

A photograph of a woman from the waist down, wearing a long, flowing white dress, walking barefoot on a sandy beach. The dress is billowing in the wind. The background shows the ocean and a clear sky.

SEQUEL TO *Not By a Long Shot*

*Decisions and  
Consequences*

**JESSICA TERRY**



*Natasha Williams seemed to have learned her lesson about leaving the past in the past and well enough alone, but she clearly still has a lot to learn. She and her husband, Sharif, become caught up in a whirlwind of paternity issues, lies, secrets, and family drama and, since Natasha still can't seem to finally sever ties with her ex, Davion, Sharif is wondering just how much more he can put up with.*

# Decisions and Consequences

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# Decisions and Consequences

Jessica Terry

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## Dedication

I can't believe I'm on book number five!

I'd like to thank God for the blessing of being able to make things up for people's entertainment. ☺ Writing is the one thing I've loved to do since I was a child that I still love to do as an adult.

I thank my family for the constant support and feedback. My mother, the honorable Judge Barbara Caldwell, my sister Jennifer, her husband Tony, my gorgeous nieces Lace and Alex...and of course, my heart, my son Langston, who is the best son in the world.

I love you all with everything that I have. And all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins (WAY too many of y'all to name lol) I love you all so much, too. To my grandmother, Geneva Harper...I'm so blessed to still have you in my life. And to my hero, my father Alton Caldwell, I can't even express how much I miss you and wish you were still here.

To my church family, friends, co-workers, you all mean so much to me and I can't tell you how much I appreciate you. I can't thank you enough for your support and encouragement.

If you've ever featured one of my books at your book club meetings, interviewed me, or just spent time reading anything I've written, I thank you so much. I pray that your support continues and grows as I keep the books coming.

This is my first sequel that I'm putting out and I hope that you enjoy it as much as you did 'Not By a Long Shot.' I had a great time writing this book and I hope you enjoy reading it. Natasha is at it again. ☺

Please feel free to hit me up on Facebook at [facebook.com/AuthorJessicaTerry](https://www.facebook.com/AuthorJessicaTerry), Twitter at [@JessicaLTerry](https://twitter.com/JessicaLTerry), Instagram [@JLTerry32](https://www.instagram.com/JLTerry32), or on my website at [www.jessicaterry.com](http://www.jessicaterry.com). I'm not just saying it when I say I love to hear from you! ☺



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## Chapter 1 – Natasha

I must have sat on that floor for a good thirty minutes. The paternity test results were still in my hand but I couldn't bring my eyes to look at them again. Because they said that there was basically no chance that my husband Sharif was the father of our daughter.

I just *knew* that Sharif was the father, even though I had also known that there was basically a fifty/fifty chance that he wasn't. I had slept with him and my ex Davion within a day of each other, each time with no protection (and yeah, I know you're probably dogging me already). But something in my gut had told me that Sharif was the one that had impregnated me. Maybe I just wanted that to be the case so badly that I believed it. Either way, women's intuition isn't always right, obviously.

Sharif had gone to check on our baby Sheridan after reading the results. I almost wondered if he had read them right, because he had said he was going to check on *his* daughter. I knew he had to be feeling some kind of way; we were just somewhat getting back on track after I had admitted to cheating on him with my ex for most of the time we had been married, which had only been a little over a year. He had moved out for a while, but he had started staying at the house more and our intimacy was slowly but surely revving back up. We had a baby girl that we were both crazy about. Really, Sharif hadn't wanted to even *do* a paternity test, even though he knew as well as I did that the baby might not be his. Once Sheridan was born, he had fallen in love with her, and that's all he needed. But that didn't sit right with me, so I took his toothbrush and went and had one done anyway, without him knowing. Now I was wishing I hadn't.

