



LISETTE JANELLE *Exploring Life Through Words*

Lisette Janelle is a contemporary fiction author whose work delves into the emotional complexity of Black womanhood, healing, and identity. Her writing is intimate, lyrical, and unapologetically honest—inviting readers to confront truth, embrace vulnerability, and find themselves in the pages. Through her *Twenty-Two Series*, Lisette crafts stories that resonate deeply and linger long after the final chapter.

A storyteller at heart, Lisette is inspired by the world and the people around her. Although her background is in information technology, digital marketing, and business management, she often finds herself daydreaming about her next story. Creativity has always called to her. Her passion lies in crafting realistic, respectable, and passionate romance novels—love stories that leave readers wanting more. She enjoys building characters that feel authentic, reflecting the complexities, vulnerabilities, and beauty of real-life connections.

Asseveration

Book One of the Twenty-Two Series

When Dr. Raya Xander arrives in Ana, Alabama, she's going to do more than turn heads. With a tragic past and a vision for the future, Raya is determined to revive the town through a medical center and business park. But not everyone welcomes change. As crime, corruption, and painful secrets surface, Raya must navigate betrayal, broken trust, and her own emotional scars.

Drawn into a complex relationship with Detective Joshua Boseman, and facing tension with her twin brother Luther, best friend Aurora, and close friend Dorian, Raya finds herself at a crossroads—where love, destiny, and resilience collide.

Asseveration is a passionate and emotional story of big dreams, overcoming the past, and the search for love.

Genre: Contemporary Romance **Themes:** Black Womanhood, Emotional Healing, Community Transformation **Release Date:** March 13, 2025 **Publisher:** Lisette Janelle **Formats:** Print, Ebook

Bestowal

Book Two of the Twenty-Two Series

Book Two adds depth and suspense while continuing the emotional journey.

In the aftermath of the raid in Ana, Dr. Raya Xander's world is upended. What began as a local investigation reveals a global crime ring tied to human trafficking. Whisked away to Seattle to work with the CIA, Raya faces new threats, unexpected allies, and a stalker who's getting too close.

Meanwhile, her brother Luther and close friends Aurora and Dorian are navigating their own emotional terrain. Love is within reach—but past wounds and old habits threaten to derail their futures. As danger escalates, they must decide whether healing and connection are worth the risk.

Bestowal is a gripping continuation of the *Twenty-Two Series*, blending romance, trauma, and the hope of redemption.

Genre: Romantic Suspense, Contemporary Fiction **Themes:** Trauma Recovery, Found Family, Emotional Resilience **Release Date:** May 1, 2025 **Publisher:** Lisette Janelle **Formats:** Print, Ebook

Prominence

Book Three of the Twenty-Two Series

This installment adds tension, romance, and emotional complexity—perfect for deepening the series arc.

They say never to mix business and pleasure...

Raya and Joshua are on ice after concerns arise that his personal interest in her could compromise her safety—and her disregard for his position hasn't helped. When threatening letters from her stalker begin to surface, Joshua is determined to prove his professionalism, even if it means sacrificing his chance with the woman he loves.

Enter Dr. Miguel Sterling, a charismatic researcher whose attention toward Raya is anything but subtle. Meanwhile, Lux is head over heels for Aurora, who struggles to match his emotional depth, and Dorian courts Tamiko, a key player in the ongoing investigation.

With distractions mounting and danger closing in, one misstep could cost Raya everything.

Prominence is a stirring continuation of the *Twenty-Two Series*, exploring determination, unconditional love, and the power of forgiveness.

Genre: Contemporary Romance, Romantic Suspense **Themes:** Emotional Boundaries, Forgiveness, Love Under Pressure **Release Date:** August 2, 2025 **Publisher:** Lisette Janelle **Formats:** Print, Ebook

Praise for Lisette Janelle and the *Twenty-Two Series*

*“Lisette Janelle’s storytelling is raw, real, and deeply moving. Her characters feel like people you know—and her words stay with you.” — Danyelle Scroggins, Author of *His For Christmas**

*“Lisette Janelle writes with emotional honesty and cultural depth. Her stories reflect the journey of self-discovery and the power of love to heal.” — Kimberly Beasley, Author of *Searching for Me**

*“Lisette Janelle is a rising voice in contemporary fiction. Her work is bold, heartfelt, and rooted in the lived experiences of Black women. The *Twenty-Two Series* is a must-read.” — BlackBookPromo.com*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Lisette Janelle Unleashes a Bold New Voice in Contemporary Fiction with the *Twenty-Two Series*

Florida — Storyteller Lisette Janelle is shaking up the literary scene with her unapologetically raw and emotionally gripping *Twenty-Two Series*. With characters that leap off the page and narratives that challenge, heal, and inspire, Janelle is quickly becoming one of the most compelling voices in modern fiction.

