

Chapter 6

"Hey, Darlin'." Hosea opened the Towncar's door.

Jasmine stepped out and into her husband's arms. "I didn't expect you to be waiting for me."

He kissed her. "Whenever I get the chance, I walk side-by-side with my wife." Slipping his hand into hers, the two weaved through the lunch time throng outside of Rockefeller Center.

Chatter and laughter greeted them when the elevator doors opened on the sixty-fifth floor. Jasmine and Hosea mingled with the Bring It On team, until the restaurant's staff directed the guests to sit for lunch.

"I'm glad they put us at a table together," Jasmine whispered to Deborah Blue. "I thought they were going to have a dais or something."

"This is so much better," Deborah agreed as she sat at the table set up for four. Then, she called to her husband.

"Honey, you and Hosea see each other every day, but you're worse than me and Jasmine."

Hosea and Triage - the other executive producer of the show - turned toward their wives and laughed.

"We're busted." Triage kissed his wife, and as he sat, he turned to Jasmine. "Hosea just told me you're not going to L.A.."

Jasmine stiffened. "I can't get away right now." She took Hosea's hand. "But, I'll be visiting when I can."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Deborah said. "I'll be in L.A. the entire summer recording a new CD and I was looking forward to showing you the city."

Before Jasmine could tell Deborah that she was born in Los Angeles, Stephen Hager, one of the top executives with the network stood at the microphone. "I'd like to thank everyone for coming today. This is an exciting time for the show. Our ratings have steadily increased which means more advertising dollars." He paused. "And those Emmys we got earlier this year certainly helped."

Applause filled the room.

"This is a good time for a celebration. That's what this lunch is about. No long speeches, just an enjoyable time with colleagues. Now, before they serve lunch, I do have one announcement." He turned toward Hosea and Triage. "I have to congratulate you two for the wonderful job you've done."

More applause.

"You've both expressed your thoughts about the show in L.A. and we agree with you - *Bring It On* should thrive in Hollywood."

The crowd nodded.

"To help with that, we've hired another producer. An award-winning news journalist...."

Jasmine leaned forward, whispered, "Did you know they were hiring someone else?"

Hosea shook his head. "But Triage and I did request another producer after Mary Magdalene left. We wanted someone with news experience."

Jasmine sat back. That made sense. Hosea was always saying that he wished the show had a bit more of a news/current events focus.

"Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce the newest member of the *Bring It On* team, Natasia Redding."

"You're kidding!"

Jasmine frowned as her husband shouted, then jumped from his seat. A tall woman, draped in a red Tadashi V-neck sheath sauntered into room, paused at their table as if she were at the end of a runway and then wrapped her arms around Hosea's neck.

Jasmine's glower deepened; she was not feeling this scene.

"What are you doing here?" Hosea asked, when he stepped back.

"Didn't you hear?" Natasia responded in a voice that came from her throat. "I'm joining the show."

"Hosea," Stephen began, "we were in the final stages of the interview when Natasia realized that you were one of the hosts and a producer. We understand you know each other."

"Yes," Hosea said, "we do."

When the woman slipped her hand through Hosea's, Jasmine jumped up and stood in front of her husband.

"Oh, Jasmine," he said as if he'd forgotten his wife.

"This is an old friend, Natasia."

Natasia laughed, her chuckle sounding even sexier than her voice. "Old friends? Is that what you call it?" Her fiery-fuchsia-colored lips spread into a wide smile as she turned to Jasmine. "Please, I'm the first woman he ever loved and I still have the engagement ring to prove it." She held out her hand to Jasmine. "Do you work with Hosea?"

Jasmine stared at Natasia's hand, left it dangling in the air, then crossed her arms and glared at her husband.

Hosea cleared his throat and embraced Jasmine. "Natasia, this is my wife, Jasmine."

"Really? I didn't know you were married." She paused, her eyes wandered over Jasmine, up, then down, before she turned back to Hosea. "I can't believe you came to New York and became a star," she said as if Hosea's wife wasn't standing there. She hooked her arm through his. "We must catch up."

Natasia slipped into the chair where Jasmine had been sitting and pulled Hosea down next to her. Jasmine's eyebrows raised, her mouth opened, but before she could say a word, Deborah was at her side.

"Here take my seat," Deborah whispered.

"Oh." Natasia stopped her chatting. Looked up. "Were you sitting here?"

"Yes. I was sitting next to my husband."

"That's okay, Darlin'," Hosea said. "Sit here." He patted the seat Deborah had been in. "I'll get another chair."

"Triage just went for one." Deborah took Jasmine's hand and guided her into her seat.

Natasia giggled. "Isn't that cute? You call her, Darlin', too." Before Jasmine could say a word, Natasia continued, "So tell me about the show," she said, ignoring everyone else. "I couldn't believe it when I found out this was you. What a coincidence." Natasia paused, leaned in closer, the deep V of her dress right in front of Hosea's face. "Oh, that's right, you don't believe in coincidences." She paused again. Lifted his glass of water and took a sip as if the glass and Hosea belonged to her. "So, it must be fate. We were meant to be."

Jasmine began a slow rise from her seat, but Deborah's hand on her shoulder held her down. "Girl, don't even worry about it," she whispered.

"Oh, I'm not worried. I just don't play that."

"You know I understand with the hoochies throwing themselves at Triage all the time," Deborah said. "But, this is business," she looked around the room to remind Jasmine where they were, "and Hosea is going home with you."

Through lunch, dessert, and speeches that followed, Natasia chatted with Hosea as if it was just the two of them. And Jasmine sat, seething in her seat.

"Darlin', are you ready?" Hosea finally asked.

Jasmine's eyes darted between Hosea and Natasia. "Oh, I've been ready."

Natasia smiled. "It was so nice to meet you...." She paused, squinted. "What did you say your name was?"

"Jasmine," Hosea responded for her. He took his wife's hand. "Natasia, it was really good seeing you."

"Oh, sweetie, this pleasure was definitely all mine." She opened her purse and pulled out a card. "Let me give you this. I'm staying at the Ritz and they give you these." She tucked the business card into Hosea's hand. "That's the number to the hotel. Call me before you stop by."

Jasmine's mouth opened wide. She could not believe that she was going to have to beat down this woman right here, right now.

"I won't need this."

"Sure you do." Natasia grinned. "How else will we catch up?"

"We'll do that in the office."

"But my hotel room is much more," she paused, looked at Jasmine, "private."

"No." Hosea's voice was stern this time and he handed her back the card.

With a smirk, Natasia shrugged. "Whatever." She smiled at Hosea, but when Natasia turned to Jasmine, all signs of her cheer were gone. "I guess we'll be seeing quite a bit of each other."

"You can count on it," Jasmine said before she took Hosea's hand and marched out the door.