

## Hidden Testimony Maisha Mahalia

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Corey and Nykol hit it off and spent time together every chance they had. Their relationship grew stronger and Nykol was determined to be a better person in this relationship than in her previous ones. She refrained from cheating for a time, but old habits die hard. Her mind could not shake her past experiences with men and soon she reverted back to that "I'm gonna get you before you get me" mentality. It didn't help that her mother constantly told her she was stupid if she thought any man wanted someone like her. Linda never let her forget the fact that she had a son who she didn't know who the father was.

"Once a hoe, always a hoe." She declared, "You can't turn a hoe into a housewife."

Corey had never met Linda, Nykol made sure of that. She didn't want to subject him to hearing all the negative and nasty things her mother would spit out. So Nykol always went to his place to spend time, even overnight. Nykol would try to bring Van with her, but Linda would not hear of it. There were a few times Van got to go with her. She enjoyed those times; they had fun doing things together, yet she'd always have to be sure to get him back to avoid a big scene. Nykol regretted having to do things like that, but she refused to feed into the drama Linda liked to cause. It was as if making Nykol miserable made her happy.

One day after bringing Van back, Linda was in rare form. After giving Van a Kiss and telling Faye she was leaving, Nykol went to Tonya's.

"Girl, I'm glad you came by. I was just going to call you," Tonya said as she opened the door.

"T, I had to get away. That woman is driving me crazy." Nykol wanted to cry. She hated leaving Van there around the negativity.

"I have an idea. I was going to ask to use your car, but since you seem to need a reprieve, why don't you take me to Sparta to pick up Bryce so he can go and renew his license?"

Tonya didn't like seeing her friend like this. She held so much in. She knew what she was dealing with because she'd been a witness to how things were with Linda and Nykol. She didn't understand why it seemed like Linda hated her daughter's guts. It was too much for Tonya, so she didn't come around unless necessary.

"You know what? I need to renew my license too. So alright, let's go." Nykol started walking to the door.

"Bryce has a friend I'd like you to meet."

"Girl, you always trying to hook me up. I'm reformed."

"Yeah, right. Let the right guy come along and see how quick you relapse," Tonya laughed.

"Whatever. But I'll meet him. Maybe it'll help take my mind off of shit." Nykol saw no harm in meeting this friend.

"Nyk, you are going to like Richard; he's real nice looking."

"Oh hell nawl. I know what that means. Not to mention with a name like Richard, he can only be a lame."

"Far from it Boo. You'll see. He goes by Rich."

"Yeah, we'll see." Nykol rolled her eyes, laughing.

After picking up Bryce and getting their licenses renewed, Bryce gave Nykole directions to Rich's house. When they pulled up, out walked a bronze skinned guy, about six foot three, nicely built, timp fade, and neatly trimmed goatee. He had a walk that put Morris Chestnut to shame.

"Damn, that nigga fine as hell," Nykol said.

"Um huh." Tonya said, laughing as Bryce shook his head.

"Whatever."

Nykol eyed Rich as he approached the car. "Man, I'm not going to make it," she thought to herself.

"What's up?" His voice was deep and as calm as a country lake. His eyes were as gray as a cloudy day. Nykol was a sucker for pretty eyes.

"Hey" was all Nykol could say.

"Yo, Rich. You want to ride with us to Augusta?"

"What y'all going to Augusta for?" asked Rich.

"We're going to the mall and then to the NCO Club on base," Bryce replied.

"Yeah, my friend here, Nykol, is in the National Guard and has a military I.D. So she's taking us to Ft. Gordon," Tonya said, smiling to herself.

"Is that right?" Rich said, looking at Nykol. He liked what he saw. "You cool with me riding along?" he asked her.

"It's straight, but you might want to pack an overnight bag," Nykol informed him. "We're staying the night."

"A'ight. I'll be right back." He turned to get his bag.

"Damn, bitch. You set me up with that Richard name and he's nice looking line."

"Yeah, well, I know you ain't complaining, are you?" Tonya smiled, she hoped these two hit it off. She didn't really care for Corey.

"Hell nawh, I ain't complaining."

Bryce interjected "Nyk, my man Rich is good people. Give 'im a chance."

"Y'all know I'm with Corey."

"Nobody said you had to have sex with Rich, girl. Just enjoy his company. You need a break from controlling Corey anyway." Tonya said with a slight attitude.

"Okay, you're right. There's nothing wrong with hanging out," but even as she spoke, Nykol thought, "This niggah is fine. Lord, I'm gonna need help not to jump his bones."

"I'm ready to ride," Rich said as he walked up. "Pop the trunk so I can put this bag in."

Nykol popped the trunk. Tonya got out and got in the back with Bryce. Nykol looked at her like

"What the hell are you doing?" Tonya just shook her head and rolled her eyes.

sending the message "deal with it."

Bryce laughed to himself, Tonya was up to her match making trick again. Rich got in the front seat and they pulled off. They went to the mall first. Tonya and Nykol went one way and Bryce and Rich went another.