The *Twenty-Two Series* dives deep into the lives of Black women navigating love, trauma, identity, and redemption. Each installment is a masterclass in vulnerability and resilience, offering readers a mirror to their own journeys and a window into lives often overlooked in mainstream literature.

Critics and fellow authors are taking notice. Danyelle Scroggins, author of *His For Christmas*, calls Janelle’s work “raw, real, and deeply moving.” Kimberly Beasley, author of *Searching for Me*, praises her “emotional honesty and cultural depth.” BlackBookPromo.com hails her as “a

rising voice in contemporary fiction... bold, heartfelt, and rooted in the lived experiences of Black women.”

Books in the *Twenty-Two Series* *Asseveration* – ★ 4.9 on Amazon *Bestowal* – ★ 4.8 on Amazon *Prominence* – ★ 5.0 on Amazon

With a growing fanbase and a fearless approach to storytelling, Lisette Janelle is not just writing books—she’s building a legacy.

The *Twenty-Two Series* is available now in paperback and ebook formats on Amazon.com.

Review Copies, Media & Interview Inquiries

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www.lisettejanelle.com - Instagram, Facebook & TikTok: [@lisette.janelle.author](https://www.instagram.com/lisette.janelle.author)

Media-Friendly Angles

If you were interviewed, what moment from the book would you want to read aloud? If I were interviewed for a talk show or podcast, the moment I’d choose to read would be the scene where Raya reveals her second secret to Joshua—a deeply emotional, raw exchange where she finally opens up about the trauma she’s carried in silence.

It’s just the two of them. No distractions. No masks. And for the first time, Raya lays everything bare, not knowing how Joshua will respond. She’s terrified he’ll see her differently, but he doesn’t. He embraces her, loves her even more, and offers her the safety she never knew she needed.

That moment is personal, because I think we’ve all longed for that kind of vulnerability—for someone to see us at our most broken and still choose to love us. It’s a reminder that the fears we build in our minds often feel bigger than reality, and that when we finally speak our truth, we may find an entire army ready to rally around us with love and life-giving words.

That’s what this scene represents. And that’s the kind of love and acceptance we all deserve.

What makes *The Twenty-Two Series* different from other romantic suspense novels — what’s the twist? What sets the *Twenty-Two Series* apart is that it was originally written with a television series in mind—designed to be fast-paced, cinematic, and emotionally immersive. It blends high-stakes action, deep romance, layered drama, and real-world issues, creating a rich, genre-bending experience.

Because of this structure, I’ve received amazing feedback from both women and men, especially male readers who were drawn in by the action and suspense. Even my professional editor noted in his review that I was stepping into a new lane of fiction, taking a creative risk that

paid off. He described the series as raw, entertaining, and incredibly visual—something readers could truly see and feel as they turned the pages.

By weaving together intense emotional depth with thriller-like momentum, the *Twenty-Two Series* offers something fresh—an experience that reads like a movie but connects like a memoir. It's suspense romance reimagined.

Can you share a behind-the-scenes moment from writing this series that would make a great anecdote? I'm not sure I'm supposed to say this, but the inspiration for this series came from a very difficult moment in my life. I was going through a tough time at work, dealing with someone who was consistently harsh, belittling, and dismissive. It wasn't subtle, and many people saw it. But instead of being supported, I was told not to make waves. "Just keep quiet," they said. "We see it, but it's better to stay silent and keep the peace."

That silence took a toll. I carried the weight home every day—stressed, hurt, and unheard. And then one night, I had a dream. The first chapter of *Asseveration* played out vividly in my mind like a movie. When I woke up, I remember thinking, *How does it end?* And a quiet voice inside me said, *You write it.*

That's how this series was born.

It became a place where I could tell the truth—about what we carry, how we're treated, and who we really are beneath the surface. I wanted my coworkers, my community, and anyone watching to see the brilliance, resilience, and excellence of people who are so often misunderstood or dismissed. I hoped that if they could see us clearly, they might treat us differently.

And so I wrote.

Series & Reader Engagement

How does the newest book, *Prominence*, build on the emotional arc of the *Twenty-Two Series*? *Prominence*, the newest installment in the *Twenty-Two Series*, marks a major turning point in Raya's journey. It serves as one of the emotional climaxes of the entire series—where every danger is faced, every moment of suspense, and every unanswered question begins to come full circle.

In this book, Raya is finally forced to confront her deepest fears and unresolved trauma head-on. But she's no longer the woman we met in *Asseveration*. After being poured into by those who love her and challenged by everything she's endured, she now stands equipped, empowered, and ready.

The beauty of *Prominence* is that this breakthrough moment isn't just hers alone—you also see her twin brother, her friends, and the people who've stood by her side grow and rise to the occasion. It's a thrilling, emotional payoff for readers who've walked this journey with her.

And yes, it ends on a cliffhanger—but the kind that feels earned. It leaves readers excited, not frustrated, and eager to step into the next chapter of Raya's life in Book Four, *Indelible*.

