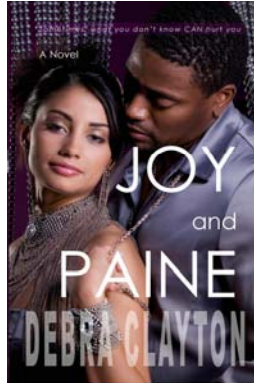


# Joy and Paine



Sometimes what you don't know CAN hurt you

## Chapter 1

*I'll tell her in the morning*, thirty-one year old Paine Michaels decided, staring up at the dark silhouette of the whirling overhead ceiling fan as it spun a soft breeze throughout the hushed bedroom. He had been struggling with his decision since she arrived at his place earlier that evening. Even their lovemaking wasn't the same, and he credited it to his guilty conscious. Her kisses were still intoxicating, and her touch still made his body erupt with such force that it made the walls shake, but it was the looking into her eyes while they made love that tore away at his soul. He knew there would be tears. Maybe even an attempt to slap the shit out of him. But he knew it had to happen.

She purred softly like a kitten as she adjusted her long, sleek, feline-like body to get more comfortable. So caught up in his thoughts, he had nearly forgotten that she was still there lying next to him. The soft curves of her body were barely visible in the dimly moonlit room. She stirred again, this time pushing her bare back up against him as if seeking the warmth of her lover. Without hesitation, Paine rolled over onto his side, slipped his arm around her waist, and pressed his chest against her back. He buried his face in the nest of her ruffled hair, inhaled its floral fragrance, closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep.



Hours later, just as morning lazily crept through the partially opened slats of his wooden, plantation-style blinds, he felt her slowly pulling away from him. He opened his eyes and watched as she quietly slipped out of bed as if trying not to wake him. Still completely naked and unaware that he was watching her, she carefully tiptoed around the room gathering her clothes that he had gently stripped away from her body the night before. Silently he marveled at her beauty as his eyes traveled from the tussled jet black curls that gently danced around her honey-brown face, to her full round breast and erected nipples, down to her tapered waist, perfectly plumped hips and ass, to her professionally manicured toes.

As he tried to prepare himself for her reaction to what he was about to tell her, he watched as she slipped into the strawberry-red laced panties that he had purchased for her at Victoria's Secret two weeks earlier. He didn't want to see her cry. He hated to see women crying. It made him feel helpless, and to know that he was the cause for the tears, made him feel even worse. But he knew he had to tell her. Postponing it would only make it worse.

"Cindy," he softly said, so as not to startle her. Surprised that he was awake, she spun around and looked at him. "Trying to sneak off without saying goodbye?" Paine teased as he propped himself up on one elbow. He was still trying to figure out how to break the news to her.

"Paine," she said as she slipped on her bra and began to stuff her full Cs into the cups. "I didn't mean to wake you." After fastening the front clasp that Paine had skillfully undone with his mouth the night before, she grabbed her skirt that lay at the foot of the bed.

"What's the rush?" he asked, studying the look of quiet determination on her face as she stepped into her skirt and pulled it up.

"We over slept." She grabbed her stockings, stuffed them into her handbag and then slipped on her silk blouse.

Paine glanced over at the clock and then back at her. They had indeed overslept. He knew she would be late getting home, but he knew he had to talk to her before he let her walk out of that door. Realizing that his time was limited, he knew that there was no room for idle chitchat before telling her. He would have to just come out with it. He sat up in the bed. "I need to talk to you before you leave."

She began buttoning up her blouse as her eyes scanned the floor for her three-inch heels. "What is it?" She said a bit irritated because she didn't see her shoes. "Damn," she mumbled as she placed one hand on her hip and tried to think.

"Cindy, this is important," Paine added when he realized that she was more concerned with her shoes than with his news.

"Just a minute," she said when she remembered that he had removed them while they were still in the living room. She rushed out of the room and quickly returned with heels in tow. "Found them," she announced as she plopped down on the edge of the bed and began slipping them on.

"Baby, I need you to listen to me,"

"I'm listening."

"I need you to really listen."

She turned around and looked at him. "Paine, you know I'm already late. Can this

wait?"

He shook his head. "No, it can't."

She sighed and threw her hands up as if surrendering. "OK. OK. What is it?"

Paine stared at her. He remembered the first time he had laid eyes on her. It was six months ago and he was in a bar throwing back a couple of cold ones with his brothers. And as if God had answered the prayers of every man in that bar, she strutted in as if she owned the place.

Dressed to the nines with her hair and face all done up and with a body that would make a blind man salivate, she looked like she had just stepped off the cover of Maxximm magazine. And in an instant, she had all the brothers polishing up their game as they tried to step to her. Patiently, he nursed his Icehouse as he watched all the amateur players get discreetly shot down. When the timing was right, he made his move. Unable to resist his charm and powerful good looks, she slipped him the digits and they had been seeing each other ever since.

