

THE
One

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ROSE-COLORED BOOKS

PROLOGUE

COLD SHOULDER

August

It was two thirty in the afternoon. Godiva Hart sat at a large oak desk in her downtown Atlanta office on the thirtieth floor of the Georgia-Pacific Tower on Peachtree Street. She had just finished plucking a Ferrero Rocher chocolate from the cone-shaped shrine inches from her reach. She removed the gold foil wrapper and popped the cream-filled crunchy wafer, with a whole hazelnut in the center, into her mouth. She needed something to calm her nerves and keep her energized because running a production company wasn't an easy task. Surprisingly, she was able to maintain her slender physique, even after devouring so many of the seventy-three-calorie chocolates throughout the day.

Godiva had started Media One with her husband, Smith, seven years earlier in her hometown of Atlanta. She was just twenty-two and he twenty-three. As the cliché goes, they didn't have

much, but they had each other and their dreams. He wanted to become a lawyer—the next Johnnie Cochran. She didn't want to model herself after anyone. Her focus was on becoming a trail-blazer in the ever-popular reality TV genre.

She studied the plans for the six-bedroom, seven-bath French chateau that she and Smith were building in the north-central Buckhead neighborhood, Chastain Park (the largest city park in Atlanta). Buckhead was the city's most affluent neighborhood and home to the ninth-wealthiest zip code in the nation—30327.

Godiva had set an hour aside to deal with her house plans so that builders would finish on schedule. And it had finally started to sink in just how much she had achieved in such a short time. She and her husband were temporarily staying at The Mansions on Peachtree—a forty-two-story condominium that combined a 127-room luxury hotel with lavish residences. It was an elegant building with plenty of amenities, but she was ready to move out of the twenty-three-hundred-square-foot Presidential Suite and into the home that her dreams built.

A woman burst through Godiva's open office door.

"Deanna, I'm calling the police. You need to leave right now!" said Honey, Godiva's personal assistant, as she trailed after the woman.

"Call them! I don't care. I have every right to be here," said Deanna, who was so frail her collarbone popped out like handlebars. She'd had too much work done—the fish lips, Botox, mounds of blond hair extensions, and double-D cups that were too large for her tiny frame.

Godiva took her time looking up from her house plans. "I don't have anything to say to you. We've already spoken over the phone."

"I was with you from the beginning, and I do mean the *very* beginning. Before anyone even knew who you were, when all you had was a little local reality show that wasn't even syndicated.

Do you remember those days? You were working out of that tiny apartment on Fairburn. Now you think because you've moved on up, you can treat me like shit." Godiva stared right through her and didn't say a word. "You caught a lucky break, and that's all it ever was. You used to be a flunky on a music video set, running errands and kissing everybody's ass."

"Are you finished?" Godiva said in a monotone. Her face held no expression. "I have business to take care of." She plucked another piece of candy from the Ferrero Rocher tower. "I'm the flunky that ended up signing your paychecks."

For Godiva, it was cut and dry—high ratings meant more advertisers, which meant money, which meant more shows and even more money. Did her employees like her? Was she there to be liked? *No*. It was an incredible feeling for her to realize her dreams and so quickly. But not as enjoyable when she discovered that no one aside from her husband and mother even cared.

"You only care about yourself," Deanna raged on. "There wouldn't even be a *Real Beauty* in any other city—if it weren't for me. You got ratings because of me. I was the star, and you still decided to crown Gwen Meyers the new Media One reality-show whore. You promised me *The One*."

"Things change, Deanna. No one should live their life on promises."

"You promised me that new show, not Gwen. I was supposed to be the bachelorette, and now I hear that Gwen's not even going to do it. And you're going to recast, for what? It was mine to begin with, so just give it to me, or at least let me come back to *Real Beauty* next season. It's the least you can do seeing as how I made you."

Godiva released a wickedly loud laugh. "*You made me?*"

"That's right...*I...made...you.*"

"No one wants to see you fall in love. No one wants to see you, *period*," Godiva said, shooting out the word *period* like a fire-

cracker. “Have you checked your Twitter page lately? How many followers have you lost as of today?”

“I had over three million followers before I closed it down.”

“You closed it down after you lost more than half your followers. *Coincidence?* I think not.”