What kind of reader do you envision falling in love with this book? The reader who will fall in love with the *Twenty-Two Series* is someone who craves a romance that's real, immersive, and intentionally built. If you love a novel series that unfolds with depth, strong character development, and a genuine courtship, this series is for you.

Book One includes some undeniably spicy moments—just enough to stir the tension and show the chemistry between Raya and Joshua. But as the series progresses, so does the intensity. With each book, the spice level rises along with the emotional intimacy, bringing readers into a romance that is as passionate as it is purposeful. By Book Three, the heat is very spicy, and by Book Four... sizzling.

This isn't just about physical attraction—it's about a complete connection: emotional, spiritual, psychological, and physical. It's for readers who enjoy watching love grow alongside careers, family dynamics, friendships, and healing from past trauma.

If you're looking for a one-and-done, ultra-quick spicy read, this may not be your ideal fit. But if you want to be swept away by a richly layered and intensely passionate love story that deepens with every book, you're in the right place.

By the time you reach Book Five, you'll feel like you've lived and loved alongside Raya and Joshua every step of the way.

Are there any fan reactions or reader stories from previous books that shaped how you wrote this one? Since the *Twenty-Two Series* is my very first book series, I don't yet have fan reactions or reader stories that inspired it—but I do have a few powerful creative influences that helped shape the way I approached writing it.

Originally, this was meant to be a television show concept, and I still wrote it with that cinematic lens in mind. Two major inspirations were the *Twilight* saga and Phase One of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). The *Twilight* series taught me how powerful it is to build a world where readers and viewers feel deeply connected to the characters and their relationships. You'll even find subtle jokes and references to *Twilight* in Book One, *Asseveration*.

The MCU influenced me in how it created stories that appealed to a wide audience—thrilling, heartfelt, and layered enough for adults, yet clean and engaging enough that families could enjoy them together without having to hit pause when a child walked in. I loved that balance and aimed to achieve something similar in terms of emotional range and cultural richness.

But on the flip side—let me be clear—while the heart of the *Twenty-Two Series* is full of family, faith, and community, there are definitely spicy scenes. These moments of physical intimacy are not written for children, and they aren't meant to be. But they're purposeful, not gratuitous. They show what it looks like to make love, not just have sex, with someone you trust, respect, and are emotionally and spiritually connected to.

That kind of intimacy, when done right, is beautiful. It's sacred. And I believe we should normalize showing healthy, loving, romantic relationships in their fullness—even the physical side—because that, too, is something we should teach our children. Not through explicit content, but through values: that love, safety, emotional vulnerability, and respect should all be present when sharing that level of closeness with someone.

This series pours out the values my parents instilled in me, shines a light on my culture, and invites readers into a layered, authentic, and sometimes raw experience—one that I hope leaves a lasting impact.

Launch & Availability

The *Twenty-Two Series* by Lisette Janelle is a five-book romantic suspense saga that blends emotional depth, high-stakes drama, and cultural relevance. Each installment builds on the last, offering readers a cinematic experience rooted in authenticity and healing.

Available Titles

- *Asseveration* – ★ 4.9 on Amazon
- *Bestowal* – ★ 4.8 on Amazon
- *Prominence* – ★ 5.0 on Amazon

Coming Soon

- *Indelible* – Book Four in the series
- *Benevolence* – Book Five in the series

Formats

- Paperback
- Ebook (Kindle and other platforms)

Where to Buy

- [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) - All books, [Amazon.com: Lisette Janelle: books, biography, latest update](https://www.amazon.com/Lisette-Janelle-books-biography-latest-update)
- lisettejanelle.com (direct links and updates)

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Chapter One

From *Asseveration* by Lisette Janelle [For promotional use only.]

Chapter One

She squints into the setting sun as she steps outside into the scorching Ana, Alabama evening, a hot gust of wind blowing across her face.

After the stuffy interior of the abandoned strip mall, even this muggy air is welcomed. Taking a cleansing breath, Raya Destiny Xander turns to the two people who followed her out. Cash Stevens reluctantly takes her outstretched hand. "Thank you, Mr. Stevens," Raya says with a polite smile despite his sour attitude. She doesn't know for certain that his issues are due to her race, but considering he was nothing but polite the times she dealt with him on the phone over the past few months, she suspects that her being Black came as a bit of a surprise to him.

Not that she cares what some Southern good ol' boy thinks of her. Now that the sale's gone through and she has the keys, she can dismiss him from her mind and focus on building relationships that will matter.

Like the one with the forty-something mayor of Ana, Tina Hernandez. That handshake is much friendlier, and the smiles they exchange are genuine. "I look forward to seeing everything you're going to accomplish here," Tina says. "Thank you again for choosing Ana for your revitalization project."

"Thank you for welcoming me to your town," Raya says. "It was my first choice."