Needless to say, I was devastated by this. Just as everything had started going right again, I had to throw yet another wrench in the wheel. I wanted to talk about it with Sharif, to see where his head was, but he wouldn't discuss it. He was acting like he had never even seen those results. I worried about his denial and how long it

would be before he finally exploded. Sharif was a kind and pretty easygoing and reasonable man, but this was his daughter we were talking about. His daughter that was conceived when I had gone to Davion's house and seduced him in the middle of the night after reading a fake letter Sharif had planted in an effort to get a rise out of me. Well, it had worked. But he wouldn't have done that if I hadn't been treating him so shabbily and taking him for granted in the first place. All of this was my fault; there was no other way to slice it.

"Sharif, baby," I said to him one evening, dropping down next to him on the couch where he was reading the newspaper. Sheridan was asleep and the baby monitor sat on the end table next to him. "Can we please talk about this?"

"Talk about what?" Sharif asked, his eyes still on the paper.

"You know what I'm talking about. The paternity issue?"

"There is no paternity issue. Sheridan is my daughter."

I sighed. "Sharif-"

"She's *my* daughter, Natasha," he interrupted strongly, looking at me intently.

I pursed my lips, trying to choose my words carefully. "I consider her to be yours too, baby, but-"

"There is no *but*," Sharif interrupted me again, snapping the newspaper shut. "She's mine."

"But you saw the results, though."

"They're wrong. They got them wrong."

"Sharif, the accuracy on those things is incredibly high. It said there was a zero chance of you being-"

"Natasha!"

"Sharif, come on! I know this is not something either of us want to deal with but this is the reality of things, baby! Now let's just discuss it so we can figure out how to move forward from here. How come we can't do that?"

Sharif threw the newspaper onto the couch beside him and stood up, signaling the end of the conversation. He stepped over my feet, heading back to his office. "There's some chicken in there, if you're hungry," he informed me over his shoulder as he waved a hand

towards the kitchen. Then he disappeared into his office, closing the door behind him.

I threw my head against the couch pillows, covering my face with my hands. This was already such a mess. It had been three days since we had seen the paternity test results and he was still in denial about what they were. Really, I didn't know what else to do. He refused to talk about it and still wanted to go on acting like everything was everything. This wasn't something we could exactly push up under the rug.

But my main concern was how this new information was going to affect our marriage. We were way better than we were, but we were still on somewhat shaky ground. I could tell at times that Sharif was still kind of keeping me at arm's length, and sometimes he would question where I was going a little more than he used to. And I know; I deserve that. After cheating for so long, technically starting on our wedding night when Davion and I were kissing in his truck at my reception, I could understand that winning Sharif's trust back was not going to be a cakewalk. And now after this, with it being confirmed that Sheridan is actually Davion's daughter, I could only pray to high heaven that it didn't push him farther away from me.

\* \* \*

"Hey, Natasha."

That deep, baritone voice used to send shivers down my spine. And it did today, simply because I was nervous to talk to Davion after learning what I did about Sheridan's paternity.

"Um, hey, Davion," I stammered, internally telling myself to get it together. All the man had said was 'hey.' "What's up?"

"Nothing much. Just getting off work a little while ago; about to head to the house. You still at the office?"

"Yeah, but I'm getting ready to head out. I've gotta go pick up Sh-Sheridan from my parents'."

There was a pause. "You all right?"

"Yes," I answered quickly, actually stopping my action of putting some files in my satchel, as if he could see me. "Why?"

“You sound funny.”

“Funny? Funny how?”

“Like you’re nervous or something.”

I bit my lip. I wanted to tell him what was on my mind; that he was really my father of my child and not Sharif. My mouth opened to say the words, but nothing came out. Even though Davion and I had maintained (or rather, rekindled) something of a friendship after everything hit the fan and settled back down, he had backed away from me after Sharif had demanded the truth out of both of us, but he slowly started coming back around. Of course, this time I kept Sharif in the know about everything we did.

“Natasha,” Davion called out to me. “What’s wrong with you?”

“Oh, um...it’s nothing. Just thinking about this meeting I had today. Demanding client, you know.” I was lying, but it shouldn’t have been hard for him to believe. I ran an event planning business so difficult clients was something I had to deal with at times.