“You ruined me. You ruined my fuckin’ life, and you know you did!” Deanna shouted as the tears streamed down her pale cheeks. “And you don’t even care! You...don’t...even...care,” she said, stabbing her finger in Godiva’s direction after each word. “Are you human? Is it all about the money? What is it? Why would you ruin a person’s life...my life?”

“You ruined your own life, sweetie, with your attitude and the way you treat people. I feel sorry for that man you manipulated into marrying you. Media One paid for your wedding—that elaborate affair you insisted on having. Not only did we pay for it, but we aired the mess, and you divorced him in four months. I should have put a clause in the contract that if the marriage didn’t last for at least five years, we could get our money back. Do you honestly think America cares about who you fall in love with after that? You and your love life are both jokes. The key to reality TV is believability. When viewers can tell it’s fake, you’ve lost them. And, unfortunately, you’ve lost them *and* us. We don’t want to deal with all your drama.”

“I still have fans,” she sniffled, “and I can go on another network.”

“Then that’s what you should try and do.”

“People still want to know about me. The media contacts my manager every day with interview requests.”

“The media,” Godiva exclaimed. “You treat the media as if they’re your best friends. You’re always going to them with lies—nothing but lies. After you started reading the nasty comments that viewers wrote on blogs about you, you went to the media and told them, we scripted all your drama and arranged your mar-

riage. Our writers are good, but not good enough to pen the mess you came up with every season. Do not blame the end of your marriage and popularity on our show. That was all your doing.” Godiva’s focus shifted back to her house plans. “Now, if you don’t mind, I have a French chateau to build.”

“Look at me. Look up from that stupid paper and look me in my eyes.”

“I don’t have time for you, Deanna.” Godiva didn’t look up.

Deanna lunged toward Godiva, knocking over her twenty-story Ferrero Rocher tower and clawing for her house plans, which she narrowly missed.

Two men from Godiva’s production company who doubled as security rushed in to restrain Deanna. “Still acting for the cameras, I see,” Godiva said as one of the men held Deanna around her waist. “Well, guess what, Deanna. They’re not on, and if they were it wouldn’t even matter because viewers are tired of seeing a forty-year-old woman acting like a fifteen-year-old high-school bully. Every week you’re in the news talking trash about reality shows, or you’re suing a cast member. Either you go, or they go. And we can’t have a show with one person, especially one person that no one likes. Now that’s the truth. So deal with it, but don’t deal with it here. Go home and deal with it the best way you know how.” Godiva swiped her hand dismissively as Deanna wiped fresh tears away.

“I don’t have any money,” she said in a near whisper.

“What?”

Deanna cleared her throat and repeated, “I don’t have any money.”

“Why don’t you? Seasons three and four you made a hundred thousand dollars an episode. Ten episodes, one other season where you were paid almost as much, you do the math. After season one, you started making big money, so you should be set. I don’t know what you did with all that money, but honestly, I don’t even care.”

“I needed it to run my salon.”

“Don’t you have clients coming through the door?”

“I don’t have to explain anything to you—you don’t care, remember? I spent it.”

“You spent it on a big house and that Bentley, and all the vacations you rush off to. *You* did that. I didn’t. The show didn’t.”

“I just need one more season, and that’s it. It’ll give me a chance to get myself together financially. One more season and put me back on *The One* like you promised. You owe me that much. I’m begging you.” Deanna struggled to kneel down while being restrained and clasped her hands together as if in prayer. The man removed his grip but remained close by. “If you have a heart at all, please give me another season.”

“Get off the floor and go get some help. Another season isn’t going to help you. Do you want to go to rehab? Maybe you can get on *Celebrity Rehab*. Call Dr. Drew.”

Deanna struggled to rise while she grabbed the pointy end of Godiva’s desk.

“I’m not on drugs, you fuckin’ hoodrat!”

Godiva darted her hundred-dollar pen—a gift from a studio executive—across the room and sprang from her seat.

“Listen to me, you washed up, Botox-injected, bobble-headed skank. You don’t know me. You don’t know where I been or what I been through. You don’t even know where I’m from. The fact that I’ve entertained you this long in my office is a reflection of my kindness and goodwill. But I suggest you leave before I call the police and have them arrest you for trespassing. Unless you want to get on TMZ—in that case, stay.”

