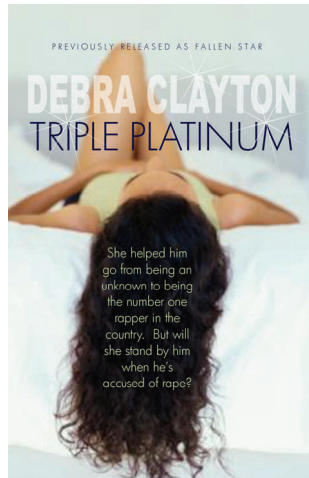


Triple Platinum

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She helped him go from being an unknown to being the number one rapper in the country; but will she stand by him when he's accused of rape?

Chapter One

S*low down, I just want to get to know you,*” sang thirty-two-year-old Ethan Michaels as he nodded his head to Bobby Valentino’s hit single, “Slow Down.” He tapped his fingers lightly on the steering wheel to the beat as he pulled his car into the circular driveway in front of the 6.8 million-dollar European-style mansion. The thirty-five rooms, four-car garage, luxurious home was detailed with sculptured ten-foot ceilings, exquisite millwork, hand-carved columns, and imported solid doors. Sitting on over three acres of land, the ten-bedroom, eleven-bath residence also boasted a wine cellar, an Olympic-size swimming pool in the courtyard, and a full-size basketball court.

But the professionally landscaped lawn and lavish home wasn’t Ethan’s. The

impressive estate belonged to his client, twenty-four-year-old rap sensation, Blayze, aka Calvin Wallace. Also referred to as Atlanta's answer to 50 Cent, Calvin was the newest "rhyme master" coming out of the heart of the South, and Ethan had been his manager for the last two years.

Southern Scope Records contacted Ethan and offered him the job. He'd had a chance to listen to Calvin's demo a few months earlier and knew right away that the rap hopeful was a lyrical genius. Knowing Calvin's potential, Ethan immediately accepted the position.

Not long after becoming his manager, he realized that Calvin was also one of the biggest assholes he'd ever met. But he didn't mind working for an asshole. . . as long as it paid the bills. And from the amount of chips that Calvin was stacking, Ethan had no problem paying the mortgage on the more modest, but spacious, 3,500 square-foot condominium he called home.

After pulling the key out of the ignition, he reached over, picked up the airline ticket and itinerary, and then climbed out of the white gold crystal Lexus SC. He hurried up the steps to the massive home and rang the doorbell.

As he waited for someone to answer the door, he tucked the papers under his arm and pulled out his BlackBerry organizer. He checked his schedule for the next day and noted an appointment to meet with Tymeless Jewelry Company. Tymeless was interested in getting Calvin to endorse their new line of diamond-encrusted watches, which they'd recently designed for highly visible and influential individuals in the hip-hop industry. Witnessing the massive record sales of Calvin's debut CD, Tymeless was convinced that he was on his way to becoming very influential in the hip-hop nation.

But Tymeless wasn't the only business to notice Calvin's potential—he'd already signed contracts to endorse tennis shoes for G-Phorce Shoes, cellular phones for En-Touch Mobile Phone Company, and a new drink called Hype Energy Drink for D & C Beverage Company. One of the most highly sought after rappers out there, Calvin's schedule kept Ethan jumping. But Ethan didn't mind Calvin's popularity, as long as the checks kept rolling in.

After the meeting with Tymeless Jewelry, he would catch his flight to Detroit to meet up with Calvin before his first performance.

"Ethan." Twenty-two-year-old Toni Wallace smiled when she opened the door. "Hi, how are you?"

Toni and Calvin had been married for three years, and although she was his client's wife, Ethan was immediately drawn to her from the first time he met her two years ago. But his attraction to her wasn't for the obvious reasons. She was beautiful. He couldn't deny that. Nor could he deny that she possessed the kind of body that could bring any man, straight or gay, black or white, to his knees. But what attracted him to Toni was her genuine heart.

In the world of hip-hop where most of the beautiful women had either fake hair, fake boobs, fake attitudes, or any combination of each, Toni was real, and she kept it real. Ethan often referred to the other women in the hip-hop world as CZ's, short for cubic zirconium, because they weren't the real thing, but he knew that Toni was a "diamond." When he was first introduced to Calvin, he pictured him being married to some gold-digging princess, but in reality, Calvin had managed to snag himself the ulti-

mate woman. It was just a shame that he treated her like shit.

“Hey, Toni.” Ethan attempted to sound casual and unaffected by the magnet that drew him to her. “I’m fine, and you.”

“I’m doing great,” she nodded. “Come on inside.” She stepped back so he could enter.

“No, no.” He shook his head and reached up under his arm to get the papers that he had for her husband. “I was just bringing Calvin’s airline ticket and itinerary by. I know he had a photo shoot with *Flow* magazine earlier today, but I didn’t know what time they would be finished with him. Is he here?”

“No, he hasn’t come home yet. Come on inside,” she insisted; “I want you to taste something for me.”

“I really should—”

“Please. . . it’ll only take a second.”

