

FRENEMIES



Courtney smiled before she could stop herself.

"Thanks. You too. Haircut?"

He touched the side of his head, amused.

"You noticed?"

"I have eyes."

"Good ones."

It was a stupid line, almost too easy, but she laughed anyway. The laugh came out softer than she expected, more open. Malik seemed pleased by it.

For the first time since the swap, Shanice's life did not feel only like something she had taken.

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The date with Jamar had gone better than Shanice wanted to admit.

She kept wondering whether he could tell she was performing being Shanice, whether she sounded like a white girl playing a fake Black girl. But Jamar had not noticed anything strange or unnatural. And if he had, he liked it.

He was easy to talk to, handsome in a relaxed, almost unfair way, and he seemed genuinely interested in her. A pretty girl he had met at the gym, dressed a little flashy, laughing a little too hard because she was trying to hide how scared she felt. A week later, Courtney brought up the double date again. "Ok," Shanice said at last, sitting on the sofa in the red sequined dress Courtney had chosen for her. "Double date it is."



Courtney looked almost touched.

"I knew you'd come around."

"I'm not coming around. I'm tired of arguing."

"Same thing."

Shanice rolled her eyes and pulled the black fishnets up her thighs, trying not to look at herself too long. The dress was too short, too bright, and covered in cheap red sparkle, but the mirror kept betraying her by making it look good.

"What kind of outfit did you pick for me? Did you really want everybody to think I'm such a slut?"



Courtney smiled. "Come on, red looks great on dark skin... I know a thing or two about that..."

Shanice had to agree with her. Her dark hair fell in loose curls over her shoulders. The fishnets gave her legs a sharp, deliberate look. It was exactly the sort of outfit she would once have called desperate. Now she was actually impressed by how good she looked in it.

Courtney noticed, of course. She was getting ready herself, with an elegant green dress and her recently dyed ginger hair, lighter than ever.

"I know you're happy deep down."

"I am not."

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"Come on. You're clearly taking care of your new body... And your guy Jamar is really handsome."

Shanice paused, fingers still hooked under the top of one stocking. "Yeah," she admitted before she could stop herself. "He is." Courtney's smile grew.

"Aren't you happy you got a chance to date someone like him?"

Shanice looked up.

The question sounded kind on the surface, but there was poison underneath it. Someone like him. As if Courtney were offering her a prize suited to her new category.

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As if Shanice should be grateful that, after losing her man, her body, and her life, she was luckily given the chance to date a man Courtney had decided made sense for her.

"Yeah... But I don't need you to arrange my life" Shanice said. "And this double date thing is weird..."

Courtney came closer, hugging her in the mirror. "You do a little," Courtney said.

"You look pretty like this," Courtney said. Shanice made a face.

"The blonde wig was ridiculous. This is just you."

"I guess it is me." - the cute Black girl admitted, before heading to the double date..

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"Don't they look cute, babe? I think they are made for one another! She should thank me for having taken you away from her," Courtney told her fiancée.

"She clearly wasn't at your level, I can't believe you fell for her at some point" she added later, leaving the restaurant. "I guess I had my jungle fever phase," he confessed. Courtney smiled, happy he was being so frank with her.

"Well, at least we met through her so we shouldn't trash talk her so much."

"No, I think you are completely right actually... she turned out to be really weird, honestly... There was something in her personality I really did not like." Courtney's heart skipped a beat. "I mean we are still