“I still remember the first time we met to discuss the project,” Deanna said in a calmer tone. “We were at Starbucks. Yep, I still remember that.”

“Let’s go,” the man restraining her said.

“I guess you don’t remember,” Deanna yelled as she was led

out of Godiva's office. "But I'm going to do something you'll remember. Something you won't ever forget. Wait and see!"

Godiva didn't look at Deanna as she was escorted out of her office. Instead, she plucked one of the Ferrero Rocher gold-wrapped chocolate balls that had rolled by her foot and started eating it.

"Would you like your door closed?" Honey asked as she stood and clutched the knob.

"No, she won't be back."

Godiva's day, which started just after six in the morning, ended at ten o'clock that night. While she drove north on Interstate 85, her cell phone rang; it was her husband calling.

"Did you hear the news?" Smith asked.

Godiva perked up. "No, but I'm ready for it. Which project did we get the green light for this time?"

"Deanna killed herself."

Godiva's heart fell into her stomach.

"What?! When? What are you talking about, Smith? I just saw the woman today."

"It was breaking news at ten. She killed herself. She died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. I knew the woman had problems, but I never thought she'd do something like that, you know?"

Go home and deal with it the best way you know how, Godiva thought about the last words she said to Deanna.

"Are you still there?" Smith asked.

"I'm here." Her other line clicked. It was Remy, a *Real Beauty Atlanta* producer, calling about the same thing she was sure. But she didn't want to talk, so she didn't answer. "I planned to call her tomorrow and offer her *The One*."

"You did?" Smith asked. "I'm surprised to hear that."

"I wanted to talk to you tonight about it, but my plan was to

offer her *The One* because we can always use publicity and she did know how to get press, all the way to the end.”

“What was she talking about when you saw her?”

“Nothing really.” She didn’t tell Deanna to kill herself, but she didn’t try to listen to anything she said, either. It was done now. She couldn’t bring her back. “Not to sound insensitive, but who’s going to be our bachelorette now?”

“I-I really wasn’t thinking about that right now. Deanna’s dead and right now I’m in shock.”

“I guess we can talk about it tomorrow, then.”

“Yeah, let’s do that,” Smith said, dragging out the words.

True, Deanna was dead. But Godiva wasn’t. And life still went on.

PART ONE

TAKE IT ALL



ONE

Olena Day lay restless in her king-size bed. Her eyes focused on the white ceiling as her thoughts ran rampant while Lauryn Hill's "Nothing Even Matters" song emitted from the built-in speakers of her iPod docking station. She lived at The Mansions on Peachtree on the thirty-second floor. The late-bloomer beauty was successful and in love. But she was terribly conflicted.

She clutched her cell phone and shook it out of frustration. He called again. And again, she refused to answer. She mulled over the times she spent with Matthew Harper, who was eighteen years her junior. Good times mostly. The worst was earlier that day when he tricked her by saying they were going to his frat brother's housewarming, which they had, but he neglected to tell her that his frat brother was also his father. She never wanted to meet Matthew's parents because she had already met his father; they had dated twenty-six years earlier. Back when they both attended Howard University. She was a freshman and he a senior *Date?* Maybe that wasn't the best word to describe what they did,

since he never took her anywhere. They used to have sex, and that was all they ever did.

Nothing even matters. Oh, how she wished that were true in her case.

Earlier that day, when she was face-to-face with Matthew's father, Andrew, he accused her of stalking his family—that mattered. He said he had forgotten her name until his son mentioned it, and that mattered too. He said his son wouldn't settle for his father's leftovers, and that really mattered. It was the main reason she wasn't going to see Matthew again—she didn't want to be viewed as any man's leftovers.

She pulled the comforter over her shoulders, snuggled underneath her high-thread count sheets, and buried her head in her pillow. Did she want her relationship with Matthew to end and so abruptly? *Not really.* Eventually she'd have to choose between him and Jason, and since she hadn't slept with Jason's father, Jason seemed to be her most logical choice. Jason was thirty-two, and a twelve-year age difference didn't seem as absurd to her as eighteen years did.

She sat up in bed.

Tomorrow was such a pressing day. She and Jason were flying to Houston to the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, and, in a few days, Jason would have surgery to remove his prostate.

