's black Range Rover pulled in front of the three-car garage of her six-bedroom, seven-bath house north of the city. She tossed the dish towel onto the counter and rushed to the door, swinging it open as her kids traipsed up the steps to the front door.

They poured into the house with duffel bags in tow—seventeen-year-old Ennis, her ten-year-old, Terrence Junior, and the youngest, eight-year-old Chelsea. Her ex-husband, Terrence, sauntered in behind them and closed the door.

Charisse hugged each of her kids in turn, as if she hadn't seen them in months instead of the few days their father had taken them to Miami for the weekend. She left the biggest hug for Chelsea since the boys were no longer as affectionate as they used to be when they were her age.

"Hi, Mommy!" said Chelsea, a lanky eight-year-old with colorful clips at the end of her braids that made each one swing around her little face.

She dropped a kiss to her daughter's forehead. "How's my little princess today?"

Chelsea was going through a stage where she called herself a princess, and her ex-husband didn't help by gifting her with tiaras, which she wore every chance she could. She wore one right now. Along with the Tiffany-blue miniature bridesmaid dress under her jacket and the white shoes she wore, she certainly looked the part of a princess at the moment.

"I'm fine. Tired," Chelsea replied.

"I bet you are. I'm sure Daddy kept you busy all weekend. Okay you guys, go ahead and put away your bags. You know the drill," Charisse called as she followed the boys, who'd lumbered down the hall.

Charisse made her way back to the kitchen with Terrence and Chelsea following.

The kitchen was a wide open space and the heart of the house, filled with top-of-the-line appliances that included two ovens and a Sub-Zero refrigerator filled with all manner of beverages and snacks for three growing children. During the day, plenty of sunlight came in through the many windows and the French doors that led into the back yard.

Chelsea crouched down to pet the fat tabby that reclined in the corner near the table where they usually ate breakfast and dinner. "Hi, Simba." Her cat yawned and lazily bounced his tail on the tiled floor.

Terrence tapped his hands on the marble countertop and watched as Charisse finished

cleaning up from cooking dinner.

He kept much of his firm physique as he edged toward forty years old, and worked out with the same trainer he started in the music business with when he signed his first recording contract twelve years ago.

“How’d it go this weekend?” Charisse asked. One of his celebrity friends who lived in L.A. owned a place on the water in Miami, and he gave Terrence free rein to use it whenever he wanted.

“Good, as usual. Too cold to get *in* the water, but they still had fun when we went out in the boat. You know how Chelsea loves making s’mores, so we did that *every night* in the backyard.” He sighed.

Charisse laughed and stuck the last glass in the dishwasher and turned it on. “You know she only demands you do that because you give in. You need to learn how to say no.”

“I can’t say no to my baby.” He sniffed the air. “What’s that I smell?”

She placed her hands on her hips. “Don’t you have somewhere to be?”

“Not right at this minute.”

“You’re supposed to be catching a flight to New York for the Grammys.” This year he’d been nominated in two categories—Best Rap Performance and Song of the Year.

His dark eyes narrowed. “If I didn’t know better, I’d think that you were trying to get rid of me.”

“Moi?” Charisse said with mock innocence.

“You made lasagna.” Terrence rounded the counter.

“Wait one minute.” Charisse spread her arms wide to block his path to the oven.

“No, Daddy. You’re going to eat it all and there won’t be any left for us,” Chelsea said.

Everyone in the family knew how much Terrence loved Charisse’s lasagna, to the point where he once jokingly asked her if she was half Italian.

“You’ve managed to turn my own children against me,” he accused her.

“I haven’t turned them against you, it’s just that everyone knows how greedy you are.”

“Yeah, yeah. Where’s the lasagna?” He stepped his broad body closer with mock intimidation, looking down at her with eyes filled with humor and his thick, luscious lips curled into a smile.

Goodness, he was handsome! His face was almost perfectly symmetrical, with dark umber skin and a long, narrow nose set in the middle of a face that at one time had been deemed “too pretty” for rap. His wavy black hair had started to gray, but he maintained its dark luster with the

diligent application of hair dye. And when he smiled, her heart clenched painfully.

She still remembered the first time she saw him on stage at a small venue where he'd performed with other up-and-coming acts. He wore an earring in each ear and a thick gold chain with a large medallion around his neck. He smiled at her, and she was putty in his palms from that moment on.

"You're really going to do this?" Charisse asked.

"Yes. I'm really going to do this. Don't make me move you." He arched a thick brow.

She cursed him under her breath and stepped aside. Terrence opened the door to the wall oven. Inside sat a warming lasagna, ready for dinner when the kids arrived. He glanced over his shoulder at her and shook his head. "Look at how you treat me. You were going to let me leave and not give me any of this. I can't believe you."

One of the ways they bonded when they first started dating was over their love of food. They'd both enjoyed the adventure of trying new cuisines, especially as the dollars in his bank account expanded. She missed those days.

Terrence rummaged in the drawers and found a metal spatula.