"So what do you think?" Tonya asked

"Think about what?" Nykol asked looking all innocent

"Don't play Nykol about Rich?"

"He seems to be okay,"

"Just okay?"

"Look I'm attracted to him but I'm with Corey. Remember I've reformed." She tried to make light of it.

"Girl please, I can promise you Corey ain't thinking about you right now. He's probably laid up with some one right now."

"I doubt it. He's at work."

"So he told you." Tonya said looking at her cutting her eyes.

"T, let's just enjoy now okay." Nykol said, she really wanted to do the right thing by Corey. As they were shopping Nykol picked up a Tommy Hilfiger jacket and out-fit, a Ralph Lauren outfit, the new Jordans and a game for Van. She felt it was the least she could do for leaving him behind. She loved to see how excited he got when he got inside any store. It was as if it was his birthday. Nykol laughed to herself.

"What's so funny?" Came that deep, calm country tongue.

"Uh..Oh where did you come from?" Nykol was startled. She was so caught up in her thoughts of Van she didn't notice Rich had walked up.

"Foot locker. Now what was so funny?"

"Oh, I was thinking about my son." Her smile fastened a bit, she didn't really want to talk about it.

"You don't look like you have a child. Where is he?" Rich wanted to know more about this sexy lady.

"At home with my grandmother."

"Why didn't you bring him?" Rich noticed how her face closed off and knew that was a touchy subject so he wouldn't push. "It's a long story, and plus I don't want to talk about it." Nykol stated sadly.

"Okay, lets go get something in our stomachs."

"Where is T, and Bryce?"

"They went to the music store. Knowing Bryce they'll be there a while. Bryce considered himself a rapper on the rise." Rich laughed.

"I am hungry, I want to go to the wing shack."

"I have a taste for some lemon pepper wings." She wanted to shake the mood she was in.

"Aight head that way my queen." Holding out his hand in a gesture of after you with a slight bow. Nykol smiled. She didn't know a guy as sexy as Rich could be so silly.

They arrived at the food court and Rich told her to get a table while he went and got their food. She tried to give him money for her food but he wouldn't take it.

"My treat, my queen." Rich went to get their food as Nykol watched him swagger to the wing shack. She could fall for this guy easy. After eating, they met up with Bryce and Tonya at the GAP. They decided it was time to go and get the rooms.

"Y'all go ahead I'll meet you at the can, I want to get Van one more out-fit."

"Okay see you in a few." Tonya said. Nykol picked out a nice black and grey sweater, a pair of acid washed jeans, a small leather jacket, a belt and a few shirts. As she was going to leave she noticed a t-shirt that would bring out Rich's eyes, and picked it up. After paying for the items she headed to the car.

"Damn Nyk you said an outfit, not the whole damn store." Tonya laughed. She knew when it came to Van spared no expenses.

"He can never have too many clothes. Plus he's a growing boy, I have to be prepared."

"Yeah I know but that boy is going to be clothes hog and have a shoe fetish the way you keep getting him things."

"What's wrong with that, a young man needs to dress nice."

Tonya and Nykol laughed as they got in the car. As they entered the base Nykol thought of Van again, but had to shake it off. She pulled up to a building that didn't look like a hotel and parked.

"I'll be right back." They wondered what she was doing.; After a few minutes she came out and handed Bryce a key.

"Room 246 is your room."

"What?" Bryce was confused.

"This is the motel. I know it doesn't look like much but wait til yopu ee the room." They had their doubts.

"Thanks Nyk, how much was it so that I can pay for it."

"Don't worry about it. It was only \$25.00 for the room for two nights."

"Girl I know you ain't brought us to no flea bag place." T hotly stated.

"Man calm down and go inside before you judge damn." Nyk was getting pissed.

"A, let's just give it a look." Rich said. He didn't know what to expect, but he figured it couldn't be all bad.

When they walked in they were shocked to see the décor was clean, warm and upscale. They headed towards the elevator. As they got on Tonya apologized.

"Uh hum.." was all Nykol said. They got off on the second floor. Bryce and Rich headed down the hall to fine 246.

"Hey where you going Rich? Our room is this way! 246." Nykol called pointing in the opposite direction they were headed.

"Oh I figured you gave the key to Bryce because we men were to share a room."

"Nah, gave the key to Bryce because he's the man."

"I see. So you and me are sharing a room." Rich was intrigued by this turn of events.

"Yes, Unless you want to share a aroom with Bryce and T."

He thought about it, looked at his friend and laughed. "Naw, I don't think that will be a good idea. Come on."

"We're in room 216." Nykol hoped she wasn't making a mistake.

When they entered the room Rich was surprised at how nicely it was done. The room even had a microwave, VCR and mini fridge. The colors were nice warm and welcoming in Beige, Hunter green and Burgundy.

"Nice, I didn't think it would be this nice for 25.00" He said as he looked around.

"I know that but the rooms were 25.00 because I get a military discount. That's why I paid for the rooms."

