

## *CHAPTER 1*

### *THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME*

“Karissa, where have you been!? I can’t believe this crap! The board says our flight is still delayed! We’ve been in this musty airport for over seven hours!” Chante asked as she closed her M.A.C. makeup compact and put it inside her 17,500 Kelly bag her husband got her from Hermes. It was one of her most it coveted gifts from him. Chante looked rather chic in her pink and white Roberto Cavalli pant suit, Jimmy Choo stilettos that added height to her 5 foot even frame and matching accessories that went great with her freshly cropped new haircut.

“This is so damn aggravating! I...I need an aspirin.” Chante dramatically rubbed her temples in frustration. Karissa was enjoying the trip despite the many obstacles that stood in their way. Karissa was more laid back and less dramatic than Chante. To look at Karissa one would think he was looking at Garcelle Beauvais Karissa was striking at 5 ft 11, with sun kissed skin, long straight hair, but her main attraction was her long beautiful legs that she didn’t mind showcasing. Karissa turned many heads in the airport as she made her way towards Chante in her Dolce & Gabbana gold pebbled lamme jacket and skirt giving the ultimate look of elegance. She felt something good was destined to happen to her in Chicago. Even though Chante was her boss she didn’t feel uncomfortable telling her when she went overboard because they were also best friends.

Through much sweat, blood, and tears Chante is now the Regional Bank Director of Kingdom Mutual Bank and wouldn’t dream of having anyone else be by her side constantly everyday but Karissa.

“This has got to be the business trip from hell! Everything seems to be going wrong. First the meetings ran longer than planned! Then just out of making the day a total disaster, our flight was canceled not once but twice since last evening due to the weather conditions! Today’s flight was scheduled to leave at 10:45 a.m. It is now after five o’clock, and the flight’s still delayed because of this damn thunderstorm!” Chante complained.

“You’ve got to learn to take the bitter with the sweet. Anyway, it’s raining like cats and dogs out there. I know you don’t think anyone would be stupid enough to board a plane in this weather?” Chante knew Karissa was right. The airport was swamped with people sitting around with briefcases, cell phones, and laptops conducting their business while waiting on their perspective flights.

“Anyway, we could’ve stayed at the hotel and watched the soaps to see what will happen to Erica Cane in court today.”

“Tell me about it. I could be in a warm cozy room ordering room service right now instead of being here. I’m so hungry I could eat a whole cow.” Karissa moaned.

“Not the whole cow!” Chante squawked while continuing with her summation of the soaps and joking with her friend.

“That Erica has been in more trouble than the law allow. First, she drugged someone, stabbed her husband, got hooked on drugs, stole Maria’s baby, had another daughter that she completely forgotten about now a son has been thrown into the mix! Oh don’t let me forget she was a Las Vegas show girl and a drunk. Talk about a drama Queen!” Chante laughed.

“Those story lines are just too unreal. They need to let me write some of those soap lines. I’ll have them all in an up roar. And another thing, Erica Cane has got to be the best looking woman I have ever seen in jail! She wears a designer jail suit, stilettos,

manicured nails, and makeup with her hair all done up. Pine Valley's jail system is a joke...but if I ever go down that's where I wanna be!" Chante remarked.

"Have you noticed something else about soaps Chante? Everybody that comes on the soaps leave rich. Look at Babe and Krystal Carey they were trailer park trash now look at them rich as hell!" Karissa revealed.

"Another thing about the soaps that's just too fake; I wouldn't care how much money Asa Buchanan has...he couldn't pay me enough money to get a whiff of this with his old wrinkled ass!" Karissa laughed.

"I don't know all about that. Shit, I can get over Asa's looks with all that money real damned quick." Chante snapped her fingers.

"That's the way it goes on the soaps. Girl, if I could be on the soaps I would be one devious rich sistah sleeping with all the good looking men. They always got some some fine men to gawk at!" Karissa beamed.

"OKAY!" Chante hollered." Karissa and Chante started laughing and two other women joined in on the conversation.

"That Shamar Moore is one fine ass nucca!" A cinnamon complexion woman with freckles and sandy red curly hair joined in and said.

"I can't argue with you on that! Fine or no fine you should always be one step ahead of them. Sometimes you have to be a dog just like them." Chante admitted.