Charisse snatched it away. "Please don't. Let me handle this."

"Are you going to fix me a plate?" he asked.

"Yes, but only because if I don't, you'll scoop out half the lasagna and there won't be enough for me and the kids. Don't forget, they've all inherited your hearty appetite."

Well, the last two, anyway. Ennis was from a previous relationship, and Terrence adopted him after they got married.

She bumped him out of the way with her hip and proceeded to scoop the steaming pasta onto a plate. She added homemade garlic bread and wrapped the entire dish in foil. "There you go. Now, be gone with you."

"Thank you." Terrence took the plate right as his phone rang and he looked at the screen before answering. "Yo, what's up?" He paced away from her. "I just dropped off the kids, and I should be at the airport in about half an hour."

Charisse folded her arms and shook her head at the lie. With the airport at least an hour's drive, the only way he'd make it there in half an hour was through time travel.

"Man, I'm not giving her no message for you."

Charisse walked over and sent him a silent question with her eyes.

"It's Bo," he mouthed.

“Tell him I said hi,” she whispered.

He rolled his eyes. “She said to tell you hi.” Pause. “He said to tell you hi back and that he hopes you pampered yourself during your break from the kids.”

“Thank you, Bo. I enjoyed my weekend off, but of course I’m happy to have my babies back.” She spoke loud so that he could hear.

“Happy now?” Terrence asked his friend. There were a few seconds of silence, and then he said, “All right. I’ll holler when I land. We can set something up when I get there.” Pause. “A’ight. Peace.” He hung up the phone and took a deep breath. “My work is never done.”

“You’re a very important man. I take it he went up early for the pre-Grammy parties?”

“Yeah, he did.”

“Good luck tonight.”

“Thanks. But it’s an honor just to be nominated.”

“But even better to win,” they finished together and laughed.

Chelsea scampered over and hugged his waist. “Knock ’em dead, Daddy.”

“Thanks, princess. I needed that extra boost.” He gave her a squeeze, kissed her forehead, and then started out of the kitchen.

“Bye, boys!” he hollered.

Ennis and Junior came out of their rooms.

“Good luck, Pops,” Ennis said.

“Yeah, good luck, Dad,” Junior added.

“Thanks.”

The three dapped and then the boys disappeared again.

Terrence turned at the door. “Think I have a chance?”

Charisse was one of the few people, assuming there were any others, that he admitted his insecurity to. He wanted the Song of the Year award, no matter how much he joked that the honor was simply in being nominated. Sales on his last album dipped lower than expected, as his unique sound—the lyrical stylings of an East Coast flow combined with the bounce of Southern hip-hop—was replaced by new and younger artists coming onto the scene. His income hadn’t declined, though. He expanded his fortune by investing in multiple business ventures—flavored water, a line of specialty vodkas, shoes, and other opportunities presented to him. He courted the idea of retiring, though he wanted to tour one more time before he left the rap game.

“I think you have every chance of winning. Win or lose, you did an amazing job, but I really

think you can win, Terrence.” She crossed her fingers and held them up. “I have my fingers crossed for you.”

His eyes softened on her. “Okay if I call you after the show?”

“Of course. You know you always can.”

“Thanks, sweetheart.” He gave her the quickest, faintest peck on the cheek. “You’re the best.” He winked and then left.

Charisse quietly closed the door behind him and stood there for a moment, chest heavy with an emptiness she couldn’t seem to shake. His cologne lingered in the entryway. He’d worn the same scent for a long time—a French brand that layered the crispness of citrus over the fullness of musk.

She placed a hand over the spot that he kissed. She shouldn’t dwell on the sensation but couldn’t help it. Divorced five years, they were in a good place now. They really were, considering how painfully their marriage ended. It took a while to get to this point of being friends and co-parenting in a positive way. But there were times when he touched her that the memories came barreling back and she longed for a simpler time, when they lived in a two-bedroom apartment on the west end and his popularity was limited to a small fan base. Before the record deal, the money, the glamour. Before the many women who’d catch his eye.

“Mom?”

She swung around and faced her eldest son. “Yes, baby?”

“Can we eat now? I’m starving.” Ennis’s caramel-toned skin was a mixture of his biological father’s fairer complexion and her deep brown complexion.

She walked over to him and looped an arm through his. “Yes, we can eat now.”

So her marriage was over, but she had three beautiful kids and lived a full life, simply because of them.

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Delaney Diamond is the USA Today Bestselling Author of sweet, sensual, passionate romance novels. Originally from the U.S. Virgin Islands, she now lives in Atlanta, Georgia. She reads romance novels, mysteries, thrillers, and a fair amount of nonfiction. When she's not busy reading or writing, she's in the kitchen trying out new recipes, dining at one of her favorite restaurants, or traveling to an interesting locale.

Enjoy free reads and the first chapter of all her novels on her website. Join her mailing list to get sneak peeks, notices of sale prices, and find out about new releases.

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