“Oh. Well, don’t let it stress you. Just go home and relax with your husband and that beautiful daughter y’all got.”

I so wanted to let him know. He deserved to know that Sheridan was his biological daughter. But I just couldn’t make myself say the words. If I told him what the deal was, that would only make things more tangled than they already were.

“Yeah,” I muttered, extremely frustrated with myself. “Good idea. I’ll do that.”

“Aight. I’ll talk to you later.”

I hung up my phone and dropped it on the desk, hanging my head. I was such a wimp.

\* \* \*

I’m telling you, I was trying to be patient with Sharif, because I know I had taken him through a lot already and this was just yet another blow to him, but I was getting a little frustrated with this whole denial thing he had going on in regards to Sheridan’s paternity. It had been a week and he *still* wouldn’t talk about it or acknowledge it. I really felt like my hands were tied, because I was scared to push him too hard. He was already not talking to me as

much as he had been; when he was at home, he spent all his time with Sheridan. He wouldn't even let me help with her; he wanted to feed and bathe and put her to sleep himself. There were nights when he even slept in Sheridan's room with her; right there on the floor beside her crib. I would just stand at the door and watch him, feeling helpless. I knew he was hurting and dealing with this in his own way, but this just couldn't go on much longer. Ignoring stuff didn't make it go away.

All of this denial wasn't healthy. This wasn't even like Sharif to act like this; he was usually the one out of the two of us that had some sense. Any time we had a problem or issue come up, he kept his head and dealt with it; I was the one that freaked out. But now, the tables seemed to be turning. I tried to remember that I had put Sharif through a lot and a person can only take so much. He had dealt with everything that had happened better than most men would have, and certainly better than I deserved. Maybe he deserved a little time to be irrational. But this wasn't something minor like us disagreeing on what movie to watch or where to go on vacation. This was about the paternity of our child. He was going to have to snap out of it.

One night I happened to reach across the bed and Sharif wasn't there. He had gone to bed with me, but given his recent actions I figured maybe he had gone to camp out in Sheridan's room again. But then I smelled smoke. I threw the covers off me and jumped out of the bed, racing straight towards Sheridan's room, when I saw the smoke was coming from the bathroom. Sharif was in there in his boxers, perched on the side of the bathtub, with a lighter and a sheet of paper. When I got closer to him, I saw it was the paternity test results.

"Sharif..."

Tears were running down his face. "Is the door to Sheridan's room closed?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes."

"Good." He watched the paper burn in his hand.

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My heart was breaking. I couldn't even remember the last time I saw Sharif cry. The fact that he was going through this because of my actions made me want to stick my hand in that fire.

I slowly lowered the toilet lid and sat down on top of it, looking intently at Sharif. But he wouldn't look at me. He just watched the paper that broke his heart burn and disintegrate into ashes. When the fire got close to his fingertips, he dropped it in the bathtub and wordlessly reached over and ran turned on the water, drowning the flames.

We just sat in silence for a while before I tentatively reached over and placed my hands on his knee. "Sharif?"

He looked at me.

"You ready to talk now?"

He just kind of shrugged his shoulder before turning his eyes back to the wet ashes in the bathtub.

"I know you're hurting and I am so, so sorry," I said sincerely, placing a hand on my chest. "I'd give anything if I could take back everything I did. And God knows I love my baby, but if I could change anything about her, it would be that she would be your blood child. But the situation is what it is. She's...she's Davion's daughter."

Sharif's jaw clenched.

"We need to figure out how we're going to deal with this, baby."

"What is it you want to do, Natasha?" he asked me, his voice still low.

"I want us to decide how we're going to tell Davion about all this."

"Nope."

"What do you mean, *nope*?"

"We're not telling Davion anything."

Why was I not surprised? "Sharif. I thought you said we could talk about this."

"We are talking. And I'm telling you that I am not telling Davion about these paternity results and neither are you."

"You know that's not right, Sharif."

“It might not be right but that’s the way it is.”

“Wouldn’t you want to know if it was the other way around?”