"Girl please, you wouldn't cheat on Alex for all the tea in China." Karissa said.

"Why would I? I have the total package in my man! Money, looks, prestige, good provider, hellafide sex...need I go on?" Chante asked as she looked around at the women who were all oh and ah's.

“Girl with all that going on you would be a fool too. I would love to have a man like that! Oh I’m sorry, I’m Yolonda and this is my cousin Shamona. We’re just all in y’all kool-aid and don’t even know the flava!” Shamona was a splitting image of the other woman looked like they could be twins only difference was Shamona had a beauty mark above her lip on the left side like Marilyn Monroe.

“Girl, we don’t mind! It’s just nice to have someone else to talk too, to pass the time. I’m Chante and this is my friend Karissa.” The women all exchanged pleasantries and continued with their conversation.

“I wished they had some decent televisions in this airport.” Shamona whined.

“You’d think they would as much as we have to pay for airfare.” Chante fumed.

“Ladies, I say let’s vibe on something else besides being stranded in this dreadful weather at the airport in Chi-town. So, what bring you girls to the windy city?” Karissa asked.

“My father lives here and we visit him every so often. He’s getting up in age and is as stubborn as a mule. You know, no matter how much I protest he still refuses to come home with me. Ever since my mother passed last year he just hasn’t been the same and I’m scared for him being way out here by himself.” Yolonda stated.

“My Aunt Roberta is the same way! My Uncle Oscar passed and she just seems to be detached from life. Where are you guys from?” Chante asked.

“Arlington, TX DFW bound!” Shamona all but yelled.

“So are we! Karisa and I are from Dallas! We must exchange numbers and keep in touch.”

“Great, I would like that very much! My job transferred me from here to DFW three years ago. I’m in the banking business.” Yolonda said.

“So are we! I’m here on business. I’m the new Regional Director for the DFW metroplex for Kingdom Mutual. Karissa is my personal assistant slash best friend.” Chante made known.

“They’re finally letting go of the reins handing them over to us! Girl you’re in a good position to help make changes for our people. Most of us can only dream of being in charge of something let alone a bank! I work in the loan department at Commerce National. Hell, it took me awhile just to get that far.” Yolonda threw in for emphasis.

“Commerce, you must know my other best girlfriend Michelle! She’s the head of the loan department at the branch on Elm Street.” Chante said excitedly.

“Get outta town! You know Michelle Ramsey!?” Chante nods. “This is getting better and better as we speak.” Yolonda sings.

Mona you remember the lady I was showing you when you came to the job that day to meet me for lunch?” Yolonda asked.

“How could I ever forget? You kept saying that she going places because she’s female, black and in charge.” Everyone laughed at Shamona’s statement.

“Karissa, I overheard you saying that you were hungry, want to go and get a bite to eat?” Shamona asked.

“Sure, I’d love too. Chante, Yolonda, want anything back?”

“Whatever you’re having is fine with me.” Chante said.

“Mona bring me back something back sweet. Make it chocolate like some kind of cake loaded with like a gazillion calories in it” Yolonda requested.

“That sounds like a good idea. Chante would you like something sweet too. It’ll sure cheer you up.” Karissa asked Chante nodded her approval.

“We’ll be back in a couple of minutes.” Karris informed.

“Okay, don’t get lost...again.” Chante quipped.

“So...tell me about yourself Chante. At least it will burn some of this extra time we seem to have too much of. Besides, you seem to have a little spice in your life. Mine is like having tofu seven nights a week. A sorry man, that’s a spoiled brat not that I’m complaining because he puts it down! Here’s a picture of my baby. Her name is Aaliyah.” Chante looked at the picture. Aaliyah was the splitting image of her mother. Both had beautiful warm brown skin, deep dimples in both cheeks and curly sandy red hair. The only difference was that Aaliyah didn’t share her mother’s beautiful oval shaped eyes.

“She’s a doll! She’s a miniature you.” Chante cooed.

“Thanks, I get that a lot.” Yolonda bragged.

“She didn’t inherit your eyes. I’d kill to have some slanted eyes like yours.” Chante continued to stare at the picture.

