

Chapter 1



It Runs in the Family

Labor Day Weekend was finally here. By 3 p.m. Friday the office is practically a ghost town. All the employees have either taken time off or snuck out of the office to get a jump start on their long weekend to end the last days of summer with a bang. After I put the finishing touches on the latest newsletter, I walk by my manager's office. Of course, she's long gone. So is the administrative assistant. Hey, it's 4:15, I'm out of here—time for Evan get a jump start on her vacation, too.

The D.C. air is thick and humid. I can feel sweat starting to form on my legs underneath my pantyhose. Damn professionalism. Sometimes I just want to wear my favorite gray cotton pants, a cute t-shirt, and my matching gray and white Nikes, but that's not going to fly in the corporate world where Business Casual is the bare minimum. Considering I'm black, female, and I wear a natural, I need to step it up, stay on my game. Suits, dress pants, sweater sets, tailored blouses, just-below-the-knee or longer skirts, closed-toe pumps, pantyhose, keep the butterfly tattoo on my thigh covered up, watch my language. Working twice as hard to get half as far.

I make it to National Airport a little less than an hour before my flight. The ticket attendant looks at me with a

raised eyebrow, but checks me in nonetheless. I run my hands through my hair which was set with double strand twists then undone. The result is a crinkly look that no crimping iron could ever duplicate.

About 45 minutes later, the plane backs away from the gate and I'm off to Atlanta, Georgia. Trading one chocolate city for another. Around 7 p.m., the flight touches ground at Hartsfield; I'm elated; Ameenah promised me a fun weekend.

I met Ameenah Cooper in a required statistics class; we had the same trouble understanding our African professor as he spoke of mean, median, and mode. She too was from Detroit, so we had an instant connection. We hit it off so well that we became roommates junior and senior year. A graphic arts major, she took off to Atlanta after graduation; D.C. was too expensive, New York too big and Chicago too cold. I understand her leaving D.C. The cost of living and car insurance in the nation's capitol is a bitch.

I fight the crowds in the terminal and make my way to the even more congested baggage claim. As I look around, I see a petite, slender, honey-colored woman waving frantically at me. It's Ameenah. I wave back as she smiles her cute smile at me. I finally reach her and we hug. The best way to describe her is small and cute— small nose, sparkling hazel eyes, tiny feet, stomach flat as a board.

She touches my hair; it's her first time seeing it. We haven't seen each other since graduation. How times have changed. She gives me a nod of approval, says she can't let go of the perm. I spare her the "dangers of caustic chemicals in your hair" speech. I check out her ring: 1.5

carats of round diamonds embedded into 14 karats of gold.

We get to her car, a gold Honda Accord and get inside. Leather that's hot enough to cause a second degree burn lines the interior of Ameenah's new ride. It still has that new car smell.

"So, how are you?" she asks as we head over to her apartment in College Park. I know what she's asking about. She was the first person I cried to when Mason left me six months ago. The only person who said, "Girl, forget him! You deserve better, anyway." Instead of the standard, "Oh, he'll come around."

"Much better," I tell her. It's the truth. "I've been working a lot."

"Girl, me too. These clients of ours can be so particular about their design. But hey, it's work. Ain't supposed to be fun."

"But I thought you loved your field."

"I do. I just hate the BS and politics that comes with it. Hate the game."

I agree.

"But enough about our jobs. You're going to meet Chris tonight," she says, beaming.

Her smile is so bright that I even smile at the mention of his name. The love in Ameenah's life, to whom she had recently become engaged. She said he was fine, a little rugged looking, with gorgeous curly "good" hair. According to her, Chris also had some serious skills in the bedroom.

"Really? The famous Chris."

"Yeah, and he's bringing his cousin Darnell. Trust me, girl, the looks run in the family."

“Ameenah, I’m not trying to get into nothing, I just want to chill.”

“And we will. I’m not trying to find you a husband. Just don’t want you to be by yourself this weekend.”

“You mean the third wheel?”

“No, not like that.”

“Oh, so Darnell is around as a preventative measure for cock-blocking?” I mess with her.

She laughs. I join her. “You won’t be sorry. He’s a cool brother, makes a helluva lot of money; you’ll like him. Just your type and everything.”

“What the hell is my ‘type?’” I ask, stunned.

“He played football in college, and he still looks like it.”

“Like he plays or he used to play?”

She laughs. “Wait and see is all I’ll say.”

We get to her apartment, a modest one bedroom size-wise, but Ameenah had hooked it up with some faux painting and artwork, some of it her own. I change out of my smoky gray pantsuit and slate pumps and into a simple cream v-neck knee-length dress and strappy sandals. We’re heading downtown for drinks and dinner with Chris and Darnell. I check the mirror to make sure everything’s in place; my good curves show and the bad ones are hidden.

The drive downtown is uneventful, just us catching up on the last few months of our lives. I’ve missed having her around. She was one of my only real friends during my Mason years. We reach the restaurant, an expensive looking steakhouse and go inside. Ameenah looks around and spots someone at the bar. She waves and a light-complexioned man waves back and taps a guy to his right.

“That’s Chris.” Ameenah says as we head to the bar.
“And the guy on his right is Darnell.”

Mahogany skin.

Body of an Adonis.

The brother is fine.

No, scratch that. Fine as hell.

Correction: “It-don’t-make-no-damn-sense-to-be-that-damn-sexy kind of fine.

I feel a long-forgotten tingle between my legs and an old song by D’Angelo begins to play in my head. Shit, damn, motherfucker.