

CHAPTER 28

Something's wrong.

Speechless, I shook my head at Sandy. Dismantling the laptop from the projector, I said, "All she has to do is look at her branding photos, approve them, and we can launch. We've invested so much. I don't understand why she wants to quit."

I could see the confusion on San's face. "I don't know, Nitty. Maybe we'd stop everything if it were our husband, parents, or child."

"You know we wouldn't bring the whole train to a stop so close to the station. When you told Dr. Brooks that you dove into your work, that's what we do to work through our pain . . . she sits in hers. Why do you think she is always putting herself down? Somebody said something to her a long time ago, and she can't let it go."

"It's unfortunate. As disappointed as I am, I understand that what Dr. Brooks is displaying is the fear of success."

I sighed, "It's hard to see someone, as seasoned as Dr. Brooks, being so hard on herself." I stood up and danced on the ball of my feet.

"Feet burning, huh?" I nodded at Sandy. "Like your mom says, because she is an elder we have to give her a different level of patience. Her generation bent their backs to create a step ladder for us. Perhaps, she doesn't digest rejection well." San packed up the ring lights, "We'll be here when she's ready and her promotion will be awesome."

"Maybe, but one thing this whole situation confirmed for me," I waved my hands in a circle. "Is that we're cut from a different kind of cloth." I rubbed my forehead. "First off, we were raised to never waste anyone's time. Second, our parents wouldn't tolerate us speaking to ourselves the way she does. I get so confused watching elders put themselves down."

“Dr. Brooks is so amazing, I don’t know why she can’t see it in herself, a woman with two doctorates and two MBA’s can’t see her authentic greatness.” Sandy zipped up the ring light bag, put it on the shelf and sat on the couch.”

“Me either, girl,” I flopped down on the plush rug, laid on my back, and put my feet up on the ottoman, the only thing I could do to keep my feet from burning. I closed my eyes and said, “When Dr. Brooks turned her camera back on and she was holding her beloved Buttercup, I knew she was up to something. Yet, I would’ve rationalized that she was about to put her project on pause.” The burning sensation in my feet was incredibly intense.

I inhaled then exhaled slowly, but it wasn’t really making a difference. “Yeah,” I agreed. I can’t imagine being seventy-five and putting myself down like that. It really breaks my heart.” I felt myself calming down. “I really love Dr. Brooks, and I want her to be ready for personal transformation, but we can’t force it on her.” I could feel my heart thumping in my chest. I kept breathing and started to massage my scalp.

“Nitty!” Sandy called me with concern. “You okay? You don’t look so good.”

“I’m just trying to push back this headache. I don’t get them often, but when I do, you already know what happens.” I sat up and reached for my water bottle, but got dizzy, so I laid back down and closed my eyes.

“Here,” I could feel Sandy putting my water bottle into my hands. I took a few gulps, but for some reason, couldn’t quench the thirst that was tickling the back of my throat.

Unaware of the sun storm brewing in my head, Sandy kept talking, “Dr. Brooks reminds me of NiNi in some ways.”

“How so?” I managed to whisper through my desert dry throat.

Sandy’s voice sounded like she was standing in a box. “Dr. Brooks has a demeanor like your grandmother, stoic, yet she’s wearing a mask and everyone knows it.”

“Don’t . . . like . . . change.” I rubbed my temples.

“Right, some people like the idea of change, and the notoriety of accomplishment, not the process, or the time it takes to transform. Going back to school to get two doctorate degrees at fifty-five is a major accomplishment. She doesn’t even acknowledge it.”

That was a dose of reality for me. “I haven’t even had the chance to go back and get one doctorate, and this woman has two!” I got upset all over again, and I could feel the crown tightening on my head. I whispered, “We could’ve helped somebody who was willing to complete the work needed to launch. Dr. Brooks has been putting herself down, complaining and ruminating on her failures. That irritates the hell out of me! Excuse my French.” I grunted, “This can never happen again. ElnaHue is a business, not a charity.”

San started laughing, “But what’s funny is,” she said between chuckles. “When you slowly put your notebook in front of your face and covered the camera, I knew you were silently screaming.”

I laughed too, “Yeah, girl, I’d had enough of her.”

Sandy cracked up for a few seconds. “In all seriousness,” she said when she calmed down. “We do good work, friend. We have to trust God that there’s a lesson in this. Let’s give her a couple of days before we check back in. I have a feeling she’ll change her mind once Buttercup is in recovery.”

“Dr. Brooks has struck my last nerve. If I had the energy, I would change my clothes and go for a run. I just want to lie here and I gather myself.”

“You want me to take you home, Nitty? You don’t look like you can drive right now.”

I opened one eye and looked at San. “Let me lie here for a little while. Follow me home, I’m not leaving my car here, no way!” We laughed, our office is located in a great neighborhood, but there are no cameras.

“I’ll go back to my office, but before I let you go I wanna say this,” San squatted behind my head, leaned over and looked me in the eye. She hesitated before she said, “I think you should consider

seeing the counselor Harold, your own husband, found. You don't seem like yourself, Nitty. You got a little snippy with Dr. Brooks, and we can't represent ourselves like that."

"I agree, San. I tried to calm myself. Something is off with me, I just can't figure out what it is."

"I think you have more in common with Dr. Brooks than you care to admit. Deep down, Nitty, you know what you need to do."

"I agree that there is a lesson, and I will pray about it. Now, leave me alone for thirty minutes, Sis." San stood up, walked to the door, turned off the light. Before she closed the door she quietly said, "I love you, Sis."

"I love you, too." I pulled a blanket from the couch onto the floor and curled up under it. I closed my eyes, blew out a breath of defeated exhaustion, and imagined myself tearing my dress off to change into my running clothes. I wanted to hit the pavement running to make my headache cease but I fell asleep thinking about the woman in the red dress, in Dr. Brooks' painting. I wondered if that woman, wearing her crown, had to run anywhere.

"The headache crown on my head is so tight," I thought. "Lord, relieve this pressure."