

Sinners & Saints

Jasmine and Rachel Meet....

Jasmine shivered as she stepped outside of the airport terminal. Not from the temperature - it was April in Los Angeles. Her trembling was from her excitement. She was home.

She slapped on her sunglasses as Hosea strapped the children into the back seat of the first Town Car, but she kept her eyes on her husband since Reverend Penn's wife was standing so close to the car. Jasmine shook her head. She still couldn't believe that the Penns had been invited to fly on the chartered plane, as if they belonged with their group. It had been Hosea's idea to include them.

"Reverend Penn has tried to become president twenty-three times!" Hosea had said. "We need to show him respect."

"And how does letting him travel with us show him respect?" Jasmine had asked.

Hosea had just waved her words away, but as Jasmine stood now, eyeing the reverend's wife, she had a feeling that Hosea had made a grave mistake. "I just don't trust that woman," Jasmine muttered to Mae Frances.

"Who?" Mae Frances turned to see who Jasmine was staring at, then sucked her teeth. "You don't need to worry about that Debbie-Does-Dallas movie star. Hosea don't want to have nothin'

to do with the likes of her. Who you need to be thinking about is right over there." She jutted her chin forward, pointing to the left.

And there he was. Just feet away...the man from the photo and Hosea's competition - Lester Adams.

Mae Frances had been right. Someone had cleaned the man up good, but even from this far away, Jasmine could tell that he was no match for her husband. Reverend Adams looked like a country-boy for real, as he shuffled toward his car. And if the size of his entourage was any indication of what was to come, Pastor Adams needed to take the two men who stood on either side of him, turn around, get back on the bus, and go home.

Still, Jasmine wanted to get closer. If there was anything that she knew well, it was men. With her man-dar up, she would get a read on Reverend Adams. Pastor Griffith had his own plans to bring down Lester Adams, but if Reverend Adams reacted to her in the right way, this election might be as simple as sending a prostitute into his hotel room.

She straightened the light wool of the designer pants suit that her personal shopper had selected for this trip, tossed her curls over her shoulder and sauntered toward the men. The sidekick's eyes were already on her as she approached, though

Reverend Adams was concentrating on some kind of newspaper he held.

See - country? He didn't even know when a beautiful woman was nearby.

But right when she was just inches away from the man, a tornado blew by - in the form of a woman wearing a beige pants suit that was too light, so inappropriate for the month of April.

Barreling in front of her, the woman blocked Jasmine. With her arms folded, her lips poked out and her attitude showing, she asked, "May I help you?" as if she had her own radar. As if she knew exactly when a woman was within feet of her husband.

Jasmine had to hold her laughter in. Rachel Adams. Oh, this was going to be easier than she thought. This heifer thought she was big and bad and bold. Well, Jasmine had something for her - the perfect way to introduce herself.

Jasmine's lips spread into the slowest of smiles. "Hello," she said, reaching for the woman's hand. "My name is Lady Jasmine - actually, Jasmine Cox Larson Bush, the new first lady of the American Baptist Coalition." She paused. "And excuse me, but who are you?"

Chapter Six

No, she didn't. Rachel had to take deep, slow breaths because it was obvious this old hag was delusional. She'd recognized Jasmine right away. The sultry way she slithered off the jet. The whole entourage like she was M.C. Hammer. The way she slid those designer glasses on - just showing out. Had it not been for digging-for-dirt.com, Rachel might actually have been intimidated. But the information she knew about Jasmine Cox Larson Bush empowered her.

A smile crept up on Rachel's face as she shook Jasmine's hand. "Jasmine?" she said, ignoring the First Lady comment. *In her dreams.* "Rev. Bush's wife?"

Jasmine smiled confidently as she nodded. "The one and only." Rachel feigned confusion. "I'm sorry. I thought Rev. Bush's wife was named Natasia."