“Well it’s not the other way around. Call it what you want to, but I’ve been getting the short end of the stick enough when it comes to you and Davion. I’m tired of him always winning. He’s not gonna win *this*.”

“Sharif, baby...this isn’t about winning. I’m so sorry that you think it is, but it’s not. You have *me*. And you have Sheridan; it doesn’t matter that she isn’t your biological child. You have loved her and taken care of her since the day she was born. You’re all she knows.”

Another tear streamed down his cheek and his jaw clenched again.

“You and I both know telling Davion is the right thing to do,” I said gently.

Sharif was silent for a few moments. Then all of a sudden, he abruptly stood up, brushing my hand off his leg. He looked down at me with hard, red eyes and growled, “Like I said. I am not telling Davion anything. And you better not tell him, either.”

He walked out of the bathroom.

## Chapter 2 – Sharif

Being a nice guy wasn't getting me anywhere.

Yeah, I could see where Natasha was coming from as far as telling Davion the truth about Sheridan's paternity. But that didn't mean I agreed with her. Davion was doing just fine thinking that Sheridan was my daughter. We had enough things to deal with without adding having to deal with him on a regular basis.

Really, I should be getting some kind of medal for how well I've handled everything I've had to deal with this past year and some change. Ever since Natasha and I got married, I've had a feeling something wasn't right. She was missing from our wedding reception a little too long, but I chose not to think anything of it. My baby wouldn't do anything to disrespect me, especially on our wedding day. But, unfortunately, I was wrong. Turns out she had gone out to talk to Davion and they ended up making out in his truck. That just started a months-long affair that was going on right under my nose, and it wasn't until Natasha turned up pregnant that I stopped denying the obvious and confronted her about it. She admitted everything. It probably helped that I had called Davion and we were both there when she confessed, so it wasn't like she could really lie. Either way, I finally knew what the deal was.

I'll be honest; it wasn't easy looking at my wife after that. I've never been so angry and so hurt before in my life. I had to move out of our house for a while 'cause I just couldn't stand to be around her. But over time, with patience and counseling, we eventually started getting back on track. I'm not gonna lie and say I didn't miss her 'cause I did. I never once stopped loving her, even though for a while I didn't like her 'cause of what she did to me. She cheated on me for most of the time we were married; it wasn't easy for me to accept that and really, it still kinda burns when I think about it. But I believe she's sorry about it and I've never been one to hold grudges; people make mistakes. I know I have. So we're still working on it.

Aside from not wanting to derail me and my wife's progress, another reason I didn't want to tell Davion that he was really



Sheridan's father was because I just loved her so much. It was love at first sight for me, and I can't imagine anyone else trying to be her father but me. She wasn't even a year old yet. I didn't know Davion as well as Natasha did (obviously) so I had no way of knowing how he would react if he found out; would he try to take her from us? Or would he fall back like he had promised to do after Natasha finally told me about their affair that day? I didn't know, and I didn't want to risk it. Even if he just had regular visitation or something, it would still raise a bunch of questions because our families would eventually find out. We had done a pretty good job of keeping people out of our drama so far and I didn't want to start bringing people into it. It was embarrassing enough as it was.

I told Natasha all of this. But Natasha, of course, didn't want to just leave it at that.

"Sharif, I get all that, and I even agree with you on the drama thing, but still. We cannot keep something like this a secret."

"I don't think of it as a secret. I just think of it as something that isn't any of his business."

Her mouth fell open. "Isn't any of his business? How do you figure it isn't any of his business? It's *his* daughter, Sharif!"

I glared at her.

"I know you don't want to hear that, but she is," she added gently.

"No, I don't want to hear it. And I wish you would quit saying it."

"Me not saying it doesn't make it not true."

"Do I need to remind you that we wouldn't even be in this mess if you hadn't snuck and gotten a paternity test in the first place? I told you when Sheridan was born I didn't want one. And Davion had agreed to fall back and leave us alone; *he* didn't even ask you for one. *Did he?*"

She lowered her eyes. "No."