Ana is one of those places that doesn't get a lot of attention. On the large side for a town but not quite big enough to be considered a city, it sits on the narrow line between a lot of things. Not poverty-stricken but definitely not high income either. Urban enough to have decent public transportation but not so urban that everything is concrete and steel. Across the street from the strip mall are wide open fields that will serve as prime real estate for further expansion.

For Raya, this area is a good representation of the town as a whole.

As the mayor walks away, Raya tugs on the bottom of her blazer, smoothing out a few faint wrinkles, and then starts walking toward the corner store located at the end of the strip. It's the only store that isn't for sale, which means Raya needs to make herself familiar with it to determine how to best incorporate it into her project. Her red-bottomed heels click on the sidewalk as she walks straight toward the group of young men she spotted the moment she arrived this morning.

There are half a dozen of them, all wearing baggy jeans and tank tops or t-shirts. Even if they aren't in an official gang, this group has all the signs of being one, and the comfortable way they've been staring at her tells her

they spend a lot of time on the wall lining that side of the property.

Knowing that she'll need to deal with them at some point, she decides to set the precedent right now and walks past them without changing her walk. She hears muttered comments filled with all the crude words and curses that she expects. She doesn't need to hear everything to know they aren't just talking about her body but about how out-of-place she is here with her designer handbag and white gold charm bracelet. Her brother suggested that she dress a little less noticeably, but she told him she intended to start the way she intended to finish: as herself.

As she reaches the door, she stops and pulls her long, dark hair over her shoulder so she can see them clearly when she turns her head.

With a smile and a wave, she says, "Good day, gentlemen."

She's inside before she can hear how they react. She pauses only a few steps in, taking a moment to appreciate the air-conditioning as she looks around. She doesn't really need to buy anything, but she's no fool. If she wants to get off on the right foot with her new neighbor, she has to show that, while she has money, she doesn't think she's too good to buy from a store like this.

To her right, she notices a handsome, dark-skinned man casually standing in the back corner, but that suit makes her think he's actually some kind of cop. No one else would wear a suit that doesn't quite fit – though it doesn't really disguise the broad shoulders or muscular build beneath the fabric – and keep looking around like he is. Well, she doesn't plan on shoplifting anything, so his attention

doesn't really matter. She's not here to schmooze the local PD. After giving him a nod of acknowledgement, she grabs a bottle of water and a pack of gum and smiles as she approaches the counter.

The man at the register looks to be in his sixties, with curly white hair and the sort of café au lait skin that makes Raya think he's probably mixed. Which, if she has his age right, means he probably put up with a lot of crap when he was a kid. Her gaze catches on some pictures behind the counter, ones of a younger version of this man at various protests.

Her smile widens as she sets her things down. "Hello, sir, how's your day been?"

"Why, hello there, young lady. My day is mighty fine. I haven't seen you around these parts before. I may be old, but I'd surely remember your pretty face. Where are you visiting from?"

Raya can feel the eyes of the guy in the suit on her. She ignores him, though a part of her wants to preen, a little bit, because he is definitely one fine specimen. She might not want any romantic entanglements, but a look and a little flirt never hurt anyone.

"Well, Mr..."

"Michael Simms, ma'am."

"Mr. Michael Simms, it's nice to meet you." She holds out her hand. "I got

back from Dubai a few weeks ago after being abroad for a couple of years, and Ana seemed like a good place to plant for a moment."

His eyebrows shoot up. "Duuu-bai?" He drags out the first syllable. "You don't say! What were you doing over there, young lady? Do you serve in the military?"

Raya laughs, a cheerful sound that makes the older man smile. "Oh, no, Mr. Simms."

"Call me, Michael, ma'am."

"No, Mr. Michael," she says. "I work in health care."

As he rings up her purchases, he asks, "So where are you originally from?"

Raya's smile dims ever so slightly, and a shadow crosses her dark eyes. "I moved around a lot when I was younger, but I'm from the South." She coughs lightly. "Oh, let me add an orange juice for the road, please."

She uses the short walk back to the refrigerated section to pull herself back together. The question shouldn't have thrown her. When she reaches the orange juice, she's surprised to see the handsome man in the suit there, holding out a bottle of juice.

He flashes her the sort of charming smile that she tries to avoid. With his clean-cut hair, nice fade, and his smooth, clean-shaven skin, he's definitely her

type, but it's his kind smile radiating humility that makes him a man that a woman might dream of taking home to meet the parents. Those are always the ones she finds the most dangerous. She can resist a bad boy. It's harder for her to stay away from this type.

"Ma'am, I overheard you're a guest in our town. Let me cover these for you."

Before she can argue, he heads back to the front of the store, and she follows because he has the last bottle of juice. By the time she gets there, the stranger is talking to Michael.

"Put the rest of her things with mine. How much do I owe you, Michael?"

"That's Mr. Simms to you. Only the pretty lady can call me Michael." The older gentleman winks at her in a way that's more friendly than lascivious. "That'll be \$15.73, Detective."

