

SCENE TWO: LENORA

*Lights up on the living room. The doorbell rings. IDARA admits AKEESHA.*

AKEESHA

Damn, Idara, this is the prettiest home I've ever been in.

IDARA

Why, thank you, Akeesha. I was hoping you would join us. I'm so glad you're here.

JORETTA

Hi. I'm Joretta. You met at the Y?

AKEESHA

I was heading out for a job interview when she was coming in to drop these books off. The Infamous Mother books? She looked like she needed some help ...

IDARA

I didn't need help, but it was kind of you to offer.

AKEESHA

... and we started talking and one thing led to another. She said she had this little group?

IDARA

And here we are.

AKEESHA

Y'all known each other a long time?

IDARA

Not so long, but not so short either. Joretta and I met much the same way you and I did. That was ... when was that, Joretta?

JORETTA

Dead of winter. January. Two years ago.

IDARA

It feels like I've known you longer than that.

JORETTA

Two years. I would know. I'd just got out of prison and I was fighting to get my babies back from a man I never should have been with in the first place. If it hadn't been for Idara, I never would have gotten them.

IDARA

You give me too much credit, Joretta. Akeesha, this is Max.

MAX

So nice to meet you.

JORETTA

Max is my friend.

MAX

Just a friend?

IDARA

Here, we are all best friends. Isn't that right, Joretta?

JORETTA

Yes, ma'am. I suppose it is.

IDARA

Max?

MAX

The very best of friends.

IDARA

This is a safe space, Akeesha. In my house, you can say anything you like, so long as it's the truth. Just be yourself. Nobody judges nobody. We're here to listen to each other, hear whatever is going on. Help if we can. Sometimes we come together and eat food. Maybe cook something. Do a project or a game of some kind. Read to each other. And we always talk. Girl talk. Whatever comes into our minds.

JORETTA

Today, we're reading Infamous Mothers. It's this new book everybody's talking about, and Idara donated all these copies to the ...

AKEESHA

I know. She gave me one, too. I had to ask her what an infamous mother was.

MAX

It's us. It's what we all are.

JORETTA

And proud of it.

AKEESHA

*(To Max)*

You, too?

IDARA

Yes. All of us.

AKEESHA

Huh.

IDARA

There's coffee and cookies for anyone who wants them. Just help yourself.

AKEESHA

You made these?

JORETTA

You know she did.

IDARA

I thought we'd each take a turn reading one of the stories out loud, to each other. How does that sound?

JORETTA

I'm not much of a reader.

MAX

You read just fine.

JORETTA

To myself, maybe. Just not out loud.

IDARA

Nobody is going to be judging you. Remember? It's just us.