Naturally, he was scared, and she was also. They'd grown so close over the past few months. When she first met him and found out he was a well-known NFL player, she didn't take him too seriously. She assumed he had several women spread over different states. But he proved to be more consistent with his feelings for her than Matthew had. He was patient with the fact they weren't having sex, but the reason they weren't, at the time, wasn't because she was celibate, which was the lie she told Jason. It was because she and Matthew had started a sexual relationship,

and she wasn't going to have sex with both men. But now, even though she was no longer seeing Matthew, Jason's impotence, which was brought on by his treatments for prostate cancer, meant they couldn't have sex.

She removed the book—*Invasion of the Prostate Snatchers: No More Unnecessary Biopsies, Radical Treatment or Loss of Sexual Potency*, by Dr. Mark Scholz and Ralph Blum—she'd purchased a week earlier from Barnes & Noble on Peachtree not far from where she lived and started reading it while she continued ignoring Matthews calls. She kept reading, rubbing her eyes and yawning whenever she started getting so tired she could barely keep her eyes open, and she didn't stop even after Matthew's calls ceased. As she continued turning pages, she felt re-energized because she realized that Jason may not have cancer after all. Matthew liked to say, "Everything happens for a reason," and he was right because the reason she stayed up half the night was to help Jason discover the truth. According to the book, a misdiagnosis was a common occurrence. *Was it too late to do something?* she wondered. What could Jason do, or better yet, what could she do?

She rushed over to her desk to turn on her laptop and google "prostate cancer misdiagnosis." She found 498,000 results. Her online research began with a few YouTube videos. In one, a doctor explained the process for detecting prostate cancer along with the great possibility of a misdiagnosis. Those videos along with a settlement, in excess of four million dollars, she'd read about online that was awarded to a man who had his prostate unnecessarily removed, convinced her that she was on to something.

Maybe Jason had another condition that wasn't quite as serious; he was too young to have prostate cancer. The doctors were wrong. "He has to get another opinion," she told herself as she phoned him.

"Did I wake you?" she asked in a voice brewing with excitement.

“No,” he said, but she knew she had. It was four o’clock in the morning. “It’s late, baby. Why are you still up? You know you have to be over here in a couple of hours. You’re not exactly a morning person.”

“I couldn’t go to sleep, so I stayed up reading.”

“Always reading and always writing. Was the book any good?” he asked as he yawned.

“Jason, don’t think I’m crazy, but we shouldn’t fly out to Houston tomorrow.”

“We have to. You know I’m having surgery in two days.”

“No, we don’t *have* to. I was reading *Invasion of the Prostate Snatchers: No More Unnecessary Biopsies, Radical Treatment or Loss of Sexual Potency*. It’s a long title. Have you ever heard of it?”

“No, never have,” he said, dragging out the words.

“Well, based on what I’ve read, and what I was able to dig up on the Internet, I believe you should get another opinion.”

“Why are you saying that? It’s too late for all that.”

“It’s *never* too late.”

“Baby, I’m already scheduled for surgery. Are we going to mess around because of a book and let this stuff spread because I don’t want that to happen?”

“And you know I don’t either.”

“So what do you want me to do?”

“I want you to have your biopsy samples sent to a world-class cancer research—”

“Stop,” he said, cutting her off, “it is what it is, baby. I’ve accepted it, and I’m going to have surgery. Hopefully it all turns out for the best. And if so, I’ll take it from there.”

“It is what it is, but sometimes it isn’t. Everything happens for a reason. I read that book so fast. If I’d been able to go to sleep as I wanted to, I would have never read it. Another opinion won’t hurt. They’ll be able to get the results back fast. Please Jason, you have to do this.”

He sighed deeply before moments of silence. “Baby...I’ve had a second opinion; I have prostate cancer. I’ve had a third opinion, and I was told the same thing: I have it. Now all I want to do is get better. I know that you’re looking out for me, but at this point, what I want for you to do is pray and always be here for me. Can you do that?”

“Of course I can,” she said with a reassuring voice.

“Okay then, I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Okay, I’ll be there.”

“Hey,” he said, just before she hung up the phone, “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“I appreciate everything you’ve done for me, baby. I’m going to get through this, and we’re going to have a beautiful life together. Believe that, okay?”

“I believe it.”