"What is it, Paine?" she asked impatiently. "You know I'm in a hurry."

"I know. I know," he nodded. "You know we've been seeing each other for six months now."

She nodded with a smile. "Six wonderful months,"

"But this is not enough for me anymore."

"I don't understand."

"I need more than this."

"More than this? I still don't know what you are saying." She looked confused.

"Baby, the sex between us is great, but I need more than just sex. I need more than just a warm body to hold every Tuesday and Thursday night."

"Well, what is it that you want baby? You know my situation."

He took her hand and pulled her over to him. "I need a wife, Cindy. I want a wife."

"Paine."

"I want a wife and I'm not talking about someone else's."

She pulled her hand away from him. "You know I can't leave him." She looked down at her wedding ring.

"I don't want you to," he admitted. "You belong to him. And I know that there is someone out there for me. Our relationship is getting in the way of your marriage as well as ruining all possibilities of me finding the right woman for me."

"Paine, what are you trying to say?" she asked as she tried to fight back the impending tears.

"We can't do this anymore baby. We just can't."

"But, Paine, I love you." Tears raced down her face as she forgot about the time. She forgot about the fact that she only had fifteen minutes to get home before her husband arrived.

He leaned over and wiped the tears away with his thumb. "Don't cry." He didn't dare lie to her and tell her that he loved her back. He didn't love her. It was just sex. Great sex, but just sex nevertheless, and as long as she belonged to another man, it would always just be sex. He didn't dare give his heart to her but he was ready to give it to someone. Someone he could love and spend the rest of his life with.

She pulled away from his reach. "How can you do this, Paine? How can you do this to me? To us?"

"I want to be happy, Cindy. I want a wife. A family. Kids. You can't give me any of that," he tried to explain.

"You're right, I can't but—"

"No buts," he shook his head. "We agreed when we started this six months ago that we would have an open door policy. We could walk in or walk out whenever either one of us is ready. I'm ready to walk out." He tried to remain unemotional for her sake. He didn't want her to know how much this was hurting him inside. It would just make things harder for her.

"You're right," she said as she quickly wiped away her tears and tried to put her emotions in check. She stood up. "Open door policy," she repeated as she gathered the rest of her things. After walking over to the bedroom door, she turned to look at him. "I hope you find her, Paine. You do deserve to be happy," she whispered just before disappearing out of the bedroom.

After hearing the front door close, Paine took a deep breath, climbed out of bed, and went into his bathroom. He started the shower and then stared at himself in the mirror. And for the first time in six months, he was not disgusted by what he saw looking back at him.

## Chapter 2

“You don’t mind if he kisses you, do you?” Dave Rogers asked.

Twenty-one year old Joy Phillips looked up at the music video director as she continued to wedge her swollen, throbbing foot into the black patent leather stilettos. “Huh? Who? What?”

“Avery. You don’t mind kissing him, do you?” He was referring to hip-hop singer Avery Houston, whose music video for his latest single ‘What Kind of Love’, they had been shooting for the past twelve hours.

“Kiss? But I’m...I’m just a dancer.”

“You have been kissed before, haven’t you?”

“Yes, but—” she glanced past the director to see Avery sitting across the set. He casually sipped on a bottle of Evian water as people clamored around him, adjusting his wardrobe, retouching his makeup, and satisfying every one of his needs. Her eyes fell to his full lips that curled into a smile. He was obviously happy with the fuss they were making over him.

“Kiss him like you’d kiss your boyfriend,” Dave said, drawing her attention back to him.

“But that wasn’t—”

“We’ve made some minor adjustment to the scene. You don’t have a problem with it, do you? Because if you do—”

“No, sir. I can do it.” She was in no mood to debate the kiss with the director. She had been dancing in four-inch heels for the past twelve hours. Her feet ached. Her back ached. All she wanted to do was finish shooting the video, go home, climb into bed and hibernate for the next forty-eight to seventy-two hours.

Besides, it was just a kiss. One simple little kiss. And it wasn’t as if she was just meeting this guy. She had been dancing with him, for him, all up on him for the past seven days. She knew that his breath always smelled of sweet peppermint. His cologne of choice was Sean ‘Diddy’ Comb’s Unforgivable. She knew what his hands felt like on her hips, how his bare chest felt pressed against her back and how his abs rippled beneath her fingertips. She knew that he had the longest lashes she had ever seen on a man, and that his eyes were amber with speckles of green.

They were practically old friends by now. What harm could one emotionally detached kiss be? She was a professional. And even though she was a dancer, and not

an actress, she was convinced that she could muddle her way through one simple kiss with this guy. So what if he was sexy, single and gorgeous as hell. So what if he had the voice of an angel, the body of a Greek god and his net worth last year was in the millions. She didn't believe in mixing business with pleasure. She was there to do a job and that was what she had intended to do, her job, no more, no less.