“Okay.” Ethan stepped inside.

“Thanks. Follow me.” She led him into the kitchen.

The spacious gourmet-style kitchen was so well equipped with the finest state-of-the-art appliances and accessories; it would’ve made even the most finicky chef swoon. And although Toni didn’t consider herself much of a cook, Calvin’s insistence that intricately carved cabinetry and woodwork accent the already stunning cooking area made the little time she spent in the kitchen almost heavenly.

“I’ve made this surprise dinner for Calvin,” she explained. “Sort of a going-away dinner since his tour starts tomorrow. Could you taste this meatloaf and let me know what you think. He loves meatloaf. I tried to make it the way his mother did.” She cut off a piece of the meatloaf and fed it to him.

Ethan closed his eyes and savored the flavor. “Mmmm, this is delicious.” He opened his eyes up and looked down at her. He smiled. “You did your thing, woman.”

“Really? You like it, or are you bullshitting me?”

“I love it. I wish Kenya could cook like you.”

“Kenya? Who’s Kenya?”

Toni put the fork down, folded her arms, leaned on the counter, and stared up at him. Her eyes strolled over the smooth, hazel-brown skin of his face as she studied his strong jaw line, full velvet lips, and dark, yet warm eyes. *Damn, he is fine.* She wondered what it would feel like to kiss those strong, velvet lips of his, which seemed so inviting. She wondered what kind of woman it would take to steal his heart.

Although she felt a spiritual connection with Ethan and couldn’t deny a physical attraction to him, she was never one to step out on her husband. And even though he worked for her husband, Ethan had proven to be a good friend to her. In time she had come to rely on him and his friendship. Whenever Calvin’s antics got the better of her and she needed a nonjudgmental shoulder to lean on, Ethan was always more than willing to lend his. She hoped that the woman to capture his heart would be able to appreciate his gentle kindness and giving soul. She also hoped that his new lady wouldn’t put an end to their unique and special friendship.

“Oh, she’s just a lady that I’ve been seeing for a couple of months.”

“Really,” she smiled with intrigue. “Calvin never mentioned that you had a girl-

friend.” Suddenly she was feeling a little envious of Kenya. She wondered what it would be like to be Ethan’s woman and to have his soft patient hands on her body as he made love to her instead of being fucked as usual by her husband. She was sure that Ethan, unlike her husband, was a gentle lover. It was just too bad that she was a married and faithful woman.

“Well, I don’t know if I would call her a girlfriend.” Ethan didn’t want to give her the impression that he was taken or unavailable just in case she came to her senses and decided to leave her philandering husband. Ethan wasn’t one to break up a happy home, but from where he sat, the Wallace’s home wasn’t a happy one.

“So what is she then?—A booty call?” Toni knew that Ethan was too much of a gentleman to refer to a woman as a booty call.

“No, not a booty call.” He chuckled, “She’s just someone I kick it with every now and then; she’s good people.”

“Well, whatever you call her, I’m glad you found someone. You need a good woman in your life; you deserve it.” She smiled as she stopped leaning on the counter and stood straight up.

“Thanks.”

“No problem.”

As he stared down at Toni, he wondered where Calvin was. *He is probably somewhere with his dick shoved down some chick’s throat.* He remembered the incident that occurred a little less than two years ago. He caught Calvin in the recording studio with his pants down around his ankles, fucking some girl that he’d only been introduced to a couple of hours earlier. It was then he realized that Calvin was a “grade-A” ass-hole. The worst part was Toni knew he was unfaithful. He was blatant with the shit that he did. And even though Ethan knew Calvin’s infidelities hurt her, for some reason she remained steadfast by her husband’s side. Ethan didn’t know why a beautiful woman like Toni subjected herself to such abuse and disrespect. *How could she not know?* He could only attribute it to her being foolishly in love. Most sistahs he knew would have cut Calvin’s dick off and flushed it down the toilet by now if he’d treated them the way he treated Toni.

Instead, Toni was cooking him a fantastic going-away dinner. Ethan just didn’t get it.

“Listen, Toni, I’ve got to get going. Could you make sure Calvin gets these?” He handed her the papers. “And tell him I’ll see him tomorrow in Detroit.”

“Okay.” Toni took the papers and walked him to the door. “You be careful and have a safe trip.”

“Thanks. I will.”

“And please look after my husband. Even though he tries to be tough, he’s really nervous about giving his first big concert.”

“I’ll try, Toni, but you know Calvin.” Ethan laughed.

“All too well.” She smiled.

After he left, Toni busied herself in the kitchen, putting the final touches on her meal. She glanced at her watch. It was six o’clock. She wasn’t sure what time her hus-

band would be arriving home, but she thought about hurrying since he could walk through the door any minute. She wanted to make sure the dining room was completely set up for his going-away dinner. Tonight was going to be special in more ways than one, and she didn't want anything to mess it up, including him.

"Don't blow it, Calvin," she mumbled under her breath as she remembered all the other times he had disappointed her. "Not tonight. I have too many plans for us tonight, baby."