“She had to get something from her Daddy besides that temper. She has him wrapped around her little finger. I’m just glad that despite our situation he makes time for her. Oh well, there’s my whole little pathetic life in a nutshell!” Yolonda sighed and looked like a helpless little puppy. Chante laughed at Yolonda’s description about her life.

“It can’t be all that bad.” Chante acknowledged.

“Live my life for a week then come back and tell me how it is.”

“No thank you, I’ll take your word for it!” Chante threw her hands up.

“Karissa and I go back about...ten years.” Chante reminisced.

“Really, I know you have some stories to tell!” Yolonda rubbed her hands together like she was getting ready to get some major dirt.

“She’s the kind of friend anyone would love to have by their side.” Chante nodded.

“You seem to have a cherished friendship with her. I don’t really have that many friends I can speak of in such high regard. My cousin, Shamona, is my best friend. We’ve been close since we we’re born. Our birthdays are only days apart and our mothers are twins. We have a very close knit family.” Yolonda smiled.

“That’s wonderful, my family is close but there’s still a little rivalry there sometimes. Like my Auntie Bessie Lou, she’s always comparing her children to my Mother’s trying to make her family reign supreme.” Chante laughed.

“Girl, my Aunt Irene is just like that! You sure we’re not related?” Yolonda screamed. Chante went on about Karissa telling Yolonda how they met.

“Karissa’s sort of a Miss Goody Two Shoes if you know what I mean. When we first met, Karissa was not the woman she is today. Karissa looked like Myrtle Urkel, you know Steve Urkel’s crazy cousin.” Chante tried to contain her laugh but couldn’t help it because of Yolonda busting a gut herself.

“Girl, I see now that you are something else! Myrtle Urkel...get outta here!” Yolonda repeated while drying her eyes from laughing so hard.

“There she was this gorgeous five nine, beautiful brown complexion, coal black wavy hair cascading like a waterfall down her back just waiting to be exposed. She was desperately crying out for a makeover. I was only too glad to help her get rid of that awful bun she wore.” Chante laughed while reminiscing.

“I can’t believe that gorgeous woman used to look like anything besides perfection.” Yolonda gasped.

“Well believe it! Those concrete busta’s she wore for glasses looked like punch bowls! But that’s alright my girl is a fahionista that even Sarah Jessica Parker can’t touch!” Chante and Yolonda continued to talk.

“I need to call my husband. Honey he’s going to have a fit if these people don’t get me back to Dallas and soon!” Chante stated.

“That’s understandable. Everybody’s not as lucky as you to be as successful as you are and happily married! That seems to be a rare commodity these days! Hell I’m still working like a Hebrew slave at night school. I attend the University of Texas at Arlington. It’s a load and it keeps me from my princess, but she’ll appreciate it all once the benefits start to roll in.” Yolonda sighed then continued on.

“Her trifling ass father seems to think his good looks and third leg will get him through life. The only reason that I put up with him is because he’s the father of my child and not to mention like I said earlier...he’s a pro between the sheets. He has some other things I admire but that’s another story. Enough about me and mine how did you meet this wonderful Adonis. Maybe I can take some notes and meet my chocolate Adonis one day too. Shit, at this point I wouldn’t care if he was a vanilla Adonis! I need all the help I can get in that department!” Yolonda and Chante laughed and panted at the same time.

“If you’re not happy sex is no reason to stay with him not even for your daughter’s sake. If he’s going to be a father to her it shouldn’t matter.” Chante stated matter of factly.

“He is the best I’ve ever had in the sack, but you’re right I shouldn’t be holding on to him for any of the reasons I stated. I guess I’m afraid of being alone. Which I am half of the time anyway; he’s in the Marines and gone to fight in the unnecessary war Bush got going on. I get so mad every time I think of all the kids that have died over something that has nothing to do with the USA. I just hope and pray that he has the sense to get our troops from over there. They are young kids the majority of them. Why don’t he put his drunk ass daughters over there and let them fight? The war would be so over if that had to happen. Hell, his ass didn’t even stay in the military when he had to go fight overseas he chickened out so how is he going to have the balls to want other people’s children over there fighting for some shit his father started. A lot of people don’t know that but it’s

true. Once again enough about me and my drama...now what's up on Mr. Alex, because I'm so ready to take me some notes!" Yolonda poised.