And while she couldn't deny that she was attracted to him, she knew that getting involved with a hip-hop artist was a no-no. She had been working in the industry for the past three years and she knew that some recording artists were notorious for being womanizers, and Avery Houston was no exception.

They'd use you to satisfy their seedy sexual fantasies and then toss you aside like a used condom. And while it was evident that there were some dancers in the industry that didn't mind getting used or passed around in order to advance their career, Joy prided herself on not being one of them. She got her work the old-fashioned way, hard work, dedication, professionalism, and talent, which was why she was one of the most sought after music video dancers in Atlanta.

"Good."

After going over the changes, Dave ordered everyone back to the set.

"OK, everybody. I know it's been a long night, but this is both our final shot for the night and our final shot for the video." There was a light round of applause around the set. Obviously, Joy was not the only one ready to call it a day. Dave, smiling, continued. "Let's see if we can get through this without any glitches and then we all can go home."

After a few instructions, everyone took their place. "Now remember Avery," Dave said, "this is the woman of your dreams, when you touch her, hold her, and kiss her, act like it alright. Make us think you're in love."

*So much for one simple little kiss,* Joy thought to herself.

"Not a problem," Avery smiled as he finished off the remainder of his water and handed the empty bottle to one of the production assistants.

"OK. Now let's see if we can get through this in one take." Moving off the set, Dave took his seat in the director's chair. Glancing into the camera at the shot, he yelled, "Quiet on set." And then "Cue rain." A light drizzle of fabricated rain began to sprinkle down over Joy and Avery. "Roll sound." The music started to play. "Roll camera. Mark it...and action."

Joy's body began moving as she wrapped herself up in the slow, tantalizing beat that washed over the set. And right on cue, Avery began to sing as he methodically made his way over to her.

*What kind of love,  
Would do this to me?*

Taking hold of her hips as they rotated in perfect rhythm, he pressed his body against her, matching her tempo.

*Make me strong one day,  
The next, weak in the knees.*

*Perfect. Perfect,* Dave thought as he watched the scene play out before him. The water soaked their bodies molding their clothing to their frames like a second skin. He could feel the heat between them.

*I know what kind of love,  
Would do this to me.*

Avery serenaded her, his lips pressed against her ear. His hands slid up from her rotating hips to her tiny waist. Wrapping one arm around her, his hand spanning across her bare belly, they continued to move in perfect union. *"It's your love girl,"* he sang, *"Come give it to me."*

Turning in his arm, Joy faced him. Resting her elbows on his shoulder, the palms of her hands, against each side of his head, she stared up at him. Water trickled down over his face.

*Just pretend that he's your boyfriend,* she coached herself as their eyes met.

*"I know what kind of love, would do this to me. It's your love girl,"* He brought his hands up to her face and held her. *"Come give it to me,"* he whispered just before pulling her to him, covering her lips with his. His kiss was slow and deliberate, yet full of passion. Joy closed her eyes as she kissed him back with the same fervor and intensity. She was startled when she felt his tongue slipping into her mouth, seeking a mate, but she didn't pull away from him. She pushed her body up against his and kissed him harder.

The music faded. The director yelled "Cut," but they remained in their passionate embrace. Seconds later, after realizing that the music had stopped, the rain had stopped, and the director was yelling 'Cut,' again, Joy pulled away from Avery's hold.

"Damn, baby girl," he smiled as he licked his lips. "Maybe we should try running through that one more time. But this time without the audience." Before she could respond, a production assistant rushed on to the set with a couple of dry towels for them.

"Thanks," Joy said tearing her eyes away and looking up at the assistant as she accepted the towel. She patted her neck, chest, and belly.

"That was perfect," Dave announced as he approached them. "It's a wrap."



"You want to get something to eat?" Avery called after Joy. She had changed into some dry clothes and pulled her damp curls into a loose ponytail. She turned around to see him crossing the set toward her. "Some breakfast or something. You've got to be starving." She stared up at his handsome face as he stopped in front of her. His amber eyes sparkled as they danced with enthusiasm.

"No thanks," she smiled. She tugged at the strap of her duffle bag. It was cutting into her shoulder. "I've got things to do." She wasn't going to abandon her self-imposed rule of not mixing business with pleasure. Yes, he was fine. Yes, he was loaded. And yes, he was one hell of a kisser, but she knew hanging out with him would only lead to trouble. He was known for using women and she was adamant about not becoming one of his many conquests.

"I'm buying," he raised one of his eyebrows.

"Sorry,"

"Come on. What kind of a man would I be if I didn't buy you breakfast? And I'm not taking no for an answer," he added when he saw that she was about to protest.

She smiled. "OK."