"Well, I'm going to give you the money baack for this room. Before you open your mouth, it's only right, I'm the man, remember." He stated matter of factly as he handed her a fifty dollar bill.

"Wait, that's too much." Nykol didn't reach for the bill.

"Take it as a tip, because I assume the room would have been about fifty, right? So that's what I would have paid." he was still holding the fifty out to her.

Finally she relented. She had never ran across a man like him. Corey paid for things but always made a big deal about it. Rich truly seemed not to mind.

"Alright. I'm going to shower before we hit the NCO club." Nykol said taking her bag with her to into the bathroom.

Rich turned on the TV and scanned the channels as she showered. He couldn't help but wonder as she looked naked. He wanted to see that tattoo that peeked out from under her shirt on her neck. He knew it had to cover part of her back. He liked her, she wasn't all over him like most females tended to be when around him.

Nykol was drying off as she realized she left the bag with her underwear on the bed. She didn't want to walk out there in just a towel. She decided it was best to ask him to hand her the bag.

"Hey Rich, Can you hand me that bag on the bed?" She called out.

"Uh..Yeah." Rich was kind of nervous, because he didn't want to come off as a prevert because he was sure he would end up staring at her.

As he walked to the bathroom door he decided the best course of action would be to turn his head so as not to see her naked.

"Here you go." his voice was shaky. This had never happened tdo him before.

"Thanks." Nykol took the bag from his hand. She noticed he had turned his head. She thought that was so noble of him. Smilinig to herself she went about her business.

Rich let out a deep breath. He had no oidea how he was going to keep his hands to himself this weekend. Shaking his head he got up to prepare for his shower.

Nykol came out in a pair of black acid washed hip huggers, with a tangerine and cream colored blouse that showed off herr navel that had a Butterfly tattoo just under it. She smelled like apples.

'Damn she sexy as hell.' Rich thought to him self as he passed her. He toes were done in Orange and gray polish sprinkeld with silver glitter.

"All yours." She said as she sat in the chair by the window to put on her sandals.

Nykol could imagine what Rich's body looked like with water dripping down that bronze skin and licked her lips. "Man, I don't know what I was thinking." she said out loud.

When Rich came out of the shower he smelled like Light Blue. Nykol loved that scent. Rich had on a pair of blue jeans with a plain black T-Shirt.

"Hold on, I havae something for you." she said getting the GAP bag from by the door. She pulled out the dark gray T with Balck and light gray faded letters on the front, that read BOSS and handed it to him.

"You bought this sfor me?" he aske baffled. Rich wasn't usse to a woman thinking about him when she shopped.

"Uhm... yeah, I though it would bring out your eyes. I hope you like it" Nykol was shy about it. She haad never bought Corey anything but she haad paid his probation and car note once.

"Thank you, I like it." he put the T-Shirt on over the black one. "Anad it fits." he leanded forward and kissed her cheek. It just seemed the right thing to do.

Nykol backed up a step stammering, "You...You're welcome." There was an ackward silence.

"Call Bryce and tell them to meet us down stairs." Nykol saud to break the silence.

"Okay"

They all had a great time at the NCO Club.

Both Nykol and Tich were nervous and anxious when the went back to their room. Nykol liked the fact that Rich hadn't tried tdo push up on her or in her her for that matter. He gained her respect with that.

The night went by without incident, but not without tempting thoughts. Each one struggled with not crossing the line and having sex, yet they pulled it off. The next morning they left Augusta and Nykol dropped Bryce off first, then Rich. They had exchanged numbers. Then she dropped Tonya off. She had to be at wotk by four pm. It was now one pm.

Van ran to her and hugged her asking what was in the bags.

"you'll see Van, hold up." Nykol set the bags down and Van torn into each one. What he paid attention to the most was the Street Fighter game. He took it out and went to play it. She just smiled as she picked up the tehings Van and discarded on the floor and put them up. Just as she was putiing the last of the clothes in the closet the phone rung.

"Hello." Nykol answered.

"Hi, is this Nykol?" came a raspy female voice.

"Yeah, Who is this?" caution laced Nykol's voice.

"I'm calling about Rich."

Oh hell, I knew this was too good to be true. She just knew this was a girlfriend or worse a wife.

"Look, we only went out this once, but it wasn't nothing like what you think." Nykol rushed to say.

The lady was actually laughing and that threw Nykol off.

"Honey, I'm not Rich's girlfriend. I'm his mother. He asked me to call you and tell you what was going on. Before you go off. While he was gone his probation officer came by looking for him and said he needed to turn himself in when he got back. So he wanted me to tell you he's at the county and wanted to know if you would come see him."

"Oh...When can I go?" Nykol was confused. Shit she just met Rich so why was he asking if she would come see him. Only one way to find out.

"Today from two to Four."

"Okay, I can swing by there on my way to work."

"Okay, when he calls back I'll let him know."

Nykol was blown. Why hadn't he called her. Then she thought back to their day and night together. He probably had to call collect and didn't want to call her collect out of respect. After all he was the man. Nykol smiled to herself.