Bingo! Jasmine's whole body tensed as she lost her smile. Rachel tried desperately to fight back a smirk. Hosea was practically a

saint, but the private investigator had managed to find out about his ex-fiancé and former producer, Natasia Redding. The rumor mill said the two of them had had an affair. The PI couldn't confirm it, but judging from Jasmine's uneasy reaction, there was something to the story.

Jasmine looked like she was about to lose that fake air she had going on, but she composed herself and said, "No, it's Jasmine.

Jasmine Bush. And again, you are?"

"Rachel Jackson Adams, first lady of Zion Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Houston."

"Oh," Jasmine put a finger to her head like she was thinking, "I've never heard of it." She didn't give Rachel time to reply before saying, "Wherever did you get that adorable pantsuit? I thought I saw it in a commercial for Marshall's last year."

Jasmine's tone let Rachel know this was definitely not intended as a compliment. "No, if you must know, I got it from T.J. Maxx. Yours is lovely, too. Whose tithes paid for it?"

Lester stepped in before she could reply. "Lady Jasmine," he said, reaching around Rachel and extending his hand. "It is such a pleasure to meet you. I've heard wonderful things."

What was this Lady Jasmine crap? Rachel glared at her husband out of the corner of her eye as he took Jasmine's hand. He'd balked when she suggested she be called Lady Rachel. Oh, she would definitely be telling Lester about himself later. Jasmine looked like she was breathing fire out of her nostrils before she finally smiled and said, "Rev. Adams. It's my pleasure."

Lester grinned like he'd won the Lotto as Hosea approached them.

"And if it isn't, the esteemed, Rev. Hosea Bush." He vigorously shook his hand. "I am so honored. I'm a big fan of your show,

Bring it On. Your messages are always on point. And the work that you do in your community is just phenomenal.”

Oh, hell to the no, Rachel thought as her husband dang near salivated at the site of Hosea. He was acting like he was meeting Barack Obama himself. It was just disgusting.

“Lester, darling, don’t be so modest. You do a lot yourself,” Rachel interjected.

Jasmine looked like she was eating the whole scene up. Hosea nodded. “Rev. Adams, your lovely wife is right. I hear you won the Southern coalition hands down.”

“He did,” Rachel said, draping her arm through her husband’s. “But it’s no surprise, I mean, you should see what he’s done with our church. The membership has multiplied since he took over.”

“Oh, that’s right, to a whopping three thousand people,” Jasmine said with a fake smile. “Honey, didn’t City of Lights have three thousand members back in, what ’85?”

No, this heifer wasn’t trying to downplay their membership rolls.

Rachel dropped her arm and took a step forward. “Well, we believe

in quality, not quantity," she said as nicely as possible. "And we try to keep our family-feel so that our members can truly be fed in the Word and not just be a number on a roster. Let me guess, City of Lights, Camera, Action has an ATM in the sanctuary?"

"Okay, ladies," Lester said, putting a hand on Rachel's forearm to calm her down.

Rachel and Jasmine stared at each other in a face-off. Sure, Jasmine may have had ten or thirty years on her, but Rachel wasn't about to let this broke down Chaka Khan-looking woman punk her.

"Jasmine," Hosea said sternly.

"What?" Jasmine raised an eyebrow at her husband.

"Rev. Bush, let me apologize for my wife," Lester said, shooting Rachel the evil eye.

"Apologize for what?" Rachel snapped. The ghetto was seeping out.

"Chaka here is the one that stepped off the plane in her designer

duds like she's royalty, talking about she's the new first lady of the American Baptist Coalition."

"Chaka, who is Chaka?" Jasmine asked.

"Cha-ka, Cha-ka. Chaka Khan, let me rock you-" Rachel sang with an attitude.

"Rachel Adams," Lester admonished, cutting her off.

Rachel caught herself, rolled her eyes, and managed a terse smile. "I was just kidding with her. You know when you get old, you lose your sense of humor so I was just trying to lighten the mood."

Lester looked horrified and Jasmine looked ready to pounce. Rachel was thrilled. She'd wiped that smug demeanor right off Jasmine's face.

"We'll see who has the last laugh," Jasmine said, not bothering to smile.