"I share the same sentiments exactly when it comes to Bush and that shit he has going on over there in Iraq. We can go on and on about that so let's talk about something else. Just thinking about the many young lives snuffed out just pisses me the fuck off!" Chante spat equally annoyed with the war on Iraq subject.

"I met Alex at a college football game. When I first saw him everything clicked. It was like love at first sight. He has the body of a God, the height of a building, eyes the color of brandy, and a voice smooth like silk. When we first made love it was sheer magic and unbelievably good!" Chante moaned.

"He sounds just about as good as my man in that department...just a little." Yolonda squealed as they laughed and she continued to listen to Chante.

"I guess you can say he's the best lover I've ever had too. The guys I dated in high school and college called all that unnecessary sweating and animal sounding grunts making love." Chante acknowledged.

"Hell that's fine with me as long as he's a good man. You can always teach old dogs new tricks in the bedroom." Yolonda snapped her fingers.

"I know that's right!" Chante gave Yolanda a high five.

"Alex was the best kisser Texas had to offer as far as I'm concerned. He made me want to ask him if there was such a thing as love making 101." Chante smiled at the memory.

"I can relate to that! It has to be or you have to buy those kinds of skills on the black market!" Chante and Yolonda started giggling like two schoolgirls talking about puppy love.

“Sounds like a winner. Keep him satisfied girl, because if you don’t, some other bitch will. Trust! Believe me when I say there are a lot of moral lacking women out there that just don’t give a damn about breaking up a happy home. I’ve had to break a few heads over my loser of a man myself. If they’ll go for him because he’s got it in the looks department and the bedroom but the buck stops there. They’ll definitely go for an established man with the added perks of being fine and attractive. Why do you think all of these old wrinkled up as billionaires got all of these beautiful ass bombshell blondes? You think it’s because of them? Hey, must be the money!” Yolonda sang while dancing from side to side in her seat. Chante cracked up because it was the truth.

“Alex and I married a year after we graduated from college. A few years later were the blessed event of our lovely triplet daughters Tiffany, Whitney and Brittany born on December 24th at 11:43, 11:48 and 11:55 a few short minutes before Christmas.” Chante beamed.

“Talk about beating the gun! I bet that was tiresome and beautiful all at the same time.” Yolonda dreamed of having a loving husband by her side to raise her daughter. She envied Chante for seeming to have all she ever wanted in life without much effort.

“It was one hell of a workout. I’m not going to even mention the pain. Despite it all I was one proud mother and Alex was an even prouder father. Although, I knew he secretly wanted sons.” Chante smiled her family was perfect in all aspects who could ask for more!

“When I had my Princess oh girl, the pain was enough to let me know that was it for me! Her sorry ass father was there but only because he finally left this weak ass broad alone. I guess she found out about me after her car was wrecked. Honey, he would get money from her like she was an ATM machine anytime I wanted it. He’s good in that way but as far as a companion for me I don’t know. We have so much drama in our relationship that I don’t know if I’m coming or going sometimes. I met him the first day on my job when I transferred to Dallas and we’ve been together ever since.” Yolonda rubbed her arms to warm up.

“Anything worth having is worth the work. We had tough times in the early years too. So don’t let hardships deter you from making your family work. We hired a nanny to help out with him in school and me working.” Chante concuded.

“Girl, but it’s all good now, look at you now! You’re the HNIC at the bank and your husband is also at his business. I’m going to school and working and he’s in the millitary. He’s changed his major so much that I don’t even know what’s he’s doing in school. Whatever it is, it’s not building towards our future at all with him flip flopping and shit.” Yolonda stated.

“When we were going through all of that you couldn’t have told me we would be in the positions we’re in today. It takes a lot of hard work and rather he’s working towards an education to better your life or not you keep doing what you have to do. One day soon you’ll look back on all your hard work and feel accomplished and proud of your endeavors. Trust me you will.” Chante patted Yolonda’s leg.

“I was so glad when Alex and two of his frat brothers opened up their own law firm. Lambert, Michaels and Johnson was successful from the start. Fortunately, when Alex left Haskell, Wertheimer and Haskell most of the clients he worked with followed because they liked dealing with him exclusively. Frank Wertheimer hated to see Alex go. He told Alex if ever he needed to come back the door was always open.”