As the detective swipes his card, Raya tries not to look surprised at the title. She thought security or undercover beat cop or something like that, not detective. Still, when Michael hands her the plastic bags with her things, she smiles at the detective.

"That was kind of you, Mr. Officer." She turns to Michael without waiting for a response. "And thank you, Mr. Michael. I'm sure I'll be seeing you around soon. Have a great evening!"

"You as well, ma'am, and be careful out there," he says, breaking into a hacking cough. Raya's smile turns to concern as it keeps going.

"Are you all right? How long have you had that cough?"

He waves dismissively as the spasm eases and manages to say, "A few weeks, but I don't have a cold." He takes a deep breath and almost starts coughing again.

Raya's all business as she asks, "Are you experiencing any other symptoms?"

He shrugs and smiles. "Headaches more than usual. Sometimes my vision is blurred too. But nothing I can't handle, ma'am. Been through far worse."

She's not about to let him dismiss her that easily. She really doesn't like the sound of that cough or the other symptoms he's describing. She might've come here for business, but she doesn't ever stop being a doctor.

"Have you had it checked out?"

He shakes his head. "No, ma'am. The town's free clinic closed down years ago. The nearest clinic that's not a full hospital is right outside of town and..." He looks away, his voice tight with emotion. "You see, I don't have the best insurance. They've brushed me off, and I can't pay out of pocket. They barely looked at me before they sent me home."

Raya purses her lips. "I see." She can feel an all-too-familiar anger simmering under the surface of her skin, but she focuses on the man she wants to help. "Actually, I'm a doctor. You mind if I connect with you later this week? Be happy to take your blood pressure and check your heart rate. I can at least give you some feedback to point you in the right direction."

Relief breaks across Michael's face. "That would be mighty fine, ma'am!"

Raya's smile is genuine. Her problems with the health care system can easily affect patients. "Great! I'll see you later this week! Have a good evening!"

It isn't until she turns that she realizes the detective has been watching this entire exchange.

"Please, let me walk you to your car. You aren't exactly in the best part of town."

Raya gives him her best confident look and ignores the little thrill of attraction that goes through her at the concern in those gorgeous brown eyes of his.

"I appreciate your concern, Mr. Officer. That's very sweet of you, but I can handle myself. I'm tougher than I look ... promise. Thank you for your hospitality. Have a wonderful evening!"

She feels eyes on her as she leaves the store and has to resist the urge to put a little extra swing into her hips for the fun of it. Instead, she focuses on heading straight for her white Escalade, shoulders back, steps sure.

And then the hairs on the back of her neck stand up as she catches a glimpse of movement out of the corner of her eye. It's an instinctive warning that someone's behind her.

"Hey, excuse me."

"Oh, hello." She doesn't slow but does throw a glance his way to show she's not intimidated or threatened by him. "Can I help you?"

The always-working part of her brain notices that the young man next to her isn't very big, under six feet tall and skinny, like he doesn't get enough to eat. With his deep-tan skin and dark hair, he looks a lot like the people she's spent the last couple years around.

"Naw, I was seeing if I can help you." He runs his eyes up and down her body and doesn't try to hide it. "Where you going? I mean ... You clearly ain't from around here. Why don't you let me show you around?"

"That's kind of you, but I have a hotel on the other side of town and am on my way out." She talks to him politely but firmly. "You have a good night, okay?" She's not too far from her car now, and the adrenaline pumping into her veins has her body feeling she should run, but her brain knows that running is the absolute wrong thing to do.

The young man's gaze drops to her butt again, and he smirks. "Seeing you walking away in them heels made my night." His laugh crawls across her skin. "Know what I'm saying?"

Raya ignores him, not wanting to give him the satisfaction of any sort of reaction. It doesn't matter if a woman gets pissed, flattered, or scared. He wants an acknowledgement that he has power over her. And she won't give it to him. She's only a few feet from her car when she hears the young man's footsteps picking up speed, and then, shocking her with his boldness, he slaps her butt. She's vaguely aware of the detective yelling, but she's already moving, muscle memory and training kicking in as she drops her purse and bag, whipping around in her heels fast enough for her to catch a glimpse of surprise on the young punk's face a moment before she slams both of her hands into his chest.

He stumbles back a step, but before he can completely lose his balance, she grabs his right wrist and pulls him toward her, twisting his arm behind his back, getting him into the right position for her to put him into a headlock. She does it all almost without thinking, and then it's suddenly over. Her heart is pounding, her face dotted with sweat.

"Aye! You're hurting me!" he shouts.

Raya ignores him, scanning her surroundings to see if his friends are coming to his aid. They're standing up along the wall they were sitting on before, their

attention definitely on her, but none of them seem to be moving. The detective is walking toward her, not exactly slow but not running either, though she suspects he was a moment ago.