"But you couldn't leave well enough alone and just *had* to go and find out. And now look what's happened. Not only do we have confirmation that there's no way that Sheridan could be my child,

you won't get off my back about bringing Davion back into our mix by telling him."

"Sharif-

"It's bad enough that you still talk to this dude. I'm not crazy about that but it's not like I can control who your friends are. But you're just a little too concerned about his feelings and you don't seem to care enough about mine."

Her eyes snapped up at me, wide and pleading. "Sharif, baby, you don't really believe that, do you?"

I crossed my arms over my chest. "Actions speak louder than words."

"Sharif! I've been straight up with you about anything having to do with Davion. I've told you about every single time that I've seen him and just about every one of our calls."

"Yeah, and I really don't like hearing about that," I mumbled.

"My point is that I'm not trying to keep anything from you anymore. Don't you think I've learned my lesson about keeping secrets and trying to hide stuff? It always blows up in your face; if anybody knows that, I do. *That's* why I want to tell Davion, baby; I just want everything out in the open."

She made sense. But still. "Be that as it may, the fact that you insist on being friends with the man you cheated on me with is a hard pill to swallow. I'm just now getting some modicum of trust back for you. Are you trying to derail that?"

She gasped. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that if you don't want us to backtrack, you'll respect my wishes on this." I looked her right in her eyes. "I've had to put up with a lot from you, Natasha. And I'm telling you right now, I can't deal with anymore. Not now. I can't deal with this."

Tears were in her eyes. She came over to me and wrapped her arms around my waist, gripping me tightly. "I'm sorry," she whimpered. "I'm so sorry. I promise not to say anything."

I just sighed and hugged her back, resting my cheek on the top of her head.

Yeah, I felt a little bad about laying the guilt trip on her. That wasn't really my style. But I didn't feel bad enough to take it back.

I had meant it when I said that I wasn't crazy about her and Davion still being friends. Part of me can't even believe that she would even *want* to still be friends with him after everything that went down. The man broke up with her in a text message after they had been together for three years and were planning on getting married. Then she and I meet and fall in love. She gives him an invitation to our wedding (out of spite, she had said), he shows up and declares that he still loves her, she falls for it, and they start bangin' the day after she and I get back from our honeymoon. This went on for months. She *knows* how much that hurt and devastated me. During the time I was out of the house, I would actually lay on my friend's couch and cry like a damn baby, thinking about how she did me. So the fact that she didn't voluntarily disassociate from him immediately and wants to hang out with him all buddy-buddy like all that stuff never happened still kind of stings. And I keep my mouth shut about it for the most part because, even with everything that's gone down and everything she did to me, I'm not the kind of man that tells his wife who she can and cannot see.

But to be real, in the back of my mind, I sometimes wonder if she'll slip up and give in to temptation again. She swears up and down she won't, that he doesn't even come at her like that anymore, but that doesn't really mean anything to me. As far as I'm concerned, she's leaving the door open for it by continuing to hang with him. I still don't trust her like I used to, and it's not like I have the time or even the desire to be following her around and checking in on her every hour of the day. I refuse to do all that. I just take her at her word that whenever they meet up for lunch or he stops by her office, that's all it is.

But I'm telling you, though, if she slips up with him again, that promise I once made about never leaving her regardless will be out the window.

\* \* \*

I was heading home from work the next day when I got a call from my baby sister, Lauren.

"Hey, big brother. What you doing?"

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“Just heading home. What’s up?”

“I wanted to see if you could come over to the house for dinner. I got a new stove and I want to test it out with a big meal.”

“That sounds good. When?”

“Whenever you can come; just let me know. And make sure you bring my beautiful baby niece with you. She’s just as precious as she can be.”

“Isn’t she?” I couldn’t help smiling, trying not to remember I really had nothing to do with how precious she was. “All right, I’ll ask Natasha what her schedule is looking like and let you know when we can come over there.”

There was a pause. “That’s not really necessary.”

“What’s not really necessary?”

“You asking her to check her schedule.”

“Why isn’t it? She has a lot of events coming up.”