“They always think our business is going to be a flop. Why couldn’t he just wish the brother well?” Yolonda hissed.

“I don’t think he meant any harm in what he said. Mr. Wertheimer is still a close friend.” Chante defended her husband’s colleagues.

“Well I guess there’s some comfort knowing you will always have a job if you left a company to start your own.” Yolonda stated half heartedly.

“Amen!” Chanted praised.

“What about his partners are they married? You know how the saying goes birds of a feather flock together!” Yolonda probed.

“Tony is happily married but Michael isn’t, he’s sort of a playboy. Tony Lambert was a football player before his injury.”

“Tony Lambert! Isn’t he the one that played for the Cowboys!?” Yolonda nearly fell off her seat.

“Yep, that’s him, the one and only.” Chante smiled, she knew where this was going she got this reaction every time.

“Girl I’m so glad I ran into you at this airport! Maybe I can finally get some friends who have got some connections! Is it possible for you to arrange a meet and greet with us?” Chante gave her a weak smile then continued.

“He is married like I said but, there is Michael Johnson. He’s suave, debonair, and sophisticated. He’s the slick one of the three. I must warn you that he loves the ladies, and has no problems getting them to whatever he wants them to do.” Chante threw out for emphasis.

“Chante, you have to introduce me to Michael! I know you said he’s a playa but that’s only because he hasn’t met me yet. Once he gets a load of me, his playa days will be over!” Yolonda struck a divafied pose.

“Is that so? I’ll see what I can do but no guarantees!” Chante warned.

“Ok, as long as you arrange some type of meeting the rest will be a piece of cake!” Yolonda snapped her fingers then switched the subject.

“How long did it take for you to get your position?” Yolonda probed.

“I’ve been at the bank about 15 years. My father’s sister Iola lives in Atlanta she was a veteran at the bank and got me on through the summer program. Mr. Pringly, who’s

now the bank's President, took notice of my ambition and drive. He prompted me to consider a career in banking because I had a knack for it. So I took his advice obtained my MBA in finance and business and here I am." Chante explained.

"Amen for a white man finally helping a sistah out! Do you think you're going to precede him in the President's position? I know it had to be some cracker who didn't want you to get that position. I can just see the look on their faces when he appointed you as the new Regional Branch Director." Yolonda chuckled.

"As far as the President's seat umm...I don't know. You know other directors that are far more experienced will probably be considered over me if ever the opportunity arises." Chante said annoyingly because of Yolonda's way of thinking.

"I hope I don't offend you, but they'd die and burn in hell before they let you be President of that bank or any other for that matter. Mr. Pringly or whatever his name is will look out for *his own* before he gives that seat up for you. I bet he only went as far as he did was for a reason. Maybe you're a token. I wouldn't trust any of them as far as I could throw them if I were you; and that's no lie sista!" Chante resented the fact that this woman could sit in her face and call her a token.

"I don't think that was Mr. Pringley's motive at all. You know all white people are not like that. There are some good ones as well as bad just like black people." Chante grew tired of waiting on Karissa who was probably somewhere flirting or lost as usual. She excused herself from Yolonda and took the small Sprint cellular phone out of her purse and called her husband.

"Thank you for calling Lambert, Michaels and Johnson this is Tabitha how can I help you?" Tabitha sang into the phone.

"Hey Tabitha, I wasn't expecting you to answer...is Alex in his office?" Chante asked still put off by Yolonda's insensitivity.

“Yes he is, but he’s on a conference call right now girl. You know the drill.”  
Tabitha laughed. “May I take a message?”

“Tell him I won’t be able to make the dinner date we had planned for tonight I’m still delayed in Chicago. Have him to cancel the babysitter.” Chante instructed.

“Okay...got it all down, will that be all?” Tabitha asked.

“Yeah, talk to you later chick.” Chante pressed the end button.

The phone rang again before Chante could put it back in her purse. “I’ll just bet that’s my hubby on the other line. Excuse me Yolonda, it’ll only take a minute.” Chante walked over to an unoccupied area.

“Hey sexy.” Chante said seductively hoping it was Alex.

“Oh, it’s not even that kind of party sweetie! Who do you think this is...Alex? I think not! Sounds like you got lucky this morning or something.” Disappointed it wasn’t her husband but Chante was glad to hear from her other best friend Michelle.