"Let me go!" The young man struggles against her, but she pulls his arm higher and feels absolutely no guilt at the pained sound he makes. "I was playin' around!" When it becomes clear she's not going to let him go, he changes tactics, calling out to the cop. "Yo, arrest her, Detective Boseman!"

Raya is starting to feel the burn in her muscles, but she doesn't plan on letting go until the detective is closer. She knows how to take care of herself but isn't stupid enough to release the young man and hope he doesn't retaliate.

"What's wrong with you, lady? What are you, a black belt or something?"

"Or something," Raya mutters. She raises her voice, making it into her 'I mean business' tone. "What's your name?"

When he doesn't answer, she tightens her grip on him, and he lets out a yelp.

"Ahh! Ouch, man! It's Levi!"

Raya sees that Detective Boseman has reached them, but her focus is on the man she's still holding.

"Guess you weren't kidding about being able to handle yourself," the detective says with a mixture of awe and amusement.

Raya glances at him but doesn't acknowledge what he said. She's too busy deciding how she's going to handle things from here. She carefully removes her arm from around Levi's neck but doesn't give him a chance to do anything before she uses the arm she still has twisted behind him to shove him, chest-first, into a rusty Honda that looks like it hasn't been moved in months.

"Okay, Levi, let's get something straight," Raya says, her voice even but firm. "Don't you ever disrespect me like that again! Do you understand me? The next time you do, I promise, it'll be the last. Do you hear me?"

"Yeah, lady, chill!"

She releases him, taking a few steps back so she has room to move in case he's planning something. He doesn't come after her though. Instead, he stands there, rubbing his shoulder and glaring at her.

"Ma'am, do you want to press charges?" Detective Boseman rubs the side of his face, the hint of a smile curving his lips, and shakes his head. "I'm embarrassed this is one of your first encounters in Ana. I know his grandparents. He was raised better than this."

Raya smiles at the detective. "No, thank you. I'm fine." When she turns her attention back to Levi, she feels a little softer toward him than she did and lets it show on her face. "Levi, how old are you?"

"Twenty-two," he says sullenly.

A familiar jolt goes through Raya as she realizes how fate has worked things out. "When did you turn twenty-two?"

Levi gives her a strange look. "Last month."

"Okay," she says with a smirk, "so that gives me eleven months to turn your entire world upside-down."

"Come again?" Levi looks at the detective. "Yo, Detective Boseman, is she for real?"

"Look," Raya says, "humor me. You're young. What do you want in life? Any goals?"

He laughs. "Yeah, to make money. I'm a businessman, ya know what I mean?" He points to the road that runs in front of the strip mall. "These streets, I manage them."

"Good." Raya smiles. "So you know the city pretty well. I need that in my

next business partner.” She winks at the detective but does it so that Levi can’t see her. “Meet me back here tomorrow morning at ten. And be prepared to get dirty. I’ll explain my proposition then, and I promise you won’t be disappointed.” Levi gives her a smirk. “So ... you propositioning me now?”

Raya rolls her eyes. “Something like that. I’ll see you tomorrow, Twenty-Two.”

She picks up her things and resumes her walk to her car, knowing full well that Levi is staring at her, posturing for his friends like he didn’t get his butt handed to him by some rich woman in heels.

“Wait, ma’am,” Detective Boseman says, falling in step with her. “I never caught your name. All I know is that you’re a doctor who clearly has martial arts training. That’s kind of you to connect with Mr. Simms.”

Even as her body responds to the attraction she feels, she gives him a half-truth. “Mrs. Destiny Xander.”

Standing close enough to hear her answer, Levi calls out, “Yo, you married? All that ice and I ain’t see no ring on your finger.”

Raya raises a single eyebrow. “I’m married to my purpose and my dreams. You can call me Ms. Destiny.” She looks back at the detective. “And, Mr. Officer, will I also see you here tomorrow morning, or are you on duty somewhere else?” “Yes, ma’am, there’s a town hall tomorrow. The mayor is supposed to make a big announcement. Would you happen to be part of that announcement?” Surprising herself, Raya gives him a slightly coy look and shrugs. “I dunno. Guess we’ll have to see tomorrow.”

Before the detective can come up with a response, Raya climbs into the back of the white Escalade and shuts the door. As she settles into her seat, her close friend and driver Dorian Baker starts driving toward the exit.

In the passenger’s seat is her twin brother, Luther, who looks pissed. She doesn’t need to be able to read his mind to know what he’s thinking.

“I see you showed that hoodlum what’s up. Guess he’ll think twice before grabbing my sister again!” Lux turns slightly so he can look at her, concern radiating off him. “Man, this is hard, Raya, letting you handle yourself like that. Are you sure this is a good idea and you know what you’re doing?”

Dorian scowls, growling, “I don’t like it at all! I was ready to snap his neck, but I know I trained you well, and you never disappoint. You did your thing out there, but I think it’s time we reveal ourselves to this town so they know you have backup.”