“Well she can just go to those events and you and Sheridan can come by yourselves.”

I might need to mention that Lauren isn’t really a fan of Natasha’s. And really, I can’t say why. They seemed cool enough when we were dating, even though I admit she didn’t take to her like the rest of my family did. But ever since we got married, she hasn’t had anything nice to say about my wife. I’ve lost count of the number of times I’ve had to check her about that. She didn’t have to like her, but she wasn’t about to disrespect her to me.

“What have I told you about that mess, Lauren?”

“I’m just saying...”

“This is getting real old and I’m tired of it. I suggest you get over whatever petty nonsense you have against my wife ‘cause she’s not going anywhere.” *I hope*, I thought to myself.

“I’m just trying to avoid the drama by suggesting she sit this one out, that’s all. I’m sure she’s a very, *very* busy woman. Is she working right now?”

My temper flared at the obvious sarcasm in her voice. “Lauren, let me tell you something-”

“All right, all right, I’m sorry. That was uncalled for.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Let me change the subject before you end up cussing me out again. I spoke to Zoe today.”

“So?”

“She was asking how you were doing.”

“I hope you told her I’m good and happily married.”

Zoe is my ex-girlfriend. I was with her before I met Natasha. She and I had been together for five years when I found out about her cheating on me. And I found out by finding a note from her on the night I had been planning to propose that she was in love with both me *and* my frat brother but wanted to see if she could make things work with him. I hadn’t seen or spoken to her since and hadn’t wanted to. And I certainly didn’t want to start talking about her now.

“I told her you were good,” Lauren said. “That you’re doing well in your career, that you look great...”

“Lauren...”

“She really regrets messing things up with you,” Lauren continued quickly. “You’re just about all she talks about every time we talk. Maybe you should see her.”

“That’s funny.”

“I’m not kidding, Sharif. I mean, why not?”

“Because I have nothing to say to her, that’s why not.”

“Come on, Sharif, don’t be like that. Are you still angry with her for what she did?”

“No, I’m not angry. I’ve moved on from that. But that doesn’t mean I want to shoot the breeze with her, either. It’s bad enough you two are BFFs.”

“We are not BFFs. And I know you think it’s messed up that I’m still cool with her after what she did to you...”

“I never said that.” *Even though it was true.*

“But I hope you know I do not condone what she did. You know my loyalty will always be to you. I cussed her out good fashion when she got back to town. But she was all devastated because ol’ boy dumped her and was acting like she didn’t have anybody to turn to and I guess I just felt sorry for her.”

“Whatever, Lauren. That’s your business.”

“No, I need you to understand this. ‘Cause I know I would feel some kind of way if you were hanging with some man that had dogged me out.”

“I wouldn’t do that.”

“I know you wouldn’t. I just want to make sure we’re cool.”

“Yeah. We’re cool.”

“Good,” she said, sounding relieved. “But I do think you should see her, though. Get you some closure.”

“I don’t need closure. I’m good. Like I said, I’ve moved on from that. I’m not holding a grudge; I wish her all the best. I just have nothing to say to her.”

Lauren sighed.

“And she better not be at this dinner you’ve invited me to, either,” I added, knowing how sneaky my little sister could be. “You and I are gonna have a major problem if she is.”

“Okay.” I knew she had been planning that.

“I’ve got enough stuff on my mind with...”

“With what?”

I had almost slipped and said something about all the issues I had with Natasha, which nobody in my family knew about. If I had anything to do with it, it was going to stay that way. I had enough drama as it was.

“With work,” I quickly covered. “Just a lot going on at work. Don’t need any more stress.”

“All right, Sharif,” Lauren finally conceded. “Whatever you say.”



*Natasha Williams seemed to have learned her lesson about leaving the past in the past and well enough alone, but she clearly still has a lot to learn. She and her husband, Sharif, become caught up in a whirlwind of paternity issues, lies, secrets, and family drama and, since Natasha still can't seem to finally sever ties with her ex, Davion, Sharif is wondering just how much more he can put up with.*

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