“Hey Miss hotter than fire, how was Chicago?” Michelle asked.

“How was it? Girl, I’m still here! What’s going on with you sounding all chipper?” Chante jumped in with her own line of questioning.

“It’s better than that girl!” Michelle always got some gossip to spread or worse man troubles.

“Tae, you’ll never guess who called?”

“No, but I know you’ll tell me.” Chante’s patience was beginning to thin again.

“Don’t get cute Miss Thing! Anyway, you remember Brandon don’t you?” Chante gasped then rolled her eyes.

“How could I forget? He only ruined your life!”

“Whatever, he’s in town and he called me because he wants to right his wrongs from the past starting with a suite at the Crescent Court and a night on the town!” Michelle squealed.

“I guess you’re going to accept the invitation after all the shit he put you through.” Chante spat.

“He’s changed and he’s even gone to counseling. His psychiatrist taught him how to deal with his temper.” Michelle was going to stand for her man no matter what.

“Mmm...hmm whatever.” Chante was not trying to talk about that loser Brandon.

“For real!” Michelle protested.

“Whatever girlfriend, if that’s what makes your jelly roll.” Chante sat quietly listening to Michelle go on and on about Brandon.

“Tae! I know you hear me talking to you.” Michelle shouted.

“I hear you alright. What about Greg? I guess you’re going to dump him now.” Chante sighed.

“Who said anything about me dumping anybody? It’s just a date...damn!” Chante decided to change the subject before she got too deep on the “*Brandon*” saga.

“Oh, guess who I’m at the airport with!”

“I have no time for the guessing game...who?” Michelle asked annoyed that Chante would cut her off like what was going on in her life didn’t matter.

“Yolonda Weavers, she transferred from Chicago—” Michelle cut her off.

“Oh no you didn’t just sit here and talk my business in front of that bitch! That’s the mouth of the South! She’s so damn jealous hearted and nosy till it isn’t funny! I can’t stand her! She’s always trying to bring that white man black man shit into play.” This time Michelle was the one with the attitude.

“You should’ve heard her. Talking about I’m Mr. Pringley’s black token. I’m surprised she didn’t say I was fucking Mr. Pringley.” Chante laughed.

“Now that would’ve been cause for an old fashion ass kicking! I would’ve slapped the words out that bitch’s mouth. I don’t see how you sitting there talking to her.” Michelle snapped.

“She went to find Karissa and her cousin. I’ve got work to look over before I get back to Dallas. I’ll talk to you then.” Chante tried to end the call.

“Don’t hang up on me yet Miss Thing! I know you didn’t let Jim have access to your computer and office!”

“He is next in charge. Why?” Chante snapped.

“Tae, if I were you I’d watch out for that man. You know he’s mad about you getting that position over him in the first damn place. Last week at the banker’s convention, I over heard people talking about him. He may be the one that scammed Lancaster Trusts for that five hundred thirty something thousand dollars.” Michelle recounted.

“That’s been over three years ago. Are people still talking about that old news?”

“Money is always news no matter when it happened. You didn’t know?” Michelle hollered.

“Michelle now I know I’ve got to go...here comes Karissa.” Chante breathed a sigh of relief.

“Alright, you’re going wish you had listen to me one-day about Jim.” Michelle warned.

“Just like you’re going to wish you would’ve listen to me about Brandon. Enjoy your trip to the dog pound girlfriend.” Chante closed her phone shut.

Chante was putting the phone back into her purse when she looked up and saw Karissa looking dazed.

“Karissa what took you so long?” Chante asked.

“Girl you wouldn’t believe it, but there’s a long line for snacks.” Karissa said half heartedly.

“That’s not all tell her what else went on!” Shamona urged.

“I met this incredible man named Andre. He lives in Texas, and has his own business.” Karissa rattled off.

“What kind of business? Hope it’s legal.” Chante smirked while gazing in her mirror again to refresh her makeup.

“There you go...of course its legal! He has his own construction company—”

**“Flight 741 is now boarding leaving Chicago to DFW non stop! Flight 741 is now boarding!** A voice over the PA system boomed.

“That’s us girl, finally we’re going home!” Chante snapped her compact shut and jumped up. The women all grabbed their carry-ons and quickly made to their way to boarding.