She knows he means well. D is as overprotective of her as her brother, but when people see D’s stacked, six-foot-four frame, it’s him they respect, not her. That’s why she needed to handle things today on her own.

“Guys, chill.” Raya has been calming them since they were kids. “There will be time for the big reveal tomorrow. I’m ready to get some rest.”

Dorian glances at her in the rearview mirror. “What were you talking to that kid about? Seems like you gave him a pass after he literally assaulted you.”

“His name is Levi, and he’s twenty-two.”

Lux rolls his eyes. “Bingo. Makes sense. So he’s the new side project in addition to this major initiative we already have on our hands to literally transform this town.”

Dorian, of course, has to put in his two cents too. “If you ask me, you could be walking into a suicide mission. This place is crime infested. You and I need to stay on top of our training each day to make sure you stay sharp.”

“I didn’t ask you,” she mutters. “But seriously, you know this city wiped out an all-black town during Reconstruction after slavery ended, right? A ton of families were murdered because people couldn’t stand to see them prosper. It’s time for reparations. For all we know, some of these people could be descended from those families. We’re multi-billionaires, and all I want to do is help people with the money and get rid of some of these racial inequalities and health care disparities.”

Both D and Lux nod in agreement.

“Big facts,” Luther says.

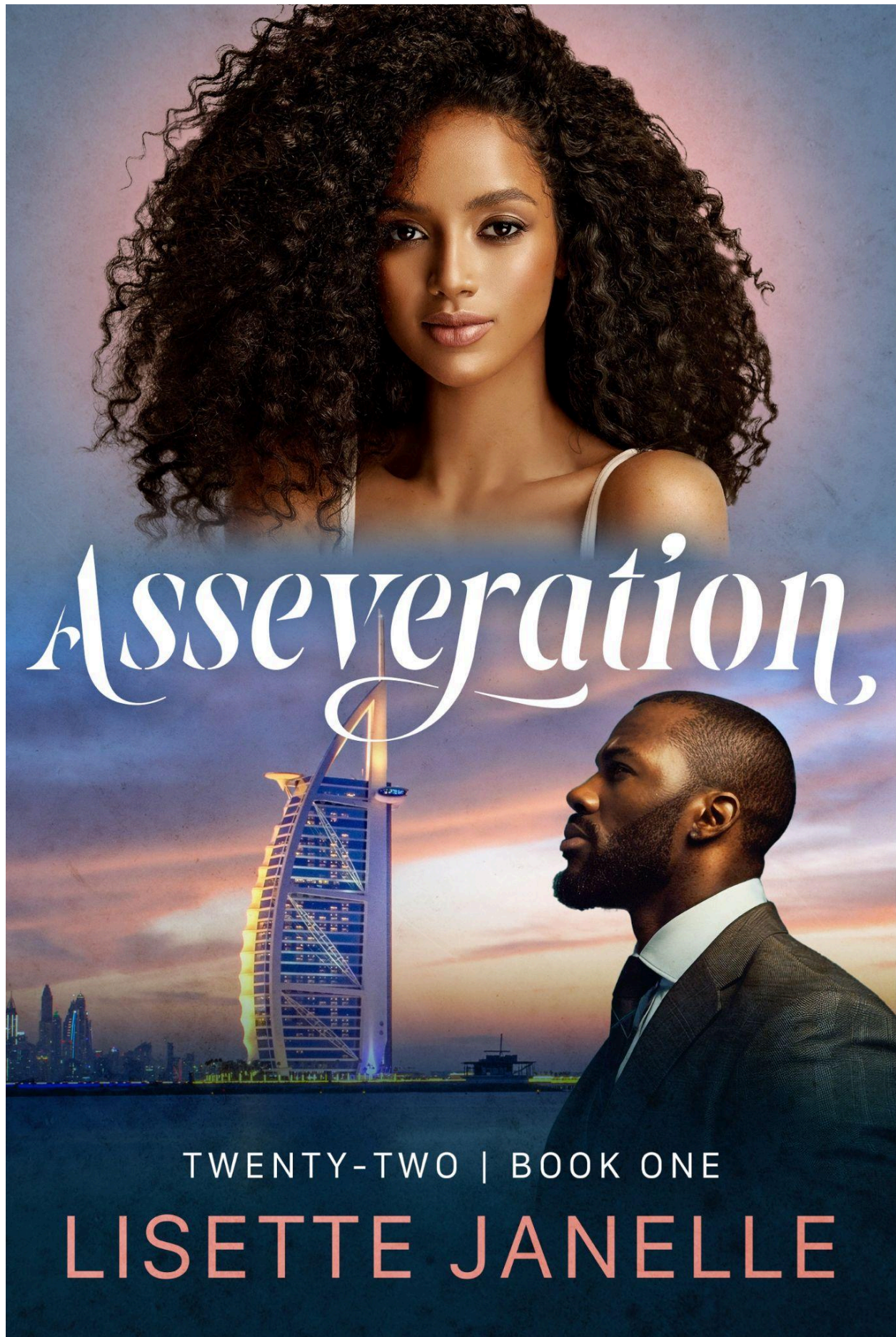
“Look,” Raya continues, “the medical center we’re opening in the strip mall will have the latest technology and security. People are going to travel from all over the nation to see it. And I want the people of Ana to have it. Plus, D, you’ll be opening up your state-of-the-art martial arts studio in the plaza, and Lux will have his upscale lounge. And then Aurora is coming next week to start her renovations

in the plaza for the luxury hair salon and spa. See, we’re already kicking off four of our twenty-two renovations for this city. We got this.” The excitement of what’s to come pushes back thoughts of what just happened. She claps her hands in delight.

“I’m so excited about tomorrow!”

The look in Dorian’s eyes is soft as he says, “I don’t want you to get hurt.”


Raya leans forward and pats D’s shoulder. “I won’t. I never doubt that you guys have my back. Always.”



Asseveration

TWENTY-TWO | BOOK ONE

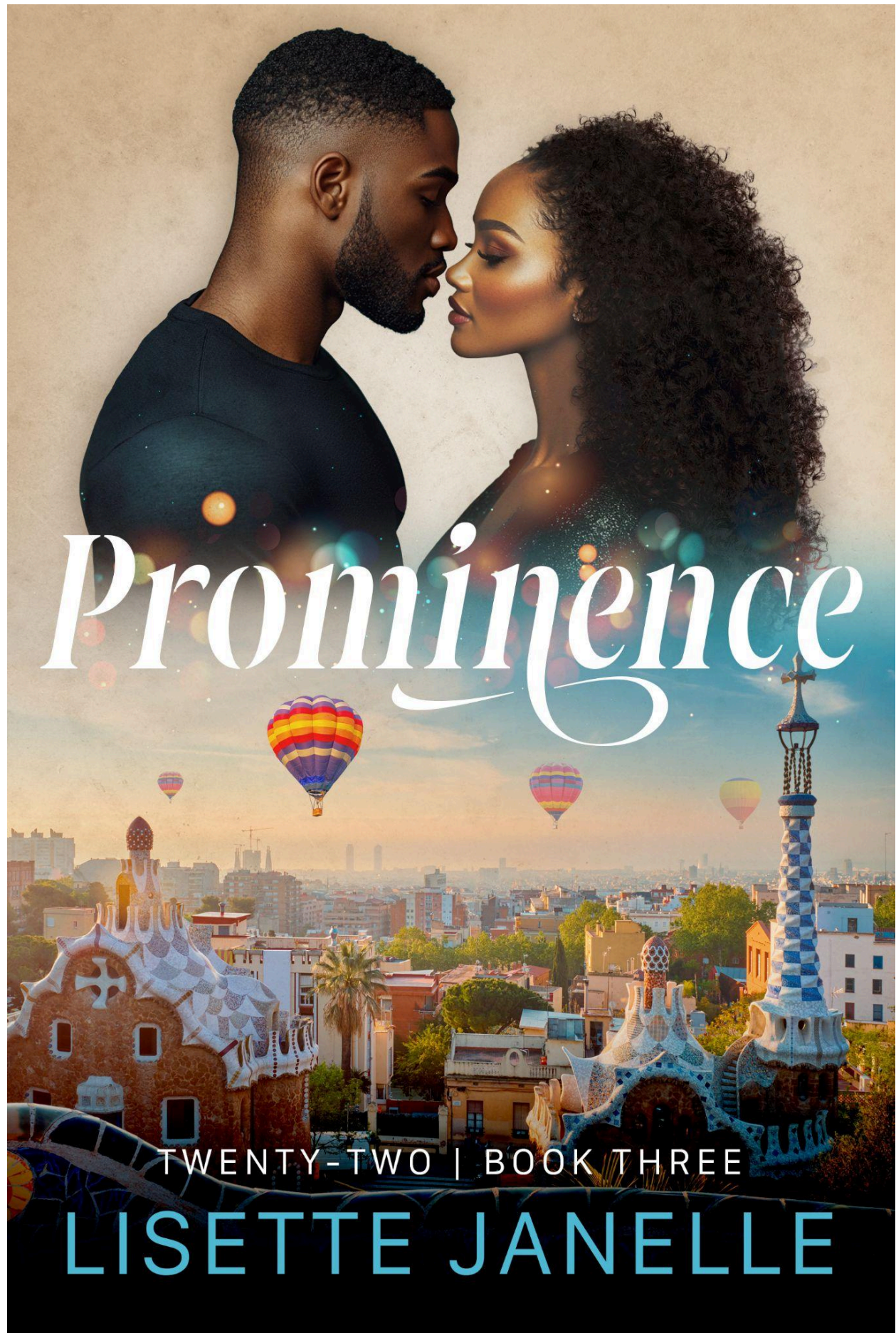
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Bestowal

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